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Comments on the International Social Ecology Network Gathering and the "Deep Social Ecology" of John Clark

1995

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I

Between August 14 and 19, 1995, an international social ecology network gathering met near Dunoon, Scotland, to discuss the topic "Democracy and Ecology." Its agenda featured, among other presentations, a one-hour summary of a long essay by John Clark titled "The Politics of Social Ecology: Beyond the Limits of the City."

My age and growing disabilities prevented me from attending the gathering, which caused me some concern since Clark has broken with social ecology and become, as he impishly denominated himself in *The Trumpeter,* an organ of the deep ecology "movement," a "deep social ecologist, or social deep ecologist" (Clark, *Trumpeter,* p. 104). For quite some time, in fact, Clark's writings in the deep ecology and anarchist press had already been fundamentally at odds with social ecology and were blurring major differences between the two tendencies, at a time when it is of essential importance to distinguish them clearly. The views he had been advancing were essentially mystical and, from a social ecological and social anarchistic perspective, reactionary.

I strongly objected in two personal conversations with Michael Small, the gathering's convener, that highlighting Clark as a major speaker was legitimating him as a social ecologist — when he had been in the process of shedding social ecology for quite some time. Not only did I feel that Clark's tendency to grossly confuse — and even mislead — people who regard themselves as social ecologists would likely create problems at the gathering; I was also deeply concerned that the gathering would not remain the "educational experience" or "interchange of views" among social ecologists that it was intended to be, but attempt to function instead as a founding congress for a social ecology network.

Further, I voiced to Small my strong fears that any "statement" that might emerge from such a gathering would almost certainly compromise the basic principles of social ecology. Small, in turn, assured me emphatically that "we would know how to deal with Clark" (or words to that effect) and that the gathering would remain strictly educational in nature. To express my own views on social ecology as unequivocally as possible, I sent on to the gathering several "Theses on Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction" that I had written.

As it turned out, some of my deepest concerns about this gathering appear to have been confirmed. It does appear to have tried to function as something of a founding congress, by producing a one-page draft statement of "Principles of the International Social Ecology Network." To my astonishment, I learned that when the committee was formed to draft the statement, Clark was nominated to participate — and that he did participate in its preparation. The confused,

indeed bizarrely hybridized nature of the draft statement that resulted from the committee's work appears to be due in large measure to the wrangling that Takis Fotopoulos, editor of *Society and Nature,* who also sat on the committee, was obliged to engage in with Clark. Fotopoulos, who is explicitly committed to libertarian municipalism, had to defend the document's meager political contents against Clark's insistent efforts to denature it in favor of spiritualistic formulations.

Having piggybacked his Taoist version of ecology atop social ecology for many years, John Clark's more recent writings often involve an unsavory denaturing of concepts filched from social ecology and from serious social anarchist movements of the past. (I shudder to think what older Spanish anarchist comrades whom I came to know like Gaston Leval and Jose Peirats would have made of his misuse of the phrase "affinity group.") Now, as he shifts his ideological identification from "social ecologist" to "social deep ecologist," he can in all probability look forward to a new career among deep ecologists as a revered apostate, riding on the current wave of antihumanism and mysticism that threatens to render the ecology movement socially irrelevant. Indeed, he has already plunged with vigor into his new career by writing appreciatively of the works of Father Thomas Berry, Arne Naess, et al. in the deep ecology press, while his own "surregionalist" writings have been republished with appreciation in the lifestyle anarchist periodical *The Fifth Estate.*

Happily, Small has apparently had second thoughts about the way he organized the gathering. But let me suggest that Clark has no more place on a policymaking body at a social ecology organizing gathering than I have on a similar body at a deep ecology organizing gathering, let alone as a featured speaker. He has every right to attend or call gatherings and conferences based on views and writings that he supports, and I would earnestly encourage all who share his views to partake of such transcendental experiences for as long as they like and wherever they please.

But the evidence that Clark had no place on this committee lies in the statement itself: in its mixed messages, some of which are sharply at odds with each other; in its relegation of libertarian or confederal municipalism to a secondary status among a collection of largely communitarian options; and in its queasy tilt toward a personalistic lifestyle outlook, indeed toward a narcissism that has already produced ugly results in Euro-American anarchism, whatever the latter word has come to mean in the absence of the qualifying adjective *social.*

We are facing a real crisis in this truly counterrevolutionary time — not only in society's relationship with the natural world but in human consciousness itself. By designating himself as a "social deep ecologist or a deep social ecologist," Clark has obfuscated earnest attempts to demarcate the differences between a deadening mystical, often religious, politically inert, and potentially reactionary

tendency in the ecology movement, and one that is trying to emphasize the need for fundamental social change and fight uncompromisingly the "present state of political culture."

II

As to the essay that Clark summarized and apparently distributed at the Scotland gathering, it reveals how far he has drifted from social ecology, and more importantly, it reflects the kind of irresponsible thinking that increasingly marks the present period. This document, titled "The Politics of Social Ecology: Beyond the Limits of the City," bears the following caveat: "Note: This is a draft. Please do not copy or quote it. Comments are welcome"

Bluntly speaking, I regard this caveat as scandalous. Clark is not simply circulating his paper to a few friends and colleagues for comment, which is what one usually does with essays so marked, before their publication. Instead, he seems to have distributed this twenty-six-page single-spaced propaganda tract against libertarian municipalism to a gathering of several score people from different parts of the world. Having distributed the essay and summarized its contents in his presentation, Clark apparently permitted the participants to take his "restricted" criticism of libertarian municipalism back home to their respective countries, where they would be likely to circulate it further.

In short, despite his injunction against quoting from the essay, Clark clearly brought his attack on libertarian municipalism into the public sphere and used it to try to obstruct an attempt by social ecologists to build a movement on terms with which he disagrees. And what those terms are, Clark has recently made clear in his house organ, the *Delta Greens Quarterly*: "We need a spiritual revolution more than a political platform, and a regenerated community more than a political movement" (Clark, *Delta Greens*, p. 2).

It is clear, then, that Clark is trying to immunize himself to criticism by abjuring people from explicitly quoting from his essay. Such behavior may wash at academic conferences, if you please, but it is a scandalous ploy in the political sphere. Clark should not be permitted to shield himself from criticism of his widely distributed attack on social ecology, and I have no intention whatever of honoring his grossly dishonorable abjuration. Behind his patina of uplifting spirituality, his behavior exhibits an immorality that beggars some of the worst hypocrisies I have encountered in decades of political life, and he should be held morally as well as intellectually accountable for his behavior.

III

The central component of Clark's dispute with me is his objection to libertarian municipalism, a view that I have long argued constitutes the politics of social ecology, notably a revolutionary effort in which freedom is given institutional form in public assemblies that become decision-making bodies. It depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local municipal level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life. Having democratized themselves, municipalities would confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such. Libertarian municipalism is thus both a historical goal and a concordant means to achieve the revolutionary "Commune of communes."

Libertarian or confederal municipalism is above all a *politics* that seeks to create a vital democratic public sphere. In my *Urbanization Without Cities* as well as other works, I have made careful but crucial distinctions between three societal realms: the social, the political, and the state. What people do in their homes, what friendships they form, the communal lifestyles they practice, the way they make their living, their sexual behavior, the cultural artifacts they consume, and the rapture and ecstasy they experience on mountaintops — all these personal as well as materially necessary activities belong to what I call the *social* sphere of life. Families, friends, and communal living arrangements are part of the social realm. Apart from matters of human rights, it is the business of no one to sit in judgment of what consenting adults freely engage in sexually, or of the hobbies they prefer, or the kinds of friends they adopt, or the mystical practices they may choose to perform.

However much all aspects of life interact with one another, none of these *social* aspects of human life properly belong to the *public* sphere, which I explicitly identify with *politics* in the Hellenic sense of the term. In creating a new politics based on social ecology, we are concerned with what people do in this *public or political sphere,* not with what people do in their bedrooms, living rooms, or basements.

Clark, for his part, claims to go "beyond" the political realm, and expansively attempts to make cooperative institutions outside the political sphere — what I consider parts of the social realm, not the political — into *central* parts of his approach to social change. "Political programs [no less!] must be placed within the context of the development of a strong, many-sided ecological communitarian culture," he writes — and verily it is a "culture" (not a politics) of "producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, land trusts, and other more limited cooperative forms,"

possibly like the "Mondragon system [which] is certainly not revolutionary [but] has achieved notable successes in instituting more cooperative and democratic forms of production" (p. 22). In effect, Clark dispenses with the distinction between the political and the social. Doubtless, the workplace is a realm that a municipality and confederation of municipalities has to reclaim for the political sphere in the future — in a municipalized economy. But to include it *now* in that sphere, replete with "bosses" (p. 6), no less, is to dissolve the political into the social as it exists today and to make the untransformed realm of exploitation analogous to the transformative realm of freedom.

Clark's accusation that I "prioritize" the municipality over the family and other domestic arrangements causes me some puzzlement. Even a modicum of a historical perspective shows that it is precisely the *municipality* that most individuals must deal with directly, once they leave the social realm and enter the public sphere. Doubtless the municipality is usually the place where even a great deal of *social* life is existentially lived — school, work, entertainment, and simple pleasures like walking, bicycling, and disporting themselves, which does not efface its distinctiveness as a unique sphere of life.

Clark, however, thoroughly confuses people's *private* satisfactions — and for that matter, their personal needs, responsibilities, and duties — with the political public sphere. Indeed, he writes about their relationships in a startling way: "Millions of individuals [!] in modern society [!] deal most directly with the mass media," he tells us, "by way of their television sets, radios, newspapers and magazines, until they go to work and deal with bosses, coworkers and technologies, after which they return to the domestic hearth [!] and further bombardment by the mass media" (p. 6).

