
13. Environmentalism and an anarchist research method

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In thinking about the way that liberal theory and legal practices have run aground when it comes to issues of environmentalism, alternative methods and approaches are highly desirable. On the surface, one of those alternatives, an anarchist legal method – and a concomitant research agenda that it produces – seems quite oxymoronic. Anarchism, it would seem, is the antithesis of a method.¹ Anarchism seems given over to free form and spontaneity; it suggests that, particularly when it comes to the law, there is nothing for anarchists to say or do insofar as the law is all about order and predictability whereas anarchism is nothing of the kind.

Yet, to make such a point is to concede a very basic liberal critique of anarchism; it offers that anarchism is chaotic and unsystematic. Liberalism prides itself as the most organized and rational of systems, whereas it often projects onto anarchism visions of *Lord of the Flies*, chaos and a total lack of organization. In fact, however, it is our argument that liberalism is an inherently chaotic system and that the arguments it makes about anarchist chaos are actually a projection and externalization of its own darker and disordered aspects.² Because liberalism is above all involved with the promulgation and protection of the market, it is, in fact in the service of an eminently chaotic system.³ The market ascribes winners and losers willy-nilly and it largely escapes the controls of human politics thus wreaking havoc, quite literally, on the planet. Therefore, to a liberal who might ask how it is possible to have an anarchist legal method at all – much less one that applies to questions of environmentalism – our retort would be to say that it is liberalism that has put the world in such dire jeopardy by subordinating politics to the exigencies of a market that disregards all values, including the value of a sustainable and healthy planet.

Anarchism, we will argue, is not chaotic but represents a way of

¹ The classic reference is Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (Verso 2010).

² Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (Verso 2014) and Richard Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder* (Verso 2008).

³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (University of California Press 2011).

reasserting a human-based politics. Its method – and therefore the method of conducting and engaging in research as well – is to submit every decision, every action to politics. By politics we are not referring to the contemporary – and archist – models of rule whereby people vote (if they are allowed) for representatives who then effectively take on all subsequent decision-making. Instead we are referring to the anarchist model of politics that eschews this form of representation entirely. Under anarchism, there is no voting for someone else. People speak as themselves and decisions are made by processes that cannot bypass or elude collective models of decision-making.⁴ Rather than separating law and politics an anarchist legal method has law directly address and express political decisions. As we will argue, this does not collapse law into politics, making law a nonentity; rather, law can be read as the harnessing of political decisions, a way to apply local and disparate decisions in a way that stems directly from the experiences and knowledges of these communities. The ‘method’ in this case then is a decidedly horizontal one; rather than a top-down model (which imitates the top-down nature of archism more generally) where an academic projects ‘knowledge’ onto some object of study, an anarchist method serves to immerse the researcher into the community in question, not to stand above it but to join it. In what follows we set out an exploration of the ways anarchist academics can do research in the field of environmental law, a way to think about encouraging further dialogue on this deeply critical question of how to address the despoilment and ruination of the planet.

⁴ In some ways, there are already anarchist tendencies in the forms of law that predominate in the English-speaking world. For example, during the English Reformation, John Lilburne argued that jurors had the right to judge the law itself and not just the facts being presented. Although Lilburne was not himself an anarchist (insofar as he sought to submit popular judgment to Scripture), that idea is reflected in the practice of jury nullification wherein juries can decide that the law for which a person stands accused is itself invalid. In the United States, the right of jury nullification is established everywhere, but in only one state (New Hampshire) are jurors actually informed of this power. In some states it is a crime to let jurors know about this right and so the anarchist possibility of law is present but hidden from the people who might practice it. Examples of communities having taken the law into their own hands include the Black Panthers in Oakland, CA, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Aymara communities in El Alto, Bolivia, and various anarchist communities in many countries which seek alternatives to state-run prison and court systems. In every case, questions of law go from being a disengaged body that floats over the community (and which they must submit to) to an active and engaged decision-making process coming from the community itself. See further James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale University Press 2010).

Before examining the implications of anarchist methods and politics for research, we provide a three-part critique of liberal environmental law. First, we highlight the ways liberalism rationalizes itself to the market and promotes a shallow discourse that offers 'rights-talk' in place of more radical projects that seek to undermine or displace key sights of power. Second, we argue that environmental law has become highly specialized, reductionist and abstracted from the natural world. Environmental law lacks, not only overarching commitments but also a process for establishing what such commitments might be or how they can inform environmental governance. Finally, we argue that environmental law is primarily solution focused and motivated by a teleology that suggests that it is possible to reach a desired future state or equilibrium where contest and struggle are no longer required. Each of these factors, we argue, impedes rather than promotes environmental goals.

Following this we describe anarchism and anarchist legal method. Alongside self-identified anarchist thinkers, we draw more broadly from the cannon of leftist and socialist thought. By this we mean a range of thinking that extends from left-wing Marxists, radical feminist scholarship and other disciplinary apparatuses that promote 'people's knowledge' while eschewing vanguard politics. The critical link uniting the authors we engage is a concern to harness and empower the knowledge that comes from a given community. This we argue, is at the heart of anarchist politics, and is particularly vital when it comes to issues of environmentalism. In this case, even the best meaning liberal research method is incapable of identifying, let alone addressing, the fundamental chaotic and anti-life forces that lie at the heart of the liberal polity.

