

UPPSALA UNIVERSITY
Department of Government

Research Paper – B-Level

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The Political Theory and Practice of Anarchist Simplicity

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Introduction

Introduction. In this paper I will firstly investigate the political theory that stands behind the ecological and more of less Luddite strand of Anarchism, or as I shall call it hereafter: Anarchist Simplicity.

Secondly I will jump into the present and see in how far certain political practices match up with the theoretical political thought elaborated on before.

In this first theoretical part of the paper I will draw upon the anarchist political theorists, William Morris, Henry Thoreau, Ivan Illich, Mohandas Gandhi, Aldous Huxley and Jacques Ellul. Their core ideas on simplicity as a critique of technology, industrialism and machinery will be shown in combination with their anarchist political philosophy which were in most cases intrinsically linked to each other. Furthermore the political utopias which many of these writers and thinkers have formulated in their literature well be exposed and analysed upon their socio-political content and tendencies towards simplicity and anarchism. It will lastly also be shown that their notions of anarchism and simplicity were based on an ecological thinking.

In the second part it will then be investigated how these theories could be translated and vastly are translated into political and ecological anarchist practice in the present. Topic here include the politics of permaculture, the current heritage of the arts and crafts movement as in radical subsistence, post-development projects in the global South, and advocates of the movement in the global North. and lastly the current anarchist networks within which ecological communes and communities are putting the ideas of anarchist simplicity into action.

In this paper I will hence argue, that the politically theoretical tradition of anarchism is intrinsically linked to such ideas as simplicity and anti-industrialism, defining technology as a dominative force within political relations. To do so will draw upon the key thinkers in this specific tradition of anarchist simplicity and show that these are not written words or historical experiments but that the concrete political practice of anarchist simplicity is very well alive in the present anarchist movement as well as unconsciously in traditional communities all around the globe. Lastly it will be concluded, that in order to conceptualise this distinct political theory and practice it helps to refer to the concepts of 'Autonomy and Cooperation', 'Simplicity and Anti-Industrialism', 'Radical Subsistence' and 'Direct Action'.

The Political Theory of Anarchist Simplicity

Introduction.

This chapter will be structured along the different writers and thinkers that were advocating the idea of anarchist simplicity. Morris, as utopian anarchist and member of the Arts and Crafts movement, Thoreau a dissident and anti-civilisational individualist, Illich and his politics of post-development, Jacques Ellul and his Christian anarchist rejection of technological society, Gandhi developing non-violence into anarchist simplicity and lastly Huxley as a science critical de-centralist.

William Morris and Arts and Craft as Anarchist Simplicity

One of the most coherent and fascinating advocates of anarchist simplicity might be the poet and artist William Morris. Beyond that however he actively engaged in the political struggles of the times. His anarchist political thought was closely coupled with „hatred of modern civilisation with it's physical ugliness and emotional constrain“.¹ His anarchist political stance through his self ascribed „wholesome horror and government interference and centralization“². In his political essay on 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', He furthermore launched a heavy critique against capitalism, arguing that the capitalist division of labour through the modern industrial technology led to class division, mass production and machine domination as well as compulsory labour.³ His alternative vision was one of „the freedom and cultivation of the individual will“, inspired by anarchist Kropotkin⁴, a world of federations of ecological self-governing communes of simplicity in which law, property, government, money and nationality would be abolished. Such society would be „conscious of a wish to keep life simple, to forego some of the power over nature won by past ages in order to be more human and less mechanical, and willing to sacrifice.“⁵ Accordingly, the House of Parliament in his utopian novel 'News from Nowhere' is turned into a dung market while the return of political commons had come about and in which disputes are solved

1 Peter Marshall. *Demanding the Impossible*. London: Fontana Press 1993. p. 171

2 E. P. Thompson. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988. p. 772

3 William Morris. 'Useful Work vs. Useless Toil' in Various Writers. *Why Work?*. London: Freedom Press. 1983. Passim

4 Peter Kropotkin. *Mutual Aid*. London: Freedom Press 1987. Passim

5 William Morris. 'Society of the Future' in *The Political Writings*. London: Lawrence & Wishart 1973. p. 192

locally by an assembly on a consensus basis as well as economic commons, where the resources of nature would be owned by „the whole community for the benefit of the whole“⁶. Accordingly all alienating machinery should and in his utopian novel is abolished and people live in the abundance of simplicity, under the ideal of craftsmanship and individual autonomy.⁷ Anti-social individualism would be prevented through a common rule of conduct that was based on the mutual agreement of the society.⁸ He strongly advocated political non-violence, as he was repelled by the violence of the anarchists of his time. The political essence of his argument is that „local communities should be autonomous“ with the aim of „decentralised communities being self-contained and self-governing“ advocating in it a synthesis of „political theory, art and ecology“⁹.