This reduction of the historico-civilizational domain introduced by the city simply to individuals "most directly" dealing "with their television sets, radios, newspapers, and magazines" is not without a certain splendor, putting as it does our "relationships" with the modern mass media on an equal plane with the relationships that free or increasingly free citizens could have in the civic sphere or political domain.

Not even democracy itself is immune to dissolution into the private and personal. "It would be a mistake to associate democracy with any *form* of decision-making," Clark advises. For the "ultimate [!] expression of democracy," he tells us, "is the creation of a democratic system of values in a community that is embodied in the lives and social practices of all the people. Every [!] action in every [!] sphere of life [!] is a kind [!] of legislating, whether one does so through unthinkingly mimicking others or through expressing something that has never existed before" (p. 20).

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Is *democracy* really to be reduced merely to Clark's irresponsible "surregionalist" wordplay? Is it to be so trivialized that it includes the "legislating" we do in our privies? The gasps we emit after orgasms? The Walter Mitty fantasies we have while inserting carburetors into an automobile engine on an assembly line? If Clark can put "unthinking mimicking" on the same plane as rational discourse, we have broken away not only from politics but from adulthood and must surrender a historic achievement — democracy — to the darkness of infantile mimesis.

IV

One of the more bizarre features of Clark's essay is that he attempts to mine social ecology, especially my own writings, in order to justify his obfuscation of the political and social. He looks for places where I upheld the importance of cooperatives or countercultural endeavors, apparently in an attempt to show that I once considered cooperatives and communal living arrangements to be quintessentially *political* at an earlier stage of my thinking, rather than cultural or social, and that the development of my libertarian municipalist ideas has constituted a replacement of this older idea in my work.

In fact, most of Clark's citations from my works are outright distortions that are crudely removed from their context. On page 2 of his essay, to take just one example, the reader is told that "especially in [my] early works from the mid-60's, [I] expressed considerable enthusiasm for a variety of approaches to political, economic and cultural change." Whereupon, turning to my essay "The Forms of Freedom" — which I wrote nearly thirty years ago (in January 1968) — Clark adduces a passage wherein I favorably envision "young people renewing social life just as they renew the human species" by leaving large cities, founding "nuclear ecological *communities*" as "*the modern city begins to shrivel,* to contract and to disappear" (emphasis added). Clark not only warps this quotation by removing it from its context in "The Forms of Freedom" but he jumbles the "political, economic and cultural," as though in the development of my thinking, confederal municipalism later replaced this "variety of approaches" to political life.

Let me state from the outset that I never declared even in the 1980s and 1990s that confederal municipalism is a *substitute* for the manifold dimensions of cultural or even private life. "The Forms of Freedom," the essay from which Clark draws the quotation, is *overwhelmingly* devoted to validating, of all things, civic popular assemblies. Or — dare I use the words? — libertarian municipalism, although I did not yet call it by that name (reprinted in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism,* hereinafter cited as *PSA*). Thus, within the space of eight pages of *PSA,* I discuss the Athenian *ecclesia* (for four pages), the Parisian revolutionary sections of the 1790s (for

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another four pages), and later the *ecclesia* and the sections again, for another three pages. On page 168, I even point to the "famous problem of 'dual power'" and the "danger of the incipient state" that might emerge in any revolution (*PSA,* p. 168) — themes that have been central to my writings in the late 1980s and 1990s. These continuities in my work conveniently escape Clark's observation.

The passage that Clark quotes from "The Forms of Freedom" on "young people" who will renew "social life," as it happens, appears in the last paragraph of this lengthy essay, the overwhelming bulk of which explicitly focuses on how we can begin to physically decentralize large cities. Clark thus distorts the sense in which I "envision young people renewing social life" and minimizes my emphasis on popular assemblies, from neighborhood "sections" to *new* citywide Athenian-type "ecclesias" and new *municipalities* as the bases for a future libertarian society. I emphasized these themes back in 1968 and even in my writings of the 1950s. So emphatically did I stress the importance of participation in local elections in my lead article ("Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations") in the last issue of *Anarchos* (in 1972), that Judith Malina, with the aid of an anarchist printer, inserted a criticism of electoralism into the magazine without my consent or that of the editors (an illustration of the "morality" to which some of our high-minded anarchists are prone).

Clark's modus operandi marks nearly every quotation he adduces to support his claim that my views underwent a transformation — as though a transformation as such were somehow reprehensible. Still, ideas similar to libertarian municipalism — the "final step," in which "the municipality becomes the central political reality, and the municipal assembly, becomes the preeminent organ [!] of democratic politics" (p. 2), as he puts it in his very crude rephrasing — are described in many of my 1960s and 1970s writings, including "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" (February 1965, in *PSA* pp. 80–81) and "Self-Management and the New Technology" (June 1979, in *Toward an Ecological Society,* hereinafter cited as *TES,* p. 115). When Clark pulls a quotation from "Toward a Vision of the Urban Future" (December 1978, in *TES,* pp. 182–83) to support his claim that I "look with favor on a variety of popular initiatives" such as "block committees, equity programs, ad hoc committees," and the like [Clark, p. 2]), it is on a page directly opposite from one on which ideas of libertarian municipalism appear. His endeavor to portray me as a fickle thinker whose "political vision has moved from radical utopianism, to revolutionary anarchism, to municipal socialism" — no less! — is completely cynical. That I have anything in common with "municipal socialism" and that I abandoned "radical utopianism" for "revolutionary anarchism" — as though the two were incompatible — rests entirely on his grossly misleading quotations.

Most alarming, however, is Clark's elimination of the distinctiveness of the realms of the political, social, and state, replacing the political realm with the

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personal, or more precisely, dissolving the political into the personal and even abolishing it. He variously absorbs political practices into lifestyle pleasures and personalistic protests, and public organizational life into inert communes and collectives.

Let me emphasize that I *do* look with favor upon cooperative initiatives — "backyard revolutions," to use the phrase of the communitarian social democrat Harry Boyte — as laudable *educational* exercises in popular self-management. At the time when they occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, in places like New York City's Lower East Side, they suggested a hopeful *trend* toward local control. Contrary to what Clark seems to maintain, however, I never believed they were basic solutions to our political problems nor lasting *substitutes* for a municipalist *politics.* Let me further add that, regrettably, *nearly all these cooperative initiatives have failed,* even as experiments, and have either faded from the municipal scenes in which they emerged, stagnated as moribund relics of an era washed away by the social reaction of the 1990s, or regrettably, become purely privatized, like the condominium dwellings so notable in New York and other major cities.

A good many have become thriving capitalistic enterprises in their own right. As Clark himself concedes, cooperative enterprises may "adopt capitalist principles of rationality" that they then mystify with an ecocapitalist "message." Under the present social order, no food coop, however well-intentioned, will ever replace the Grand Union supermarket chain, nor will any collective department store replace Wal-Mart. And it turns out that even the Mondragon system has become increasingly hierarchical and profit-oriented over time rather than "cooperative and democratic." Indeed, as Clark admits, "it is true that cooperatives have not fully [!] transformed society, and it not likely that they will quickly [!] do so" (p. 22).

V

An important component of Clark's attack is an assault on the concept of citizenship, which is basic to libertarian municipalism. Clark applauds my counterposition of the "citizen" to the "dominant representations of the self as an egoistic calculator" (p. 3), and he notes that I regard the citizen as the "'nuclear unit' of a new politics." But typically, he then proceeds to suggest that my "image has limitations" (p. 3).

Alas, don't we all? I hold no views that are carved in stone, least of all "unlimited" views that encompass reality for all time. (Clark expresses his own ideas in this essay with so many qualifiers — such as *if, maybe, possibly,* and *probably* — that it is unclear whether he has *any* concrete views of his own at all.) But what

is the limitation of my discussion of citizenship? The limitation is that I impart to this "nuclear unit," says Clark, a "privileged form of self-identity" (p. 3).

This pedestrian criticism is precisely of the sort that could be expected from a middle-class philistine. Are we talking about politics or self-identity? Or for that matter, about "self-images," as Clark puts it a few lines later? These terms, all so very different in meaning, are for Clark all of a piece, synonyms for a hazy "selfhood" that in reality takes significantly different forms, depending upon the circumstances in which it is developed, how it is expressed, and the understanding that individuals have of what constitutes their selves.

To be sure, people have very different "self-identities" and "self-images." They are fathers and mothers, children and siblings, males and females, professors and students, and even deep ecologists and social ecologists (despite Clark's own attempts to blur this last distinction). People also eat, sleep, drink, work, and think (hopefully) and are likely to form an infinite number of "imaginary self-images." And they are political beings as well, participating as citizens in the public sphere.

To remedy the limitations of my presumably narrow concept of "citizenship," Clark invites the reader to contrast it with his own expansive category of "personhood," which will allow us, he says, to think of ourselves as "not only as citizens of a town, city or neighborhood, but also a citizens of our ecosystem, of our bioregion, of our georegion, and of the earth itself" (p. 3). Fortified with this deep ecology babble, Clark recommends to the reader a "bioregional politics" that "expands our view of the political, by associating it more with the processes of ecologically-grounded cultural creativity and with a mutualistic, cooperative process of self-expression between human community and nature" (p. 24). The conclusion Clark finally draws from his laborious critique is the need for enlightened individuals to establish, again, "affinity groups, small communities, internally-democratic process in their own self-organization" (p. 24).

Clark's professions of being a superlative dialectician notwithstanding, his capacity to dissolve all the phases or "moments" that make up a development into a cosmic "Oneness" is strikingly evident here. Indeed, not only does he dissolve the political into the social and the social into the personal, but the personal suddenly explodes into an airy "earth citizen," complete with "fellow citizens," presumably bears, bees, rivers, rocks, and volcanos. Why it is that Clark, borrowing as he so often does from the ecotheological claptrap generated by Father Thomas Berry, does not reduce us to "mammalhood" in the course of reducing us from "citizenship" to "personhood" is beyond my understanding.