To describe anarchist research method we first outline a series of epistemological and methodological points. Following this, we examine closely the relationship between anarchist research and activist research, as well as ethnographic scholarship. In presenting this analysis, we highlight the importance of contingency in anarchist research and the role of the researcher in 'accompanying' communities to reflect, rather than determine the modes of inquiry and action in question. Further, working off of James Scott's notion that communities are always engaged in acts of resistance, always fully aware of their circumstances and how to change them (even if, on the surface, they might seem quiescent and placid), we argue that an anarchist methodology relies on local knowledge and practices.⁵

⁵ James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press 1992); and James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press 1987).

Rather than assume that the expert and the academic ‘knows better’ than the members of the community involved, anarchism assumes the opposite. Those individuals who are directly affected and involved in questions of environmental justice, among other issues, are, in effect the true ‘experts’ and their experiences are the basis for any representations of anarchist positions.

Finally, we conclude by offering a series of critical questions that we hope will guide researchers about to embark on research projects. These questions are designed to reveal the partisan nature of anarchist research and prompt the investigator to consider how epistemology informs method, power dynamics between the researcher and the community and how research results will be shared.

LIBERAL LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP AND METHOD

The orthodox method of analysis in environmental law disguises important political assumptions and ideological commitments. Here we briefly describe three critiques that are of particular relevance to our chapter.

First, while environmental law purports to be apolitical and objective, it is heavily burdened by the constraints of liberal political ideology.⁶ As already noted, liberal law must rationalize itself in terms of the demands of the market, the very force that is busily destroying the environment that the law purportedly protects.⁷ Morton Horowitz, the critical legal historian from Harvard University, contends that the coupling of law to the market began in earnest during the industrial revolution, as corporate powers played an increasingly activist role in shaping law to suit their class interests. Horowitz notes: ‘Law once conceived of as protective, regulative, paternalistic and above all, a paramount expression of the moral sense of the community, had come to be thought of as facilitative of individual

⁶ We contend that this is true, despite environmental law’s incoherence about other aspects of its subject matter. See for example, David Westbrook, ‘Liberal Environmental Jurisprudence’ (1994) 27 UC Davis Law Review 619, 621: ‘Despite being a burgeoning area of practice, environmental law is not a discipline, because it lacks the professional consensus on a coherent internal organization or materials a discipline requires. The field’s intellectual incoherence makes teaching environmental law difficult, and gives rise to widespread frustrations among professors and students’.

⁷ Louis Althusser, ‘The Law’ in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (Verso 2014) 60.

desires and as simply reflective of the existing organization of economic and political power'.⁸

The influence of the market on law has only increased under the neoliberal State, one which prefers governance by executive order and by judicial decision rather than through participatory decision-making.⁹ The neoliberal State has placed an increased reliance on public-private partnerships, and corporate leaders not only collaborate intimately with government representatives but also have acquired a role in writing draft legislation, determining public policies, and setting regulatory frameworks.¹⁰ In response, liberal legal scholarship offers a shallow, minimalistic alternative that is frequently couched in the language of rights-talk. Far from displacing dominant conceptions of power and value, rights-talk frequently 'colonizes' more radical political projects.¹¹ Moreover, to quote Judith Butler, the re-inscription of existing normative concepts such as rights, which are 'derived from liberalism are . . . inadequate to the task of grasping both new subject formations and new forms of social and political antagonism'.¹²

Second, environmental law has become highly specialized and reductionist to the point that it cannot see the forest for the trees.¹³ Moreover, scholarship is frequently incoherent,¹⁴ ad hoc¹⁵ and lacks the self-awareness required to articulate guiding principles or philosophy.¹⁶ This may be a reflection, in part, of the first problem; if liberal law cannot fundamentally address the crisis of the environment, it must put its focus somewhere (hence in minutiae and specialization). However, it

⁸ Morton Horowitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860* (Harvard University Press 1977) 243.

⁹ Raymond Plant, *The Neo-liberal State* (Oxford University Press 2012) 3 and David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (OUP 2007) 66.

¹⁰ Steve Fraser, *The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power* (Little, Brown and Company 2015) 331.

¹¹ See for example Wendy Brown, "'The Most We Can Hope For . . .": Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism' (2004) 103 (2/3) *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 451, 461.

¹² Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Verso 2009) 146.

¹³ Klaus Bosselmann, 'Losing the Forest for the Trees: Environmental Reductionism in the Law' (2010) 2(8) *Sustainability* 2421, 2424.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Fisher, Bettina Lange, Eloise Scotford and Cinnamon Carlarne, 'Maturity and Methodology: Starting a Debate about Environmental Law Scholarship' (2009) 21(2) *Journal of Environmental Law* 213, 219.

¹⁵ John F McEldowney and Sharron McEldowney, *Environmental Law and Regulation* (Blackstone Press 2002) 8–9.

¹⁶ Sean Coyle and Karen Morrow, *The Philosophical Foundations of Environmental Law: Property, Rights and Nature* (Hart Publishing 2004) 1.

has resulted in a patchwork of legislation that is compartmentalized and abstracted from the physical world it purports to protect.¹⁷ Lawmakers do not comprehend the environment as a whole, but as discrete bundles of ‘natural resources’. The Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (SA), for example, seeks to facilitate the use and management of the environment, rather than safeguard its protection. To a degree, fragmentation is inevitable because law needs to be specific enough to be enforced in discrete situations. However, the lack of clearly articulated values about the environment – or even a process for articulating what such values might be – has severe consequences for the environment.