In fact, not only does Clark reduce the notion of citizenship to "personhood," he etherealizes personhood to vastly "global" proportions. And lest we believe that Clark's seminal discovery of "personhood" means something more than different facets of a quasi-Heideggerian "Being" or *"Dasein,"* he exuberantly declares, "Each

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person would . . . see the fundamental source of his or her identity in being a member of the human community, or perhaps more ecologically, as a member of the earth community. And we would then be a long way from municipalism" (p. 4).

Yes — indeed we would! In so hazy and vacuous a view of citizenship, not only has the personal failed to become the political, but the political completely disappears into the personal and even into the cosmic. Not surprisingly, it is a highly subjectivized "personhood" that Clark turns into an inchoate "Being," of which everything — political, social, psychological, vocational, ecological, and economic — becomes a mere dimension. As used by Clark, the word *citizen* becomes so elastic, diffuse, and vacuous that we are lost in a "night in which all cows are black," to use an aphorism popularized by Hegel. This flattened view of human reality allows nothing to come into clear relief, philosophical definition, developmental elaboration, or theoretical articulation.

Today, the concept of citizenship has already undergone serious erosion through the reduction of citizens to "constituents" of statist jurisdictions or to "taxpayers" who sustain statist institutions. To further reduce citizenship to "personhood" is nothing short of reactionary. It took long millennia for History to create the concept of the citizen as a self-managing and competent agent in democratically shaping a polity. During the French Revolution the term *citoyen* was used precisely to efface the status-generated relegation of individuals to mere "subjects" of the Bourbon kings. Moreover, revolutionaries of the last century — from Marx to Bakunin — referred to themselves as "citizens" long before the appellation "comrade" replaced it.

Clark's reductionism "liberates" us from the need to think out the *kinds* of institutions that would be required in a rational, ecological society; the kind of politics we should appropriately *practice*; in fact, the very existence of a qualitatively unique sphere called the *civitas,* and its history or dialectic. Nor would we be obliged to develop a general civic interest that could make for a community distinguishable from a privatistic "affinity group," or a commune in a Louisiana bayou, or a crash pad in New Orleans, or a food cooperative, or a neighborhood committee.

Thus, for Clark to flippantly diminish the *uniqueness* of citizenship, so pregnant with political meaning, to a hippie metaphor for "surregionalist" effusions about the earth and its inhabitants is grossly regressive. In the name of being "expansive," Clark actually diminishes people to mere components of a planetary domain, not unlike James Lovelock's arrogant designation of human beings as mere "intelligent fleas" that parasitize the sacred body of "Gaia."

Clark's seemingly widened scope of "citizenship" thereby divests citizenship of its crucial political content — in the name of broadening that content or going

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"beyond" it. So all-encompassing and vacuous does citizenship become that it is stripped of its rich historical content. We lose sight of the fact that the citizen, as he or she should be, culminates the transformation of ethnic tribal folk, whose societies were structured around biological facts like kinship, gender differences, and age groups, and should be part of a secular, rational, and humane community. Indeed, much of the National Socialist war against "Jewish cosmopolitanism" was in fact an ethnically *(völkisch)* nationalistic war against the Enlightenment ideal of the *citoyen.*

For it was precisely the depoliticized, indeed, animalized "loyal subject" rather than the citizen that the Nazis incorporated into their racial image of the German *Volk,* the abject, status-defined creature of Hitler's hierarchical *Führerprinzip.* Once citizenship becomes contentless as a result of the deflation of its existential political reality or, equally treacherously, by the expansion of its historic development into a "planetary" metaphor, we have come a long way toward accepting the barbarism that the capitalist system is now fostering with Heideggerian versions of ecology.

VI

Having divested citizenship of its historical and civic meaning, Clark suddenly backtracks from the transcendental, indeed the cosmic "earth citizenship" into which he has vaporized civic citizenship, into an earthy concern for the mundane, by claiming that I deemphasize "the role of economic class analysis" (p. 4). While he concedes that I emphasize "transclass issues like ecology, feminism, and a sense of civic responsibility to neighborhoods and communities," he again proceeds to raise a smokescreen by noting that these transclass issues are in fact "*both* class and transclass issues, since they have a general character, but also a quite specific meaning in relation to economic class, not to mention gender, ethnicity, and other considerations" (p. 4).

I hardly need the campus-bound John Clark to advise me that class, gender, and ethnic antagonisms exist and, particularly in the case of class, have to be fought out to revolutionary conclusions. I have frequently criticized deep ecologists for treating "humanity" as an abstract category, without differentiating between exploited and exploiter, oppressed and oppressor. Indeed, in my bitter debate with deep ecology beginning in 1987, I cited repeatedly that the real malefactors in the ecological crisis are not human beings as such but capitalists guided by a grow-or-die marketplace relationship. Remarkably, the same John Clark who now takes it upon himself to remind me about the existence of class in fact abstained, with Olympian disdain, from participating in the social ecology-deep ecology

debate, persistently remaining aloof even as it attained heated proportions. In the light of such hauteur, it is galling for him now to sally forth to remind me that oppressions in the world divide humanity. Never, to my knowledge, has he criticized his newly found deep ecology friends for inveighing against "humanity" as such rather than those members of humanity who oppress and dominate and exploit; nor has he challenged deep ecologists for speaking of the "human species" as a mere a zoological category, bereft of social attributes and distinctions. His tendency in *The Trumpeter* to gloss over the incredible contradictions in Arne Naess (a Gandhian anarchist who upholds, in *Ecology, Community, Lifestyle,* the need for a strong, centralized state and finds value in India's caste system), Father Berry's maledictions on the human species in *The Dream of the Earth,* and David Foreman's regression to his earlier misanthropic views, bespeaks an intellectual servility that is beneath contempt.

The fact is that "the People" I invoke, and which Clark criticizes, does not include Chase Manhattan Bank, General Motors, or any class exploiters and economic bandits. Nor is "humanity" a mere biological species that, in Father Berry's language, has to be "reinvented" — thereby tossing our species's biological uniqueness and its enormously important social history out of the window. The "People" I am addressing are an *oppressed* humanity, all of whom must — if they are to eliminate their oppressions — try to remove their shared roots of oppression as such.

So do let us agree that we cannot ignore class interests by completely absorbing them into transclass ones. But in our time, particularization is being overemphasized, to the point where any shared struggle must now overcome not only differences in class, gender, ethnicity, "and other issues," but nationalism, religious zealotry, and identity based on even minor distinctions in status. The role of the revolutionary movement for over two centuries has been to emphasize our *shared* humanity precisely against *ruling* status groups and *ruling* classes — which Marx, even in singling out the proletariat as hegemonic, viewed as a "universal class." Nor are all "images" that people have of themselves as classes, genders, races, nationalities, and cultural groups rational or humane, or evidence of consciousness, or desirable from a radical viewpoint. In principle, given Clark's sweeping oscillations from the ethereal heights of "earth citizenship" to the material dross of class beings, there is no reason why *différance* as such should not entangle us and paralyze us completely in our multifarious and self-enclosed "particularity," in postmodernist, indeed Derridean fashion.

The deformations of the past were created in vast measure by the famous "social question," notably by class exploitation, which in great measure could have been remedied by technological advances. In short, they were scarcity societies — albeit not that alone, if you please. Of course a new social-ecological sensibility has

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to be created, as do new values and relationships, and it will be done partly by overcoming economic need, however economic need is construed. In this respect, Clark says nothing new — or alien to social ecology

Still, history casts a dark and long shadow on the endeavors of largely spiritualistic movements, for which Clark and his new deep ecology colleagues exhibit such an affinity — movements that tried for thousands of years to "redeem" humanity with love, care, sharing, and even more powerfully, religion, gods, goddesses, and witchcraft, as well as ecstasy and imagination. Their failure can be measured by the extent to which Windows 95 has captivated millions and Wal-Mart is cornering the consumer market.

Indeed, today, when parochial differences among the oppressed have been reduced to microscopic divisions, it is all the more important for a revolutionary movement to resolutely point out the common sources of oppression as such and the extent to which commodification has universalized them — particularly global capitalism (a word that barely find a place in Clark's tract). Little doubt should exist that a call for an end to economic exploitation must be a central feature in any social ecology program and movement, which are part of the Enlightenment tradition and its revolutionary outcome.

The essence of dialectic — a term that drops from Clark's lips into cosmic oblivion — is to always search out what is *new* in any development: specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, the emergence a transclass People, such as oppressed women, people of color, even the middle classes, as well as subcultures defined by sexual preferences and lifestyles. To particularize distinctions (largely created by the existing social order) to the point of reducing oppressed people to seemingly "diverse *persons*" — indeed, to mere "personhood" — is to feed into the current privatistic fads of our time and to remove all possibilities for collective social action and revolutionary change.

VII

Given Clark's Taoist proclivities, we should not be surprised to find that he rejects intervention into the natural world and attempts to "manage" the "world's future," even to "'forge' a self," as "Promethean." In general, Asian mystics and deep ecology quietists denounce the figure of Prometheus because they oppose virtually all human intervention into first nature as "anthropocentric," except to satisfy people's "vital needs" (such as for computers, perhaps).

I must confess that being called a Promethean causes no chills to run up my spine, especially in a time when a pious quietism has become so widespread. Prometheus's greatest malfeasance against the Olympian deities was his sympathy

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for humanity, to whom he gave fire and the arts that they needed for a decent life, not any proclivity to "dominate Nature," whatever such a formulation would have meant to the Greeks, who passionately denounced *hubris.* Nor can we forget that the great democratic tragedian Aeschylus singled out Prometheus as a heroic figure for his defiance of the deities as well as for his humanism.

The sins of the Prometheans, common wisdom has it today, include the imposition of technology upon the natural world, and behind the anti-Promethean thinking lies a very privileged disdain for human intervention as such into the natural world, especially for technology — a prejudice that I explore in my forthcoming book *Re-enchanting Humanity.* Yet whether we like it or not, the human species was organized by biological evolution — not by a technophilic plot — to mediate its relationship with the nonhuman world technologically. That is to say, human beings are biologically unique organisms precisely in that they have the nervous system and anatomy to intervene into first nature and "manage" their future — to *innovate,* not merely to *adapt* to a pregiven environment, as nearly all other life-forms do. Humans are the only life-form — largely as a result of evolution — that has a rational sense of futurity and that can think out goals on an unprecedentedly high level of generality and expressiveness.

The current antitechnological impulse is not without its own hypocrisies. Gary Snyder, the best-known poet of deep ecology, celebrated his own acquisition of a personal computer for a full page in *The Whole Earth Review*, while the *Fifth Estate* anarchist crowd, militantly critical of technology and the "industrial system" generally, recently purchased a computer to produce their periodical, proclaiming it was a necessity but nonetheless adding, "we hate it," as though great revolutions had never been stirred up by hand presses. This kind of sham about technology goes on quite frequently, as though the key technological issue of our time were not whether technology is used rationally and ecologically but whether technology as such is intrinsically bad or good.

Clark's anti-Prometheanism points to a growing tendency in liberal circles these days to demand of all of us a demeanor that is passive-receptive, quietistic, and ultimately submissive. Quite recently, the Oklahoma City bombing and the violent American landscape generally have been attributed in whole or in part to the "cult of violence" in American history — as exemplified by, say, Patrick Henry's famous declaration, "Give me liberty or give me death" on the eve of the American Revolution, and by the embattled verses in the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." ("He hath trampled out the vintage . . . his terrible swift sword.") Apparently fighting — even dying! — for a righteous cause is now frowned upon in polite circles as violent (*Boston Globe,* p. 1). By the same reasoning, we should dispense with great, fervent revolutionary hymns like "The Marseillaise," "The Internationale," "A Las Barricadas" and replace them with the insipid saccharine

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fare of *Mary Poppins*. What a sterile and gray world it would be if we did! What feebleness would prevail over robustness and combativeness in a worthy cause! Here Clark can claim his palm. I, for one, want to deal neither with him nor his supporters, who are graying the world in the name of greening it.

VIII

Social ecology involves a revolutionary politics. It is an attempt to create a dual power to challenge the nation-state and replace it with a confederation of democratized municipalities. A revolutionary situation does not exist now, nor did it in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. For Clark to accuse me of believing that "social revolution" was "imminent" in the 1970s, then call it evidence of my "remarkable psychological naiveté" that I did is particularly odious (p. 2). Indeed, had he represented my views with a modicum of respect, he might have consulted "Revolution in America," an article I wrote in December 1967 and that was published as the lead article in the first issue of *Anarchos* in 1968. I had no illusions, as this article clearly indicates, that there was a revolutionary *situation* in the United States, even at the peak moment of the 1960s countercultural agitation. In the article's opening lines I explicitly state, "There is no revolutionary situation in the United States today. Indeed, there is not even a prerevolutionary situation." Despite the 1960s euphoria, I emphatically declared, that the New Left was far removed from gaining much more than a hearing for its views among the American people.

On the other hand, it was far from psychologically "naive" to believe that we were in a long-range revolutionary *era* in the 1960s and early 1970s. In fact, anyone with eyes in his or her head could have reasonably supposed that those years marked the initiation of a "revolutionary epoch." It was not only leftists who held this view, as I recall, but even many reactionary antileftists, as I am sure Clark — initially a fan of Barry Goldwater during that decade — must recall. Indeed, we still may be in that revolutionary epoch today, in the very broad sense that social changes are occurring with breathtaking rapidity and unpredictability.

My alleged belief in an imminent revolutionary situation, Clark notes in passing, is "reminiscent of Bakunin's extravagant predictions of rapid social transformation as the people's nature is transformed . . . through the alchemy of revolution" (p. 2). Astonishingly, this self-proclaimed anarchist would apparently deny a basic fact of historical revolutions, that both *during and after those revolutions* people undergo very rapid transformations in character. My own writings on this point are still as valid today as they were when I wrote them. One has only to study 1917 to learn how the Russian people managed, in a span of only a few days, to overthrow a

tsarist monarchy that had been in business for several centuries and to generate a vibrant political culture (which the Bolsheviks themselves destroyed during and after the civil war of 1918–21). Regrettably, the Russian anarchists, instead of creating a strong *political* movement in major Russian cities during this truly revolutionary situation, were largely occupied with building fruitless enterprises like collective housing (especially in Moscow and Petrograd), a "communitarian" culture that was easily crushed by the Cheka (the secret police) and the more focused but increasingly tyrannical Communist party. For Clark to dismiss the transformations that revolutionary people undergo raises serious questions about his own acceptance of the possibility of revolutionary change as such.

Indeed, Clark's criticisms of social ecology often imply that he himself favors liberal reformism. In our 1991 critique of a draft program of the Left Green Network, Janet Biehl and I had the nerve, in his eyes, to "attack the left Greens for their demand to 'cut the Pentagon budget by 95 percent,' and their proposals for 'a $10 per hour minimum wage,' 'a thirty-hour work week with no loss of income,' and a 'workers' superfund.'" (p. 9; quoting from Bookchin and Biehl 1991).

I should point out that the Left Green Network, which Howard Hawkins and I initiated in the late 1980s to counter the largely reformist and often mystical U.S. Greens, initially tried to radicalize the Green movement, such as it was, and deflect many of its members from collaborating with the Democratic Party. The centerpiece of the Network's original program was libertarian municipalism, which entailed an uncompromising fight for a direct democracy and a frontal attack on the existing social order. Subsequently, Hawkins, the author of the draft program that Janet and I criticized, attempted to curry popularity among a variety of reformists, syndicalists, socialists, and social democrats by increasingly denaturing the original tenets of the Left Greens until he not only called for "democratizing the United Nations" but began to support Third Party bids for statewide and national offices. His draft program's absurd demand for a 95 percent cut in Pentagon expenditures implicitly legitimated the very existence of the Pentagon and was part of a politically opportunistic tendency that had to be opposed resolutely.

Before Hawkins began to warp it, the Left Green program had been frankly revolutionary and tried to point out that liberal economistic demands *viewed as ends in themselves* merely supply a humane patina for capitalism, just as a nonsense demand for reducing the Pentagon's budget or claptrap about "democratizing the United Nations" legitimates the Pentagon and the United Nations alike. Nor did Janet and I think it the job of Left Greens, as a revolutionary tendency, to legitimate the wage system (read: capitalism) by raising commonplace economistic demands, including more pay, shorter hours, and a modicum of "workers' control," as Hawkins's program called for. All of these seemingly "Left" Green demands

had been raised by reformists who were and still are denaturing what remains of the Left everywhere in the United States. Coming from Hawkins, in particular, they threatened dissolve a left-wing program into a basically liberal one. Hence the thrust of our criticism. We wanted the Left Green Network to clearly stand for basic social change, not advance a cacophony of demands that intermingled radical appeals with liberal views.

In his defense of reformism, Clark observes that over a century ago, the Chicago "anarchists who fought for the forty-hour work week did not give up their goal of the abolition of capitalism." There is a point to be made here about the relationship of reforms to revolution, which Clark separates as two separate efforts rather than seeing them as dialectically intertwined. For the Chicago anarchists, the eight-hour day was not a mere "reform" for rendering the "what is" more palatable; nor was the fight for it separate from the goal of insurrection. On the contrary, the eight-hour demand was designed to reinforce what was virtually an armed conflict that pitted an increasingly militant proletariat against an intractable bourgeoisie. The Chicago anarchists hoped that the eight-hour-day struggle would generate a revolutionary struggle — not the achievement of an economistic trade union demand, still less a food coop or a "countercultural" commune.

In the Left Green Network, it was Janet's and my hope to create what is most notably *absent* and very *needed* today: a revolutionary Left, not another hodge-podge of reformist (largely personalistic) "improvements." Particularly in the transitional program I advanced for the Left Greens, we always placed our seemingly "reformist" demands in the context of *basic social change* and formulated them in terms of institutional developments that would pit popular assemblies against the state and the capitalist economy. Admirable as charity may be, we were not interested, despite all the goodwill in the world, in enhancing the probity of the United Way or Catholic Charities any more than we were eager to enhance the reputation of the United Nations. Cast within this transitional perspective, even the demand for a *municipally* controlled food coop has a very different meaning — and, let me emphasize, a stridently *political one* — from a food coop that is engaged primarily in merchandising "good food." Removed from a libertarian municipalist context and political movement focused on achieving revolutionary municipalist goals as a *dual power* against corporations and the state, food coops are little more than benign enterprises that capitalism and the state can easily tolerate with no fear of challenge.

Clark's solicitude for Hawkins's later reformist program might seem merely another instance of tepid liberalism, were it not for the fact that during while this battle was taking place, as in the social ecology-deep ecology fight, he stood "above" the fray, with academic "objectivity." If these observations seem "sectarian" to *him,* I readily agree. It makes all the difference in the world whether one tries to

enlarge the *directly democratic* possibilities that exist within a republican system, or whether one raises typical trade unionist and social democratic demands that are designed to render capitalism and the state more palatable. Contrary to Clark's grossly invidious claim that I ever regarded a revolution as "imminent," the demands I proferred for a *transitional* program based on *municipally controlled* projects such as credit unions and community gardens are designed to do in the economic sphere what popular assemblies and participation in local elections are meant to do in the political sphere.