Finally, environmental lawyers have struggled to articulate a methodology or initiate a discussion about what methodologies are appropriate to their subject.¹⁸ For example, a review of Australian universities undertaken by Terry Hutchinson and Nigel Duncan found that most legal scholars do not explain their methods.¹⁹ Brendon Murphy and Jeffrey McGee argue further that legal scholars tend to describe their research as ‘doctrinal’²⁰ but ignore the fact that this term refers to a broad range of practice and is not usually understood by non-lawyers. Murphy and McGee contend:

There is a problem at the heart of legal scholarship, grounded in its apparent inability to adequately articulate its own research design. Therefore, legal research, at least for those looking from outside the discipline of law, appears to be something lawyers do, rather than explain.²¹

The lack of an explicit research method enables environmental lawyers to slip certain assumptions into their doctrinal analysis. For example, a review of articles featured in environmental law journals reveals a common narrative that is grounded in a binary of problem/solution. Put another way, environmental legal scholarship has adopted a method that is solution

¹⁷ Klaus Bosselmann, ‘From Reductionist Environmental Law to Sustainability Law’ in Peter Burdon (ed), *Exploring Wild Law: The Philosophy of Earth Jurisprudence* (Wakefield Press 2011) 204.

¹⁸ Fisher et al. (n 14) 214.

¹⁹ Terry Hutchinson and Nigel Duncan, ‘Defining and Describing What We Do: Doctrinal Legal Research’ (2012) 17 *Deakin Law Review* 83. Similar research is underway in Europe, see Aulis Aarnio, *Reason and Authority: Treatise on the Dynamic Paradigm of Legal* (Dartmouth Publishing 1997) and Aulis Aarnio, *Essays on the Doctrinal Study of Law* (Springer 2011).

²⁰ The explication and application of rules found in formal legal sources such as legislation, case law and treaties.

²¹ Brendon Murphy and Jeffrey McGee, ‘Phronetic Legal Research’ (2015) 24(2) *Griffith Law Review* 288, 290–291.

focused²² and premised on the often-unacknowledged blackmail of ‘the end of history’, that is to say on expressly teleological forms of thinking.²³ This method presumes that, with the right legal architecture, it is possible to reach a balance or equilibrium where further intervention or struggle is no longer required. Liberal law always occurs in the context of a larger sense of progress and a future that is always brighter than the past. While never stated so explicitly, this is evidenced by the volume of articles that suggest that ‘if only *x* law was in place everything would be OK’, as well as by the general failure of environmental lawyers to think beyond the enforcement of a specific legislative enactment. Insofar as history itself seems to bear out solutions, there is no sense of contingency, no sense of a system that is out of control. If history will take care of the larger issues, then it only remains to worry about specific and isolated questions.

Seen in this light, liberal environmental law is a shallow project that seeks to mitigate (and at times facilitate) environmental impacts from within the coordinates of the current system. It says nothing about displacing dominant sites of power or democratizing power in a way that empowers communities or builds resilience. In fact, the very pose of liberal environmentalism disables other, more radical approaches. It vests agency in ‘experts’ whose imagination is limited to the status quo. The entire ‘green capitalist’ movement is a case in point.²⁴ If a building or development is ‘green’ (perhaps having solar energy panels on the roof or better insulation), no question of how this construction impacts the environment in a larger sense needs be raised. In its extraordinary ability to adapt to virtually any challenge, capitalism has discovered a way to benefit from concerns about environmental destruction, how to actually make a profit from the crisis that it itself has brought into the

²² Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, ‘Looking for the Space Between Law and Ecology’ in Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (ed), *Law and Ecology: New Environmental Foundations* (Routledge 2011) 1.

²³ Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History’ (The National Interest, 1989) <<http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>> accessed 1 September 2013. What Fukuyama meant by this was that with the defeat of fascism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 20th century had seen the ‘total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism’. History had shown that liberal democracy was the end point of humankind’s ‘ideological evolution’. Politics would no longer involve a debate or struggle between fundamentally different political systems.

²⁴ Heather Rogers, *Green Gone Wrong: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Eco-Capitalism* (Verso 2013) and Guy Pearse, *The Greenwash Effect: Corporate Deception, Celebrity Environmentalists, and What Big Business Isn’t Telling You about Their Green Products and Brands* (Skyhorse Publishing 2014).

world.²⁵ It is no wonder then that after forty years of environmental law, the environmental crisis continues to deepen²⁶ and communities are forced to defend even these flawed protections from being eroded.²⁷

This chapter offers a radical alternative to liberal environmental method by thinking further about how an anarchist legal method can harness local knowledge and decisions in ways that break out of the limitations imposed by liberal scholarship. Abandoning the pose of expert or one who knows better, the anarchist legal method adopts a posture of humility and works off the perspective that local communities are fully aware of the environmental problems they face and capable of making informed recommendations. For these reasons, the role of the academic researcher is to ‘accompany’²⁸ these communities and utilize their relative social power to amplify the voice of the community.

In adopting this approach, we are not arguing that every community will make a perfect environmental decision every time. However, it is surely conceivable, perhaps even likely, that collective decision-making processes will reflect community and ecological interests better than those decisions made by corporate executives or members of parliament operating within the structure of State capitalism. They will also be preferable, we argue, to the kinds of policies and ‘solutions’ offered by the liberal academic approaches described above. Anarchist researchers can play a role in helping secure the conditions that make it possible for people to participate meaningfully in politics. Here, politics becomes a way of staking out and sharing in a common life and cultivating a deep respect for and relationship with the environment.

ANARCHISM AND ANARCHIST METHOD

There are so many interpretations of anarchism that it would be hopeless to try and capture them all in some unified theory or ideology. Even if

²⁵ Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (Verso 2014).

²⁶ See The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2014* (Island Press 2014).