That I regard them as *transitional* should have alerted Clark to the fact that I regard an "apocalyptic revolution" as a remote possibility — one that requires education, the formation of a movement, and the patience to cope with defeats. For Clark to raise a smokescreen about my "unrealistic predictions of immediate change," so similar to those "made by Bakunin and other nineteenth-century anarchist revolutionaries" (who, frankly, I admire for their revolutionary outlook) (p. 11), while commending my "far-reaching list of *transitional proposals*" only two pages earlier, leaves me to conclude that he is not seeking to fundamentally change society by revolutionary means.

Clark's attempt to establish an "imminent" revolution as a precondition for libertarian municipalism — even as he alludes with "admiration" to my transitional program — is nothing more than a crude endeavor to raise formidable structural obstacles to *any serious democratic program and movement.* However much he invokes a "political culture," he is basically speaking of a *personalistic subculture* that actually lacks any politics or contact with a broad public. That libertarian municipalism is a project for entering into the public sphere; that it calls for a radical presence in a community that addresses the question of *who shall exercise power* in a lived sense; indeed, that it is truly a *political* culture that seeks to re-empower the individual and sharpen his or her sensibility as a living *citizen* — all of these completely elude Clark as even meaningful concepts in his "surregionalist" cosmos.

IX

It is perhaps a result of his own reformist views that Clark tries to debunk libertarian municipalism from every remotely questionable point, and from every possible angle. Indeed, he uses the most philistine (and demagogic) methods to deflate the very possibility of a directly democratic rational society as well as its viability under virtually any social conditions.

Libertarian municipalism, he objects, would be impossible to carry out in huge metropolitan areas as they exist today. The thousands of assemblies into which,

say, New York or Paris would have to be divided would be unmanageable for making policy decisions. "How will the vast [!] number of assemblies in a city determine road-building or general transportation policy?" he asks. How would the thousands of assemblies that would exist in present-day metropolitan Paris be coordinated confederally? That this numbers game, which would divide a large city into assemblies by veritably imposing a mechanical grid on it, totally disregards the *transformative* role of confederal municipalism in no way troubles Clark when he comes to speak of his own "vast network" of affinity groups (p. 19).

In fact, he warns us, "in assemblies of hundreds, thousands or even potentially [!] tens of thousands of members [!] . . . there is an *enormous potential* for manipulation and power-seeking behavior" (p. 12, emphasis added). The "large assemblies" into which a large city would have to be divided, he tells us, would be subject to "competitiveness, egotism, theatrics, demagogy, charismatic leadership, factionalism [!], aggressiveness, obsession with procedural details, domination by discussion by manipulative minorities, and passivity [!] of the majority." By contrast, "elected representatives or delegates can be chastised for betraying the people when they seem to act contrary to the will or interest of the community" (p. 13). Indeed! We do not have to search very far to find that "competitiveness, egotism, theatrics, demagogy, charismatic leadership" and the like were as endemic to 1960s and 1970s communes, food cooperatives, and life-style anarchoid groups (albeit obscured by a patina of intimacy, care, and love) as they are to the workaday bourgeois world, where manipulation and power are at least easily discernable to millions of people.

Nor must we insist that everyone in a free community attend its assembly meetings, as our criterion for whether it is democratic, as Clark implies in his discussion of the Athenian polis (p. 15). Such assemblies have to be *open* to everyone, and they surely should encourage everyone to attend. Indeed, there is a certain arrogance, if not coercion, in requiring that *everyone* be in attendance, irrespective of his or her inclinations, before an assembly can be regarded as democratic. In the history of direct democracies, even the best-attended, assembly halls or areas were hardly filled to the brim under all circumstances. It seems quite inappropriate to be told by Clark, who perennially complained to me in the past of how poorly his own "affinity group" meetings in New Orleans were attended, that a democracy must be judged by the attendance of its citizens at popular assemblies. Dare I suggest that Clark is searching for any cheap shot he can find to denigrate libertarian municipalism — or would such an assertion be evidence of my "forceful" language?

For Clark to mechanically impose a grid on huge metropolitan areas and then awe us with the unwieldy numbers of assemblies that would emerge is sheer

sophistry. No one who seriously accepts a libertarian municipalist approach believes that society *as it exists* and cities *as they are structured today* can *suddenly* be transformed into a directly democratic and rational society. As I have emphasized again and again, a libertarian municipalist practice begins, minimally, with an attempt to enlarge local freedom at the expense of state power. And it does this by example, by education, and by entering the public sphere (that is, into local elections or extralegal assemblies), where ideas can be raised among ordinary people that open the possibility of a lived practice. In short, libertarian municipalism involves a vibrant politics in the real world to change society and public consciousness *alike,* not a program directed at navel gazing, psychotherapy, and "surregionalist manifestoes." It tries to forge a movement that will enter into *open* confrontation with the state and the bourgeoisie, not cravenly sneak around them murmuring Taoist paradoxes.

Despite Clark's Taoist proclivities, his fears of an assembly's passivity in the face of factions and charismatic leaders are quite likely to be fulfilled if enough people adhere to the nostrums of Lao-Tsu's *Tao Te Ching.* And if anything will stir them into active citizens, I believe it will be precisely factionalism — a strident clash of ideas where real differences exist — which Clark tries to mellow out with his obscuring of differences within the ecology movement.

Libertarian municipalism may indeed begin in a limited way in civic wards, here and there, as well as in small cities and towns. It would pose demands, if necessary through extralegal popular assemblies, for increased democracy — more far-reaching, to be sure, than even the city halls that François Mitterand (no less!) proposed for each arrondissement of Paris, the very city that Clark finds so intractable to institutional decentralization. Or a similar proposal that Mayor Lindsay (no less!) proposed for New York City. Mitterand, to be sure, had his own ulterior motives: to diminish the power of Jacques Chirac as mayor, not to democratize Paris. Lindsay, for his part, was eager to seem like a 1960s populist rather than a Republican Party hack. The irony of these two examples lies not in the motives of Mitterand and Lindsay, half-hearted as their proposals were in any case, but in the fact that our soaringly imaginative "surregionalist" exhibits even less political imagination than a Parisian socialist hack and a New York liberal fop.

X

In enlightening us about the *polis* (p. 14), Clark advises that "advocates of direct democracy have always appealed to the Greek *polis* for evidence of the feasibility of their ideal," whereupon he quickly reminds us about "the exclusion of women,

slaves, and foreigners" — the usual philistine complaint thrown against libertarian municipalism. I would remind Clark that libertarian municipalists are also libertarian communists, who obviously oppose hierarchy, including patriarchy and chattel slavery.

Indeed, Clark forewarns his readers, if the agonistic behavior of outstanding Greek democrats served to promote the *polis*'s larger interests, "the fact that libertarian municipalism comes out of traditions that are very much products [!] of patriarchal society should thus lead us to reflect very carefully [!] on the possible [!] ways in which competitive, egoistic power-seeking values might [!] be subtly perpetuated through such a system" (p. 15). Nor does Clark spare us his philistine complaints that Athenian citizens sometimes followed the guidance of charismatic, agonistic, and wealthy leaders, and that the assembly had political factions, et cetera, etcetera. Inasmuch as libertarian municipalism comes out of traditions that are "very much a product of a patriarchal society," then — *beware!*

As it turns out, in fact, the "Greek *polis*" is neither an ideal nor a model for anything — except perhaps for Rousseau, who greatly admired Sparta. It is the *Athenian polis* whose democratic institutions I often describe and that has the greatest significance for the democratic tradition. In the context of libertarian municipalism, its significance is to provide us with evidence that a people, for a time, could quite self-consciously establish and maintain a direct democracy, *despite the existence of slavery, patriarchy, economic and class inequalities, agonistic behavior, and even imperialism,* which existed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. For Clark to raise all of these ghosts about ancient democracy is a particularly cheap ploy.

The fact is that we must look for what is new and innovative in a historical period, even as we acknowledge continuities with social structures that prevailed in the past. Ancient Athens and other parts of Greece, it is worth noting in this postmodern era, was the arena for the emergence not only of direct democracy but of Western philosophy, drama, political theory, mathematics, science, and analytical and dialectical logic.

On the other hand, I could hardly derive democratic ideas from the Chinese Taoist tradition, rooted as it is in quietism and a credo of resignation and submission to noble and royal power (not to speak of the exclusion of women from socially important roles). Elites who studied the *Tao Te Ching,* for their part, could easily find it a useful handbook for ruling and manipulating a servile peasantry. Depending upon which translation the English reader uses, both interpretations are valid, but what is clear to everyone but the blind is that quietism underlies the entire work.

In fact, short of the hazy Neolithic village traditions that Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler, and William Irwin Thompson hypostasize, Clark will have a hard

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time finding *any* tradition that was not patriarchal to one degree or another. Rejecting all patriarchal societies as sources of institutional study would mean that we must abandon not only the Athenian *polis* but the free medieval communes and their confederations, the *comunero* movement of sixteenth-century Spain, the revolutionary Parisian sections of 1793, the Paris Commune of 1871 — and even the Spanish anarchist collectives of 1936–37. All of these institutional developments, be it noted, were marred to one degree or another by patriarchal values, although happily we always have the "Surregionalist Manifesto" by Max Cafard (aka John Clark) to which we can repair, or possibly to the writings of Hakim Bey.