²⁷ While many countries are developing climate legislation, others like Japan and Australia have ‘backslid’ and started to reverse climate legislation. See Globe International, ‘The Globe Climate Legislation Study A Review of Climate Change Legislation in 66 Countries’ (London School of Economics 2014) <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Globe2014.pdf>>.

²⁸ Staughton Lynd, *Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change* (PM Press 2012). See also Staughton Lynd and Andrej Grubacic, *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History* (PM Press 2008).

one sought to extract from the archives of anarchism a living/evolving tradition,²⁹ it remains difficult to formulate its doctrines as a specific theory of society and social change. How, for example, does one reconcile the writings of a 19th-century Russian prince³⁰ with 21st-century post-modern philosophers?³¹ The anarcho-syndicalist historian Rudolf Rocker captured this tension, noting that anarchism is not ‘a fixed, self-enclosed social system but rather a definite trend in the historic development of mankind, which, in contrast with the intellectual guardianship of all clerical and governmental institutions, strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life’.³² Saul Newman even speaks of ‘postanarchism’, that is an anarchism that recognizes that the state is no longer the main actor to oppose and that the market has taken on a preeminent role via neoliberals.³³

What can be said about this trend in historic development? Anarchism by its very nature defies a unified theory and any anarchist method is likewise resistant to overall and unifying themes. Nonetheless, there are a few general principles that can be stated that help, at the very least, to delimit a boundary within which anarchism – and any method that might result from it – occurs.

One idea recently offered by the North American Anarchist Studies Network seeks to lay out general anarchist principles:

We understand anarchism, in general terms, as the practice of equality and freedom in every sphere of life – life conceived and lived without domination in any form; we understand this practice to belong not only to a better future but to the here and now, where we strive to prefigure our ends in the means we choose to reach them.³⁴

²⁹ For such an attempt see Daniel Guerin, *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press 2005) and Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (PM Press 2010).

³⁰ Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (Freedom Press 1974) and Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (Dover Publications 2002).

³¹ See Jacob Blumenfeld, Chiara Bottici and Simon Critchley (eds), *The Anarchist Turn* (Pluto Press 2013); Duane Rousselle and Sureyya Evren (eds), *Post-Anarchism: A Reader* (Pluto Press 2011); Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (Penn State University Press 2005) and Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh University Press 2011).

³² Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (AK Press 2004) 31.

³³ Newman (n 31) 79–80.

³⁴ North American Anarchist Studies Network, Statement of Purpose <<http://www.naasn.org/statement-of-purpose>>.

Anarchism, according to this vision, serves as an ethical compass for action in daily life – in part by allowing this life its own expression in ways that are not distorted by archism. It also offers a vision of a participatory democratic social order that progressive social movements should continuously strive to develop and move others toward, whether or not it can ever be reached in absolute terms.

Drawing on this general description, an anarchist research method can be broken down to the following (incomplete) epistemological principles:³⁵

- First, research needs to consider and respond to the objective and subjective aspects of reality as it is understood and experienced by human actors. Here objective reality might refer to the material world and the various manifestations of the environmental crisis, i.e. the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Subjective reality refers to our understanding and evaluation of the world and our response to it.
- Second, research must recognize the way that the objective and the subject are dialectically related and there is a didactic relationship between the two dimensions.
- Third, objective and subjective reality is interrelated and in a constant state of motion. As John Holst notes: ‘This change is quantitative (incremental) and becomes qualitative (fundamental) when something new is added or subtracted’.³⁶ To comprehend these shifts, the anarchist research must explore how change manifests and the significance it has to their topic.

These epistemological principles have important methodological implications. John Gaventa provides a useful summary that engages the relationship between forms of research and the extent of control a researcher exercises over the research process.³⁷ Drawing on this typology, we describe anarchist research as concerned primarily with the ‘development of people’s knowledge’ – the insights that specific groups of people,

³⁵ On the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology see Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination* (Zed Books 2014) 211–216.

³⁶ John D Holst, *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World* (Jossey-Bass 2011) 184.

³⁷ John Gaventa, ‘Participatory Research in North America’ in *An Approach to Education Presented Through a Collection of Writings* (Highlander Research and Education Center 1989).

impacted by an issue, possess. Further, anarchist research seeks to expand the ‘social production of knowledge’ so that community members are directly involved in the dispersal and use of any knowledge produced. The goal of anarchist research for law is to contribute to the ever-expanding understanding of people’s own reality with the intent of resolving problems at the root of people’s oppression (once again by facilitating their own decisions, communicating those decisions to others). The ‘political’ nature of the reality will emerge from a robust investigation of that reality in its totality and by investigating the interrelatedness of people’s legal, social, economic and cultural realities.

With this noted, we turn now to consider the relationship between anarchism and activist research and ethnography as a particular method of activist research.

Activist Research

If a writer on a political subject manages to preserve a detached attitude, it is nearly always because he doesn’t know what he is talking about. To understand a political movement, one has got to be involved in it.³⁸

It is commonplace for researchers to state that they produce knowledge to better understand the world or improve their society. This raises an important question – what are the changes that we think would make a better world and from where do we develop our list of changes?

Anarchist legal method situates human beings as embedded in the world and is fundamentally committed to praxis.³⁹ Drawing on these commitments, anarchist method is characterized by a high degree of commitment to the community or area being protected. The researcher is not a dispassionate observer and has no pretense to complete objectivity. There is indeed no ‘view from nowhere’ and an anarchist researcher should be an embedded participant who is ‘empathetic and interactive, rather than extractive and objective’.⁴⁰ This does not mean that researchers cannot take a critical or reflective stance. Rather, by situating oneself within a

³⁸ George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (Harcourt, Brace and World 1968) 348.