Or we can follow Clark's advice and repair to bioregionalism. As he tells us, "bioregional politics expands our view of the political by associating it more with the processes of ecologically grounded cultural creativity and with a mutualistic, cooperative process of self-expression between the human community and nature" (p. 24). Alas, bioregionalism, as expressed by Clark, is not only a mystification of first (biological) nature at the expense of second (social and cultural) nature; its irrelevance to improving the human condition is nothing less than incredible. One has only to view the terrible conflict in the former Yugoslavia, raging in areas that are almost identical bioregionally but are grossly dissimilar culturally, to recognize how meaningless and mystifying are Clark's expectations of his bioregional "politics."

I myself experience the absurdity of bioregionalism only too vividly in my own area, where a large lake — Lake Champlain — ostensibly defines a lake bioregion. But on the Vermont side of the lake, a very populist state constitution permits everyone to be armed (its roots are in the American Revolution, whose partisans feared professional armies); the judiciary is humane and electable; subcultures are tolerated; nearly all public officials hold office for only two years, in contrast to the typical American four-year term; and town meeting democracy is lively. On the other side of the lake, but in the *same* bioregion, New Yorkers labor under restrictive gun control laws and high crime rates; an increasingly authoritarian state government; capital punishment; legislation that automatically sentences any felon to life imprisonment after three felonies; and a massively bureaucratic system of public administration and decision-making. Every time I look outside my window, where New York State is a visible presence only a few miles away, I can only swoon over the fact that Vermont and New York share a large lake — and bioregion — in common. The tendency of physiography among ecomystics and spiritualists to overtake and devour vast sociocultural differences is nothing less than dazzling.

The extent to which Clark absorbs second nature into first nature, the social into the biological, ignores the extent to which the sociosphere today encompasses the biosphere, to which first nature has been absorbed into second nature, and

reveals a stunning neglect of the decisive importance of society in determining the future of the natural world. We can no longer afford a naive nature romanticism, which may be very alluring to juveniles but has been contributing a great deal to the strident nationalism and growing ecofascism that is emerging in the Western world.

XI

Within his bioregionalist framework, the alternative that Clark explicitly offers to libertarian municipalism is a "*vast* network [no less!] of small groups and local institutions in which . . . individuals would express their hopes and ideals for the community, and . . . a vibrant democratic media of communication in which citizens would exchange ideas, and shape the values of the community" (p. 11, emphasis added). One may ask breathtakingly: What institutional forms does Clark propose to constitute this communitarian network, apart from cooperatives and communes? In fact, the alternative he seems to offer to my "simplified" notion of decision-making by a popular assembly is — a "popular judiciary" (p. 11)!

Allow me to point out the singularly absurd incongruities in Clark's presentation. From a mere "communitarian" whose sense of "reality" seems to cause him to eschew all hope — imminent or otherwise — for an effective and transformative municipalist movement, Clark becomes almost manically euphoric in his hopes for what his "vast network" of "small groups and institutions" can achieve! I will not sully Clark's soaring vision of burgeoning "small groups and institutions" by asking how this "vast network" will be established and how its components will interact, or whether it will have any ties more substantial than a lofty "change of values," such as even the most radical Christian heretics over a thousand of years never carried off.

Through the "judicial institutions," as he suggests? Or perhaps we should choose "citizens' committees," as Clark also suggests, apparently forgetting that he previously inflated the very concept of citizenship beyond any civic sense to cosmic proportions. Let us get away from Clark's academic circumlocutions and understand what the author of *The Anarchist Moment* is really calling for here: courts and councils, or bluntly speaking, *systems of representation.*

It would seem, then, that in Clark's glowing vision of utopia, judicial institutions and de facto soviets are the cement that will hold together the "vast network of small groups and institutions." But will standards as tenuous as "values" prevent Clark's judicial institutions from degenerating into Robespierrist "revolutionary tribunals"? And why shouldn't "citizens' committees" degenerate into a sovietist hierarchy, as I warned they could in "The Forms of Freedom"?

In fact, the institution to which Clark is perhaps most sympathetic is that "ultimate expression of democracy," the "idea [that] is expressed in the Taoist idea of the ruler sage, the ruler who does not rule, the one who 'does nothing' and 'claims no credit,' yet accomplishes more than anyone else" (p. 20). A mere earthling who lives in a real city on a real planet in a real world would surely have to spin like a whirling dervish before remotely "grasping" (forgive the Promethean term) this supreme and profound piece of Taoist wisdom. The value of Taoism as something more than a pacifier of Asian peasants, whom Chinese emperors and lords dispatched to the "sink of death" as quickly as possible, is dubious to say the last, and in fact, it has been a prop for despotism for centuries.

In short, Clark manages to find all sorts of "potential dangers" lurking within directly democratic institutions, only to propose judicial and representative policy-making institutions that historically have lent themselves to authoritarian forms of rule. Having commented ex cathedra on all the "potential dangers" that beset the empowerment of citizens' assemblies, this lifestyle anarchist, with truly elitist arrogance, nonetheless airily proposed courts and policy-making "citizens' councils" as solutions and remains sublimely oblivious to the prospect that a "vast network of small groups" or a system of courts to judge their behavior could degenerate into a system of dictatorial tribunals. Yes — there are potential dangers *everywhere* and in *everything,* but it is reason and a directly democratic society that are most likely to counter or remove them, not an effluvium of contradictory rhetoric.

XII

On the subject of *paideia,* Clark claims that I think that the "citizenry" *as it exists today* has the cultural and intellectual background to practice libertarian municipalism in its fully developed form — a form whose fruition has yet to be determined by historical factors that no one at present can foresee (pp. 8–9). Hence ordinary people as they are today, Clark tells us, may not have the capacity to maintain a direct democracy. "An extensive process of self-education in democratic group processes would be necessary before large numbers of people would be able to work together cooperatively in large meetings," he writes, recapitulating my own call for fostering a public sphere for the education of large numbers of people in the give-and-take of local political life (p. 13).

Although one can offer guidelines of varying merit, suggestions, reflections, and often practical institutional and educational changes, it seems necessary to remind Clark repeatedly that libertarian municipalism is a transformative *process,* a dialectic, indeed, a development in which ideas, institutions, practices, and

historical forces must interact on the face of the real earth, not in Clark's ethereal one. But then Clark asks us to consider whether "the citizens [in a free assembly] *can* in fact intelligently [!] and usefully [!] consider [the] alternatives" that strictly technical experts propose for their consideration (p. 13, original emphasis). Even more alarmingly, when he sniffs at "anarchist critiques of *existing bureaucracy*" — I thought they were critiques of *any* bureaucracy! — Clark tells us that "it does not seem desirable" that administrators should be "mindless," that is, be transparent, under the complete control of the free people in free assembly (p. 11). Thus contrasting the competence of experts with the ability of citizens to intelligently and usefully discuss the experts' conflicting alternatives, he leaves us with virtually mindless and unworkable assemblies, representative bodies (courts or councils), an absence of transparency in political relations, and finally, the likelihood that society would best be governed by elites or experts.

XIII

It is hardly surprising that Clark, whose background in the libertarian right wing is totally alien to the socialist tradition, finds the slogan "From each according to his or her abilities, to each according to his or her need" problematical. How, he brightly asks, "are the abilities and needs determined?" (p. 17).

The *whole point* behind this great revolutionary slogan is that in a communistic post-scarcity economy, abilities and needs are not, strictly speaking, "determined" — that is, subject to bourgeois calculation. In a society in which the very idea of an economy has been replaced by ethical (instead of productive) relationships, labor units, Proudhonian contracts, Rawlsian justice, and the like would not even be relevant. A basic decency and humaneness would replace these instrumentalities, which have their origins in hierarchy, class rule, and scarcity.

It is a more than reasonable assumption that when a rational society is achieved, its citizens will at least be more rational than Max Cafard and his ilk. If "primal" peoples, living in a basically scarcity situation (all the claptrap of Marshall Sahlins to the contrary notwithstanding), could rely on usufruct and the principle of the irreducible minimum for the production and distribution of goods, a post-scarcity society guided by reason would certainly not require contractual or arithmetical strictures of one kind or another to *share* the means of life without concern for who gets what and why. In any case, if humanity achieves a libertarian communist society, it will be the people who live in it who will make decisions about the production and distribution of goods, not Max Cafard or myself.

Clark's discussion of my notion of the municipalized economy (p. 16), a notion that he applauds as "compelling," is inevitably qualified by a "however," following

which we are told that a municipal economy "might [!] be looked upon not as the primary realm, but one area among many in which economic transformation might [!] begin. It is possible [!] to imagine [!] a broad spectrum of self-managed enterprises, individual producers and small partnerships that would enter into a growing cooperative economic sector that would incorporate social ecological values" (p. 16). A transitional period that allows for proprietary rights for small enterprises, Clark suggests, could "continue to exist in the long term, alongside cooperative forms of production" (p. 17).

What "might" happen and what it is "possible to imagine," alas, are not what is likely to happen if a municipalized economy coexists "in the long term" with essentially privately owned enterprises such as "individual producers and small partnerships." Owing to the fact that such enterprises, as forms of private property, must exchange commodities, they presuppose the existence of a market economy and the near certainty that if such an economy remains "long term," competition will force even the smallest enterprise eventually either to grow or to die, to accumulate capital or to disappear, to devour rival enterprises or to be devoured. Such a regressive process might indeed occur during the transitional phase of a libertarian municipalist politics, and we must be acutely mindful of the dangers it poses.

But, alas, all social and economic change is filled with risk. For example, we "might" lose! We "might" be suppressed! We "might" have to rise in a futile insurrection! Or then again, we "might" not! My point is that if we are to build a movement for a rational society, rather than a spiritual congregation for the greater glory of "surregionalism," risk should not become an excuse for making compromises that will assuredly lead us to failure. And to posit the market as a "long term" condition of economic life is to guarantee our failure. If history and Marx's brilliant insights in *Capital* reveal anything, it is that the "long term" market that Clark entertains will prevail ultimately over all his "communitarian" and private enterprises, as well as all his cherished values.