³⁹ Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and its Aspirations* (AK Press 2010) 17.

⁴⁰ Paul Chatterton and Jenny Pickerill, ‘Notes Toward Autonomous Geographies: Creation, Resistance and Self-Management as Survival Tactics’ (2006) 30(6) *Progress in Human Geography* 730. See also Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea Bissau* (Seabury Press 1978) 3: ‘The education of an oppressed and struggling people . . . must, from the first, be both political and non-neutral – or it can never succeed’.

community, the researcher has the opportunity for personal engagement and richer research outcomes.

Researchers who adopt a situated perspective attain ‘deeper and more thorough empirical knowledge of the problem at hand, as well as theoretical understanding that otherwise would be difficult to achieve’.⁴¹ Peter Kropotkin captured the benefits of this approach in his 1898 book, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*: ‘How much better the historian and the sociologist would understand humanity if they knew it, not in books only, not in a few of its representatives, but as a whole, in its daily life, daily work and daily affairs’.⁴² In agreement, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire argues that any group of outsiders who have grown up, lived and studied in a privileged situation (as university academics certainly have) must ‘die as a class’ and learn to work ‘with’ and not ‘on’ the community.⁴³ In each expression, the method is not to stand above the community in question and pass down legal solutions in a hierarchical way; rather, the method seeks to facilitate an exchange of information between the researcher and this community.

For these reasons, anarchist research methods have a lot in common with activist research.⁴⁴ Activist research is not new and has been applied by feminist⁴⁵ and race⁴⁶ scholars for decades. This history is significantly longer if one looks outside of the academy to include movement research and people’s history more broadly.

Claire Nettle describes activist research as being characterized by a ‘close collaboration between researchers and the people involved in the

⁴¹ Charles Hale, ‘What is Activist Research’ (2001) 2(1–2) *Items and Issues* 13.

⁴² Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (Freedom Press 1974) 186.

⁴³ Freire (n 40) 24.

⁴⁴ For an introduction see Lisa Hunter, Elke Emerald and Gregory Martin, *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions* (Springer 2012) and Bernd Reiter and Ulrich Oslender, *Bridging Scholarship and Activism: Reflections from the Frontlines of Collaborative Research* (Michigan State University Press 2014). Activist research is similar to Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is a form of qualitative research that is partisan, participatory and dedicated to the development of knowledge aimed at fueling a struggle for a truly inclusive, democratic society. See for example Stephen D Brookfield and John D Holst, *Radicalising Learning: Adult Education for a Just World* (Jossey-Bass 2011).

⁴⁵ Nancy A Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis and Activist Research* (Routledge 2003).

⁴⁶ Charles R Hale, *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (University of California Press 2008).

movement under study' and by 'hybrid activist/academic identities on the part of researchers'.⁴⁷ Staughton Lynd offers the term 'accompanying' to describe this kind of collaboration.⁴⁸ Accompanying is a non-hierarchical practice that implicitly challenges individualization and isolation. Lynd describes it as 'the idea of walking side by side with another on a common journey'.⁴⁹ It presumes not uncritical difference, but equality. Lynd notes: 'if accompanier and accompanied are conceptualized, not as one person assisting another person in need, but as two experts, the intellectual universe is transformed'.⁵⁰ No longer do we have one kind of person helping a person of another kind. Rather we have two collaborators who are exploring a path forward together.⁵¹ For Lynd, there is no privileged epistemic location or site to prioritize in anchoring the struggle.

Implicit in this approach is the idea that activist research is not pure theory and instead explores issues of practical importance for a social movement or environmental campaign. It incorporates feedback from community activists, and unlike the typical enclosure of knowledge that occurs inside universities,⁵² activist researchers typically publish their material in places and formats that are accessible to activists.⁵³ This might

⁴⁷ Claire Nettle, *Community Gardening as Social Action: The Australian Community Garden Movement and Repertoires for Changes* (PhD Thesis 2010) 58. (Subsequently published as Claire Nettle, *Community Gardening as Social Action* (Ashgate 2014).)

⁴⁸ For an exploration of this term and its historical application see Lynd and Grubacic (n 28) 51–3.

⁴⁹ Lynd and Grubacic (n 28) 176.

⁵⁰ Lynd (n 28) 4. See also Paul Farmer, 'Accompanying as Policy' (Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti 2011) 1: 'There's an element of mystery, of openness, in accompaniment. I'll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate for a while. And by "a while", I don't mean a little while. Accompaniment is much more about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed by the person or persons being accompanied, rather than by the accompagnateur'.

⁵¹ Lynd (n 28) 4.

⁵² Haiven and Khasnabish (n 35) 13. The authors characterize some academic social movement research as about the 'generation of academic capital'. They note further that this sort of research 'represents an enclosure of common social movement research'. On the importance of activist research being useful and accountable to movements see Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, 'Movement-relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism' (2003) 4(3) *Social Movement Studies* 185, 186.

⁵³ Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, 'Movement-relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism' (2003) 4(3) *Social Movement Studies* 185, 186.

involve publishing in a variety of venues and reframing the work to speak directly to a target-audience.

Paulo Freire provides a striking example of activist research in his late work, *Pedagogy in Process*. In this book Freire describes the process through which he developed an adult literacy program in the Western African country Guinea-Bissau. From the outset Freire understood the importance of developing his method in direct consultation with the community that would be learning with him. He writes:

Our own political choices, and our praxis which is coherent with these choices, have kept us from even thinking of preparing . . . a project for the literacy education of adults with all of its points worked out in fine detail, to be taken to Guinea-Bissau as a generous gift. This project, on the contrary, together with the basic plans for our own collaboration, would have to be borne there, thought through by the national educators in harmony with the social situation in the country.⁵⁴

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire provides broad notes on what practical steps researchers can undertake to initiate a genuine collaboration and understand the political and economic context of a community.⁵⁵ We have distilled these notes into five research stages:

1. *Context meeting with volunteers from the community and invited specialists*: participants begin highlighting research through interviews, observation and field notes.
2. *Evaluation meeting to discuss preliminary findings*: research moves from the individual to a team – either co-researchers or support people – to distill themes and if relevant, code research.
3. *Thematic investigation circles*: the researcher presents the themes and codes to groups in the community. The themes are discussed, challenged and reflected upon to make sure they represent the issues of the community and elicit further dialogue.
4. *Interdisciplinary analysis of findings from the third stage*: the researcher investigates findings from the thematic investigation circles and seeks to locate a ‘hinged theme’ that is used to connect other themes together.
5. *Reproduction of themes*: the development of new didactic materials that codify the themes and communicate with the community – these may be pictures, a short documentary or whatever is appropriate.

⁵⁴ Freire (n 40) 8.

⁵⁵ See generally, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bloomsbury Academic 2000). See also Brookfield and Holst (n 44) 177–178.

A lesson here for anarchist researchers is that they too must start from a radical position and refuse to accept whatever ‘packed or prefabricated’ solutions are being offered from those that are abstracted from the particulars of a situation. For Paulo Freire and his team, this meant becoming militants as part of an independence struggle. The stakes will not always be so high for researchers, and they must retain their agency to determine the extent of their commitment. However, once committed, an activist researcher should valorize (not idealize) the knowledge and creativity of the community, and understand the knowledge generated from their research as grounded in this source. Freire argues:

What is implied is not the transmission to the people of a knowledge previously elaborated, a process that ignores what they already know, but the act of returning to them, in an organized form, what they themselves offered in a disorganized form. In other words, it is a process of knowing with the people how they know things and the level of knowledge.⁵⁶

As indicated above, this is not a passive process. Rather, it involves challenging the information and seeking to understand how local knowledge relates to the personal experience of the speaker and the ends that may motivate them. Only through such critical reflection, can the information be organized in such a way as to offer an increasingly rigorous (though still contingent) understanding of the situation.

Ethnography as Activist Research

An alternative to action research approaches within activist research is ethnography. Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber has argued that ethnography provides a model for how a ‘non-vanguardist’ revolutionary intellectual practice might work.⁵⁷ He notes that through ethnographic

⁵⁶ Freire (n 40) 25.

⁵⁷ David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Prickly Paradigm 2004) 11–12. See also David Graeber, *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (AK Press 2007) 300. Here Graeber notes that ethnography could be a model for the ‘would be non-vanguardist revolutionary intellectual’ because it offers the possibility of ‘teasing out the tacit logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offering the analysis back to those communities, but using them to formulate new visions’. Jeffrey Juris has articulated a similar vision of ‘militant’ ethnographic practice which refuses the valorization of ‘objective distance’ and the tendency within the academy to treat social life as an object to decode. Juris contends that in order to ‘grasp the concrete logic generating specific practices, one has to become an active participant’, and within the context of social movements this means participating in and contributing to

methods, researchers observe a communities practice and tease out their underlying logics. Ethnography enables researchers to look at those experimenting with political repertoires, to consider the larger implications of what they are doing, and to offer those ideas back to the community, not as normative prescriptions, but as contributions that reveal future possibilities.⁵⁸

Ethnographic research methods combine poststructuralist ethnographic research with measures to ensure ‘mutually beneficial relations among scholars and those with whom knowledge is made’.⁵⁹ Fundamental to this is a critique of the power relations that form in traditional ethnographic inquiries. Nettle provides a sophisticated example of this in the context of her research into community gardens and anarchist prefigurative politics:

Poststructuralist analyses often seek to reveal power – and resistance – as pervasive, diffuse and constituting. A focus on ‘the multiplicity of force relations’, the micro-level of power which exists everywhere and originates everywhere . . . assisted me in being able to recognise community gardeners’ ‘ordinary resistances’, the kinds of everyday social action . . . which Foucault terms ‘mobile and transitory points of resistance’.⁶⁰

As Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish suggest, ethnography as a form of activist research needs to be understood not only as a genre of scholarly writing but as a ‘perspective committed to understanding and taking seriously people’s lived realities’.⁶¹ As a result, ethnographers must dwell in the

the work of these movements themselves. See Jeffrey Juris, *Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization* (Duke University Press Books 2008) 20.

⁵⁸ David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, *ibid*, 11–12. For examples of ethnography in the study of recent political movements see Charles Tilly, ‘Afterword: Political Ethnography as Art and Science’ in Lauren Joseph, Matthew Mahler and Javier Auyero (eds), *New Perspective in Political Ethnography* (Springer 2007) and Edward Schatz (ed), *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (University of Chicago Press 2009). On militant ethnography see Jeffrey Juris, ‘Practicing Militant Ethnography with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber (eds), *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations/Collective Theorization* (AK Press 2008).

⁵⁹ Ellen Cushman, ‘The Public Intellectual, Service Language and Activist Research’ (1999) 61(3) *College English* 328, 332.