XIV

The final objection that Clark raises to libertarian municipalism is that impedes the free play of the imagination. "It is *inconceivable*," he declares emphatically, that "most creative thought" should occur in "popular assemblies," notably, in the most democratic realm of rational dialogue (p. 11, emphasis in the original). Libertarian municipalism, despite its emphasis on *paideia,* is indifferent to the need for new sensibilities, politics, and values, Clark implies, and to help us along, he invokes Cornelius Castoriadis's notion of the "social imaginary," without which, he says,

"it is impossible [!] to comprehend the power of the dominant culture over the individual" (p. 20).

Again, one waits breathlessly for an elucidation of this "imaginary," but Clark never delivers one. Instead we are firmly told that we must make "an imaginary break [!] with what is, in order to create new liberatory cultural possibilities" (p. 20). To elucidate this startling millennarian transformation, Clark trots out Hegel to remind us that a "position becomes idealist" or merely "concerned with morality rather than ethics" when it "fails to confront the real possibilities for practice." How practical and realistic must one be! it is tempting to cry — only to be warned, on the other hand, that to limit one's imagination "to possibilities that can be easily or certainly achieved produces a cynical realism and excludes the necessary utopian dimensions from politics" (p. 20). Indeed, imagination, Clark enjoins us, must be so expansive and so sweeping that it must encompass "the unexpected — indeed the 'impossible,'" no less! (p. 20).

For nearly twenty painstaking, nitpicking, tortured pages, we have been subjected to arguments over the most trivial practicalities involved in creating assemblies in a metropolitan area: how they will coordinate themselves even to adopt designs for road-building, what rules will guide their determination of "needs" and "abilities," and how they will prevent policy from being made by administrative committees, et cetera ad nauseam. Now we are suddenly invited to make an "imaginary break" — or perhaps an apocalyptic break? — "with what is," indeed, to "imagine" nothing less than "the impossible" as the key solution to our problems!

In short, when Clark offers his *own* solution, he warns us not to become mired in the same mundane practicalities with which he has been assiduously flogging libertarian municipalism for a score of pages. Not only must we soar into the empyrean heights of imagination but — yea, think "the impossible" as a key to unlocking our problems!

XV

Clark warns his readers (who are still sworn to maintain public silence) that libertarian municipalism is likely to be a marginal movement; indeed, building such a movement might consume the "energy" of "well-intentioned activists," who would try "to transform their local communities . . . while achieving limited success for a long period of time" (p. 21).

It is galling in the extreme for Clark to ask, "given the present [!] state of political culture, given the actual [!] public to which appeals must be addressed, and not least of all [!] the system of communication and knowledge which any attempt to persuade must confront, what are the real possibilities to organize

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groups and movement under a [libertarian municipalist] banner?" (p. 8). But Clark never lacks a refuge: notably, a "social imagination" coupled with "practical experimentation." Put bluntly; if you can't create it in real life, dream it up as a "social imaginary" (p. 22). Indeed, much of Clark's disquisition can properly be reduced to a Castoriadian "imaginary," in which a pseudo-cultural, overwhelmingly subjective haze obscures bitter realities that revolutionaries have to face and think through in the present time of reaction.

One is tempted to exclaim: Splendid, Professor Clark! If you think it is hopeless, then be kind enough to stay away from social ecology gatherings and conferences that are *trying,* at least, to realize these possibilities, and whose view of reality is not boxed into the present state of affairs. Stay away from people who seek to change the world, not simply live within it! I refer to serious social ecologists who are not fixated on "what is" but are concerned with truth, rationality, and "what should be," a broader vision of a future world that is more than a collection of food coops, communes, and crash pads.

XVI

To examine what is at issue in the problems of municipalism, confederalism, citizenship, the social, and the political, we must ground these notions in a historical background where we can locate the meaning of the city (properly conceived in distinction to the megalopolis), the citizen, and the political sphere in the human condition.

Historical experience began to advance beyond a conception of mere cyclical time, trapped in the stasis of eternal recurrence, into a creative *history* insofar as intelligence and wisdom — more properly, *reason* — began to inform human affairs. Over the course of a hundred thousand years or so, as we now know, *Homo sapiens sapiens* slowly overcame the sluggishness of their more animalistic cousins, the Neanderthals, and, amidst ups and downs, entered as an increasingly active agent into the surrounding world — both to meet their more complex needs (material as well as ideological), and to alter that environment by means of tools and, yes, instrumental rationality. Life became longer, more acculturated aesthetically, and more secure, and potentially at least, human communities tried to define and resolve the problems of freedom and consciousness at various levels of their development.

The necessary conditions — or preconditions, as socialists of all kinds recognized in the last century and a half — for freedom and consciousness involved technological advances that, in a rational society, *could* emancipate people from the immediate, animalistic concerns of self-maintenance, increase the realm of

freedom from constrictions imposed upon it by preoccupations with material necessity, and place knowledge on a rational, systematic, and coherent basis to the extent that this was possible. These conditions at least involved humanity's self-emancipation from the overpowering theistic creations of its own imagination (creations largely formulated by shamans and priests for their own self-serving ends, as well as by apologists for hierarchy) — notably, mythopoesis, mysticism, antirationalism, and fears of demons and deities, calculated to produce subservience and quietism in the face of the social powers that be.

That the necessary and sufficient conditions for this emancipation have never existed in a "one-to-one" relationship with each other — and it would have been miraculous if they had — has provided the fuel for Castoriadis's rather disordered essays on the omnipotence of "social imaginaries," for Theodor Adorno's basic nihilism, and for frivolous anarcho-chaotics who, in one way or another, have debased the Enlightenment's ideals and the classical forms of socialism and anarchism. True — the discovery of the spear did not produce an automatic shift from "matriarchy" to "patriarchy," nor did the discovery of the plow produce an automatic shift from "primitive communism" to private property, as evolutionary anthropologists of the last century supposed. Indeed, it cheapens any discussion of history and social change to create "one-to-one" relations between technological and cultural developments, a tragic feature of Friedrich Engels's simplification of his mentor's ideas.

In fact, social evolution is very uneven and combined, which one would hope Castoriadis learned from his Trotskyist past. No less significantly, social evolution, like natural evolution, is profligate in producing a vast *diversity* of social forms and cultures, which are often incommensurable in their *details.* If our goal is to emphasize the vast differences that separate one society from another rather than identify the important thread of similarities that bring humanity to the point of a highly creative development, "the Aztecs, Incas, Chinese, Japanese, Mongols, Hindus, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, and Western Europeans, *plus* everything that could be enumerated from other cultures" do not resemble each other, to cite the naive obligations that Castoriadis places on what he calls "a 'rational dialectic' of history" and, implicitly, on reason itself (Castoriadis, p. 63). Indeed, it is unpardonable nonsense to carelessly fling these civilizations together without regard for their place in time, their social pedigrees, the extent to which they can be educed dialectically from one another, or an explanation of *why* as well as descriptions of how they differ from each other. By focusing entirely on the peculiarity of individual cultures, one reduces the development of civilizations in an eductive sequence to the narrow nominalism that Stephen Jay Gould applied to organic evolution — even to the point where the "autonomy" so prized by Castoriadis can be dismissed as a purely subjective "norm," of no greater value

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in this postmodernist world of interchangeable equivalences than authoritarian "norms" of hierarchy.

But if we explore very existential *developments* toward freedom from toil and freedom from oppression in all its forms, we find that there *is* a History to be told of rational advances — without presupposing teleologies that predetermine that History and its tendencies. If we can give material factors their due emphasis without reducing cultural changes to strictly automatic responses to technological changes and without locating *all* highly variegated societies in a nearly mystical sequence of "stages of development," then we can speak intelligibly of definite advances made by humanity out of animality, out of the timeless "eternal recurrence" of relatively stagnant cultures, out of blood, gender, and age relationships as the basis for social organization, and out of the image of the "stranger," who was not kin to other members of a community, indeed, who was "inorganic," to use Marx's term, and hence subject to arbitrary treatment beyond the reach of customary rights and duties, defined as they were by tradition rather than reason.

Important as the development of agriculture, technology, and village life was in moving toward this moment in human emancipation, the emergence of the city was of the greatest importance in freeing people from mere ethnic ties of solidarity, in bringing reason and secularity, however rudimentarily, into human affairs. For it was only by this evolution that segments of humanity could replace the tyranny of mindless custom with a definable and rationally conditioned *nomos,* in which the idea of justice could begin to replace tribalistic "blood vengeance" — until later, when it was replaced by the idea of freedom. I speak of the *emergence* of the city, because although the development of the city has yet to be completed, its moments in History constitute a discernable dialectic that opened an emancipatory realm within which "strangers" and the "folk" *could* be reconstituted as *citizens,* notably, secular and fully rational beings who approximate, in varying degrees, humanity's *potentiality* to become free, rational, fully individuated, and rounded.

Moreover, the city has been the originating and authentic sphere of *politics* in the Hellenic democratic sense of the term, and of civilization — not, as I have emphasized again and again, the state. Which is not to say that city-states have not existed. But democracy, conceived as a face-to-face realm of policy-making, entails a commitment to the Enlightenment belief that all "ordinary" human beings are potentially *competent* to collectively manage their political affairs — a crucial concept in the thinking, all its limitations aside, of the Athenian democratic tradition, and more radically, of those Parisian sections of 1793 that gave an equal voice to women as well as all men. At such high points of political development, in which subsequent advances often self-consciously built on and expanded more limited earlier ones, the city became more than a unique arena for human life and politics, and municipalism — *civicism* — which the French revolutionaries later

identified with "patriotism" — became more than an expression of love of country. Even when Jacobin demagogues gave it chauvinistic connotations, "patriotism" in 1793 meant that the "national patrimony" was not the "property of the King of France" (whose title the Revolution, in its early stages, changed to the "King of the French"). France, in effect, now belonged to *all* the people.

Over the long run, the city was conceived as the sociocultural *destiny* of humanity, a place where, by late Roman times, there were no "strangers" or ethnic "folk," and by the French Revolution, no custom or demonic irrationalities, but rather *citoyens* who lived in a *free* terrain, organized themselves into discursive assemblies, and advanced canons of secularity and *fraternité,* or more broadly, solidarity and *philia*, hopefully guided by reason.

Moreover, the French revolutionary tradition was strongly confederalist until the dictatorial Jacobin Republic came into being — wiping out the Parisian sections as well as the ideal of a *fête de la fédération.* One must read Jules Michelet's account of the Great Revolution to learn the extent to which *civicism* was identified with municipal liberty and *fraternité* with local confederations, indeed a "republic" of confederations, between 1790 and 1793. One must explore the endeavors of Jean Varlet and the Evêché militants of May 30–31, 1793, to understand how close the Revolution came in the insurrection of June 2 to constructing the cherished confederal "Commune of communes" that lingered in the historical memory of the Parisian *fédérés,* as they designated themselves, in 1871.

Hence, let me stress that a libertarian municipalist politics is not a mere "strategy" for human emancipation; it is a rigorous and ethical concordance, as I have already noted, of means and ends (of instrumentalities, so to speak) with historic goals — which implies a concept of History as more than mere chronicles or a scattered archipelago of self-enclosed "social imaginaries." The *civitas,* humanly scaled and democratically structured, is the potential home of a universal *humanitas* that far transcends the parochial blood tie of the tribe, the geo-zoological notion of the "earthling," and the anthropomorphic and juvenile "circle of all Beings" (from ants to pussycats) promoted by Father Berry and his acolytes. It is the *immediate* sphere of public life — not the most "intimate," to use Clark's crassly subjectivized word — which, to be sure, does not preclude but indeed should foster intimacy in the form of solidarity and complementarity.

The *civitas,* humanly scaled and democratically structured, is the initiating arena of rational reflection, discursive decision-making, and secularity in human affairs. It speaks to us from across the centuries in Pericles's magnificent funeral oration and in the earthy, amazingly familiar, and eminently secular satires of Aristophanes, whose works demolish Castoriadis's emphasis on the *"mysterium"* and "closure" of the Athenian *polis* to the modern mind. No one who reads the *chronicles* of Western humanity can ignore the rational dialectic that underlies

the accumulation of mere events and that reveals an unfolding of the human potentiality for universality, rationality, secularity, and freedom in an eductive relationship that alone should be called *History.* This History, to the extent that it has culminations at given moments of development, on which later civilizations built, is anchored in the evolution of a secular public sphere, in *politics,* in the emergence of the rational city — the city that is rational institutionally, creatively, and communally. Nor can imagination be excluded from History, but it is an imagination that must be elucidated by reason. For nothing can be more dangerous to a society, indeed to the world today, than the kind of unbridled imagination, unguided by reason, that so easily lent itself to Nuremberg rallies, fascist demonstrations, Stalinist idolatry, and death camps.

XVII

Clark crudely effaces this vast movement toward citification and the emergence of the citizen by decontextualizing the city of its historical development. Indeed, he writes off the lessons — the failings and achievements of municipal history — by advising his readers that they "must avoid idealizing [!] past forms such as the *polis,* medieval free cities, or revolutionary sections and [Parisian] communes," lest they miss "their flaws, limitations, and especially, their ideological aspects" — as if our exploration of them (which Clark outrageously transmutes into "idealizations") ignored their limitations. This man can only conceive of libertarian municipalism (coarsely enough, as "municipal socialism"!) as a "strategy," weighing its chances of success against its possible failings, and recklessly shifting his critical positions from outright elitism to the "possible" failure of full popular participation in assembly meetings. The importance of distinguishing policy-making from administration, so crucial in understanding power relationships in free municipalities (a point regarding which Marx so significantly erred in *The Civil War in France*), is eclipsed by philistine concerns about the dangers of charismatic leaders and "factionalism" — as though factionalism, which terrified the oligarchical American constitutionalists of 1787, were a danger even to a republican polity!

This distinction must be emphasized because Clark radically collapses the *political* domain — the most *immediate* public sphere that renders a face-to-face democracy possible — into the *social* sphere. Thus, we are told that it is "not clear . . . why the municipality should be considered quite so fundamental" if municipalism "*rejects* the view of some anarchists and many utopians that the most *intimate personal sphere,* whether identified with the affinity group [!], the familial group or the communal *living* group is most fundamental *socially* and

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politically" (pp. 5–6, emphasis added). In this rambling conflation of the most "immediate" with the most "intimate," of the "political" with the "personal," and of the "familial" and communal "living group" with the "political," Clark reduces the public sphere — the arena of the political or the self-management of the *polis* — to the bedroom, living room, and kitchen, or, if you like, to the café and park, in short, to the personal. One could dwell at considerable length on this overly subjectivistic, narcissistic, indeed Yuppie vision of social life. If "some anarchists and many utopians" ignore the historic development of humanity out of the parochial kin-oriented domestic life that prevailed in tribal society, toward the confederation of free cities, so much the worse for current anarchism — which indeed has largely failed to distinguish politics of *any* kind from statism, not to speak of "utopianism," whatever that may be today. Indeed, nothing has been more paralyzing to anarchism (an ecumenical word that encompasses vastly contradictory ideologies) than the proclivity of many young anarchists today to relegate public activity to throwing a brick at a plate-glass window or painting numbingly moronic "revolutionary" and largely personalistic slogans on walls.

Nor can we ignore Clark's wild swings from "mediations" that justify elitist administrative councils, to "vast networks" of affinity groups, communes, and coops; his criticism of a presumably apocalyptic revolution on one page and his plea for an "imaginary break" with existing conditions that will encompass "the impossible" on the next; his philosophical idealism that assigns to imagination a sovereignty over human affairs, that contrasts to his flip-flop concern for material class interests — not to speak of his mechanical grids and endless "possibilities" that might frustrate almost *any* political activity, including the activities of his own "network," with its very imaginary forms of interaction.

This methodology, if such it can be called, is not evidence of intellectual round-edness, especially if all of his complaints against libertarian municipalism can be used more effectively against his own alternatives, but a crude etherealization of "democracy." It coincides completely with the lifestyle anarchism of Hakim Bey, who despises every attempt to change society apart from personalistic, bluntly "chaotic," explosions of personal self-indulgence. In Clark's "surregionalist" world, democracy exists primarily insofar as we "imagine" it and presumably personally "practice" it in every sphere of life. It is notable that Clark's journey "beyond the limits of the city" makes no mention of capitalism but patently accepts a market economy, presumably of small partnerships and enterprises.

But what is fundamentally at issue in going "beyond Clark" is the ideological fluff from which his intuitions arise. The cultural and social barbarism that is closing around this period is above all marked by ideologies of regression: a retreat into an often mythic prelapsarian past; a narcissistic egocentricity in which the political disappears into the personal; and an "imaginary" that dissolves the

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various phases of a historical development into a black hole of "Oneness" or "interconnectedness," so that all the moments of a development are flattened out. Underpinning this ideological flattening is a Heideggerian *Gelassenheit,* a passive-receptive, indeed quietistic, "letting things be," that is dressed up in countervailing Taoist "contraries" — each of which cancels out its opposite to leave practical reason with a blank sheet upon which *anything* can be scrawled, however hierarchical or oppressive. The Taoist ruler, who Clark adduces, who does not rule, who does nothing yet accomplishes more than anyone else, is a contradiction in terms, a mutual cancellation of the very concepts of "ruler" and "sage" — or, more likely, a tyrant who shrewdly manipulates his or her subject while pretending to be self-effacing and removed from the object of his or her tyranny.

The Chinese ruling classes played at this game for ages. What Marx's fetishism of commodities is for capitalism, this Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* is for present-day ideology, particularly for deep ecology and all its "social ecological" offspring. Thus, we do not *change* the world; we "dwell" in it. We do not *reason* out a course of action; we "intuit" it, or better, "imagine" it. We do not pursue a rational eduction of the moments that make up an evolution; instead, we relapse into a magical reverie, often in the name of an aesthetic vanguardism that surrenders reality to fancy or imagination.

Hence the explosion these days of mystical ecologies, primitivism, technophobia, anticivilizationalism, irrationalism, and cheap fads from devil worship to angelology. Put the prefix *bio-* before a word, and you are come up with the most inane, often asocial body of "ideas" possible, such as bioregionalism, which overrides the very fundamental cultural differences that demarcate one community or group of communities from another by virtue of a common watershed, lake, or mountain range.
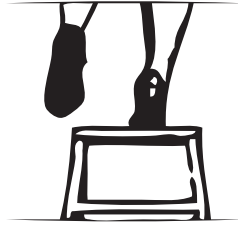
We can now begin to see the face of a barbarism that is culturally devolutionary, of "new social movements" that are irrelevant to the problems of human experience at best and quietistic, submissive, and self-effacing at worst. If we require "a spiritual revolution more [!] than a political platform, and a regenerated community more [!] than a political movement"; indeed, if democracy is an "imaginary" and that the process of legislating is everywhere, in everything we do; if we must build a vast network of affinity groups, communes, and other largely personalist entities; if we must "dwell" in Taoist quietism — not only on Father Berry's "Earth," but within the bosom of the present society — then indeed, we need no "political movement." A vast network of ashrams will do — and no bourgeois would have cause to fear this development.

— September 20, 1995

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