⁶⁰ Nettle (n 47) 61. On everyday resistance see also Judy Pinn and Debbie Horsfall, ‘Doing Community Differently: Ordinary Resistances and New Alliances’ in Jock Collins and Scott Poynting (eds), *The Other Sydney: Communities, Identities and Inequalities in Western Sydney* (Common Ground 1999).

⁶¹ Haiven and Khasnabish (n 35) 50.

terrain of ‘immanence’ – the lived realities which constitute the constitutive conditions of the community. Ethnographic activist research – including participant observation, long-term field work and in-depth interviews – are founded on the belief that the world is not comprised merely of ‘objects to be analysed’ but ‘is acted and imagined’ into being by dialogic subjects, including the researchers themselves.⁶²

Feminist researchers have also developed approaches to ethnography by advocating for situated and embodied knowledges.⁶³ Similar to activist research, this literature advocates abandoning pretenses of value-neutrality and embracing a commitment to research for as well as about social movements, often from a standpoint of being passionately and politically engaged in the issue under study. Donna Haraway, for example, describes ‘unlocatable’ knowledge claims as irresponsible.⁶⁴ In their place, she advocates:

[P]olitics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.

All research is positioned and reflects particular value commitments. Gail Mason recognizes this basic fact:

[T]he researcher (the knower) is directly implicated in the knowledge he or she produces. In other words, my own subjectivity fundamentally shapes the pictures . . . that I produce, according to the assumptions that I make, the questions that I ask, the concepts and excerpts I prioritise, the analysis I compose and the interpretations that I generate.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid 51.

⁶³ Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Cornell University Press 1991); Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (Routledge 1993); and Sasha Roseneil, ‘Greenham Revisited: Researching Myself and My Sisters’ in Dick Hobbs and Tim May (eds), *Interpreting the Field: Accounts of Ethnography* (Oxford University Press 1993).

⁶⁴ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’ (1998) 14(3) *Feminist Studies* 195.

⁶⁵ Gail Mason, *The Spectacle of Violence: Homophobia, Gender and Knowledge* (Routledge 2002) 30. With regard to qualitative research, Mason notes: ‘The dynamics of each and every interview, including the questions of personality and timing, will influence the things that interviewees tell me, how they tell me, the slant they put on a given event, what they leave out, what they forget and how they remember’.

Rather than seeking to cut off personal commitments from research, ethnography should make the writers' politics explicit and put them in service of the analytical endeavor.⁶⁶

Feminist scholars like Sasha Roseneil and Mary Heath have also argued that the inclusion of 'intellectual autobiography' is essential to ethnographic research because it enables the reader to situate the author in his or her particular social and cultural context, and writers to acknowledge and draw upon their embodied subject positions.⁶⁷ This approach emphasizes the importance of researcher's connections with the movements they study, the role of negotiating multiple subject positions in the production of 'movement-relevant' research.⁶⁸ A critical benefit of this kind of avowedly passionate and involved position is that it allows the researcher to be immersed in the community and share in its passions and desires.

Accomplices and Co-Conspirators

In thinking about the subject position of the researcher vis-à-vis the community she engages with, particularly in terms of the anarchist researcher doing environmental research work, some specific issues arise which require careful thought. Insofar as environmental law and environmental science engage with a certain tradition, and often a privileged one at that, the question of the activist/researcher and her connection to that body of work can be quite fraught. The anarchist researcher, in order to have access to the language of environmentalism, may be de facto separating herself from the community that lives with and suffers from whatever environmental changes or degradations are occurring. In light of the various methodologies we have already referred to, it seems clear that a position of being above the fray, neutral or 'scientific' is unacceptable and actually distorting both of the practices of research and of activism for the anarchist scholar. Yet, it would be equally disingenuous to deny that the anarchist researcher is not, to some extent, connected to the body of work and knowledge

⁶⁶ Charles Hale, 'What is Activist Research' (2001) 2(1–2) *Items and Issues* 13, 14.

⁶⁷ Roseneil (n 63) and Mary Heath, 'On Critical Thinking' (2012) 4 *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 11, 13.

⁶⁸ Robert Flacks, 'Knowledge for What? Thoughts on the State of Social Movements' in Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper (eds), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Culture and Emotion* (Rowman and Littlefield 2004); Jon Anderson, 'Researching Environmental Resistance: Working Through Secondspace and Thirdspace Approaches' (2002) 2 *Qualitative Research* 301; Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis and Activist Research* (Routledge 2003).

systems that environmental law and science is related to. The key point to grasp here is that the anarchist researcher is not fully dissolved into the community she engages with, but this does not mean that her work is separate from or superior to that community.

One way to consider the anarchist researcher in this context is as a co-conspirator or accomplice with the community.⁶⁹ These terms are deliberately chosen to imply that the anarchist researcher will be out of compliance with the general expectations of law and public policy. Insofar as those laws and policies generally reflect a liberal and market-oriented bias (something reflected in the very way these practices are articulated and held in some sense above the communities they are related to), to think of the anarchist researcher as someone who implements or perpetuates these policies would be to fold her back into the systems that her presence is meant to contest or subvert.

To think of the anarchist researcher as an 'ally' of the community – which on the surface of things seems quite unobjectionable – tacitly assumes a kind of blanketing equivalence that disguises deep differences of power and knowledge. The idea of alliance comes from deep within the maw of liberal theory, wherein subjects are deemed equal and mutually connected by fiat in ways that supersede and presuppose whatever imbalances in property and political access might underlie their relationship. To speak instead of accomplices or co-conspirators then suggests that rather than perpetuate unequal relationships (in the guise of equality and alliance), the researcher and the members of the community are working together in ways that are often opposed to the effects and intentions of most forms of law and authority.

This does not necessitate that the anarchist researcher actively seeks to break or overturn the law per se (although it does not preclude that either), but simply means that the anarchist researcher will not hold the law, the forms of science and knowledge and other practices that come along with environmentalism, as being binding or absolute. She will seek instead to engage with local community members in ways that serve to politicize and complicate environmental practices. If she has more access to the law and the science, she will use that access as a way to give local community members access in order to maximally upend and subvert the impact of those practices. If she is versed in the discourses of mainstream environmentalism, she will use that voice as a way to speak

⁶⁹ For more on the idea of accomplices see Indigenous Action Media, 'Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex' <<http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>>.

discordantly inside the corridors of knowledge and also to give access to other voices.

In this way, the non-dissolvability of the anarchist researcher (her failure to meld perfectly into the community that she is engaged with), far from being a problem for her and the autonomy of her work, becomes a kind of weapon in her hands in order to help provide access to law and science to those who are normally kept entirely out of its provenances. It is not so much that she surrenders herself and her agency to the community she engages with, but rather that she makes her access and experience available as part of a series of conspiratorial gestures that serve to break apart the traps and conformities of liberal approaches to environmental law and research.

Research Questions for Anarchist Research

We conclude this discussion by articulating a list of questions that anarchist researchers can use in the preliminary stages of their investigation. The questions are developed primarily with reference to the work of Stephen Brookfield and John Holst, and also with regard to researchers working in the majority world, feminist movements and indigenous communities.⁷⁰ While each question is malleable to a specific context, they are designed to make explicit the partisan nature of anarchist research, its connection to community activism and its pedagogical nature.

1. Which party initiates the research project and do they control the research process?
 - a. If power is shared, what processes are put in place for collective decision-making and dispute resolution? Are constraints placed on some people's participation? If so, how is that determined and how will the constraints be addressed?
 - b. Is the research supported by outside funding? What guards can be put in place to ensure that the outside entity does not direct the research?

⁷⁰ For further discussion of research questions see John D Holst, *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World* (Jossey-Bass 2011); Yusuf Kassam and Kemal Mustafa (eds), *Participatory Research: An Emerging Methodology in Social Science Research* (Society for Participatory Research 1982); Patricia Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach* (University of Massachusetts 1987); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books 1999).

2. What is the focus or contents of the research project?
 - a. Do the research questions frame the issue to capture exactly how the community is being impacted?
 - b. What are the parameters of the research? Who decides what issues are beyond the scope of the project and whether anyone is being left out?
3. To what degree is 'social location' considered in the collection/analysis of the research?
 - a. How diverse are data collection methods? What is the most effective way to capture the multiple ways of knowing that inhere to specific social locations?
 - b. What influence do social locations have on *who* conducts the research? What measures can be put in place to protect vulnerable people and involve them in the research process?
 - c. Are the limits of each research method understood and addressed? Given that there will always be limits and imperfections, how is the contingent nature of knowledge captured by the researcher?
4. Describe the pedagogical nature of the research process?
 - a. What steps are put in place to ensure that the research maximizes collective learning?
 - b. Does each participant have equal access to the learning process?
5. Is the research product accessible to the community and does it enable action?
 - a. Are findings and conclusions distributed equally? In what format are results published and does the product take into account social location?
 - b. Does the research product advance the interests of the community?

Researchers can amend these questions in accordance with the specific method they adopt. Properly considered, this list should prompt ways of thinking that highlight the realities of the community and elevate existing knowledge in a way that contributes to the resolution of issues. The political nature of the research reveals itself through these questions and from a nuanced investigation into the social, economic and political realities that the people experience.

CONCLUSION

There is a kind of imagining – a way of interpreting and understanding reality that guides and undergirds liberal environmental law. This imagi-

nation is captured within the confines of neoliberal capitalism and has proven tremendously limited in its capacity to protect the environment and support people who yearn for sustainability, equality, empowerment and agency. A key challenge for researchers today is to imagine new methods that enable us to construct and reproduce ourselves as social beings that are not predatory to the environments we inhabit or with respect to one another.

An anarchist research method is a collective process that animates people and groups working for radical social change. It is driven by a radical imagination that 'both emerges from and guides collective doing'.⁷¹ Drawing on a series of epistemological foundations, it positions the researcher as embedded within a sociality and whose task it is to accompany others engaged in political struggle. Unlike liberal environmentalism, the anarchist method has no pretense to objectivity and is deliberately political in nature. Moreover, the anarchist method upholds a way of thinking that is not bound by dictates of what 'should be' (not bound by teleological thinking, notions of western progress and the like) but rather a heightened sense of what is as well as a sense of the diverse possibilities that stem from that recognition. While anarchist research can take inspiration from past projects, it cannot fetishize them. It has to seek possibility in the present, from collective encounters amongst people.

While anarchist researchers may have a vision for the future, they do not seek to impose a 'blueprint' about the future upon the masses. Instead, anarchist research seeks to emphasize the immanent movement toward the future that is contained within the contours of the present. The research method described in this chapter provides opportunities for groups of people to organize and work cooperatively to identify a tangible solution to a specific problem. This process can help ensure that whatever response emerges matches the community's unique experience of the problem, their history and social power. Moreover, collaborative research provides people with experience in building networks of solidarity that are essential for enacting a politics that goes beyond liberal individualism and the narrow confines of legal rights.⁷²

⁷¹ Haiven and Khasnabish (n 35) 223.

⁷² Marina Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina* (Zed Books 2012) 20.