Henry Thoreau, Individual Autonomy and Wilderness as Anarchist Simplicity

Another interesting advocate of anarchist simplicity, is most well-known for his literature, that is transporting this message. Henry Thoreau, an American literate, being tired of modern civilisation, he retreated to the Walden pond, living a life in harmony with nature. There he wrote 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience'. His very individual political principle formulated therein was: „The only obligation which I have a right to assume it to do at any time what I think is right.“¹⁰ In turn, every law that a person thinks to be wrong needs to be broken as a moral duty. Consequently his anarchist conclusion was that the „government is best which governs not at all“¹¹. This total freedom he found to be embodied in the wilderness of nature. Therewith going beyond politics he argued for an ecological revolution.¹² In his major work 'Walden' he then provides us with a wider expose of his political theory. In it he launched a heavy critique against industrialism, as a process of profit and power seeking of many masters, may them be politicians or other authorities, enslaving society. In it's place he wanted to put a society of simplicity independence, magnanimity and trust, based upon confederated villages in which people

6 William Morris. 'Communism' in *The Political Writings*. London: Lawrence & Wishart 1973. p. 192

7 William Morris. *News from Nowhere*. London: Penguin 1993. Passim

8 Peter Marshall. *Demanding the Impossible*. London: Fontana Press 1993. p. 173

9 Marius de Geus. *Ecological Utopias*. Utrecht: International Books 1999. p. 118

10 Henry Thoreau. 'Civil Disobedience' in *The Selected Works of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1975. pp. 772-824

11 Henry Thoreau. 'Civil Disobedience' in *The Selected Works of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1975. pp. 772-824

12 Peter Marshall. *Demanding the Impossible*. London: Fontana Press 1993. p. 186

interacted though voluntary cooperation¹³. The current political system as in voting for him was „a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions“¹⁴. Thoreau's individualism however was not anti-social in essence, rather it was based upon his way of „counter-friction to stop the machine“¹⁵ - the machine of government, war and capitalist government. Instead he admired the native Americans for their egalitarian society and consensus based decision-making. His political theory of primitivism was one of sufficiency in which civilisation and materialism is largely abolished, while culture and the arts further developed and elaborated upon. That however needed, according to Thoreau a clear decision to limit one's own basic needs and suffice with little in order to preserve individual and communal political independence.¹⁶

Ivan Illich and Post-Development as Anarchist Simplicity

Another major figure within what one could define as the school of anarchist simplicity is Austrian political philosopher Ivan Illich. In his major work which made him an outspoken advocate of such libertarian simplicity is 'Tools for Conviviality'. In it he deconstructs Western industrial capitalist and statist society and its ideas of work, economic development and energy use. Within both state and capitalist he saw the technocratic elites, that governed modern industrial society: “Society can be destroyed when further growth of mass production renders the milieu hostile, when extinguishes the free use of the natural abilities of society's member, when it isolates people from each other and locks them into a man-made shell, when it undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarization and splintering specialisation”.¹⁷ This was achieved through the institutionalisation of specialised knowledge in the modern educational system.¹⁸ As such he was a sharp critic of development as driven by these elites. He argued that the paradigm of economic growth, engrained “habits of needing”. More clearly, artificial such as “electric power, synthetic clothing, junk food and travel”. This ideology of needs induces cultural imperialism and uses coercion through the market and government

13 Henry Thoreau. 'Walden' in *The Selected Works of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1975. pp. 243-465

14 Henry Thoreau. 'Civil Disobedience' in *The Selected Works of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1975. pp. 772-824

15 Henry Thoreau. 'Civil Disobedience' in *The Selected Works of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1975. pp. 772-824

16 Marius de Geus. *Ecological Utopias*. Utrecht: International Books 1999.

17 Ivan Illich. *Tools for Conviviality*. London: Fontana Press 1973. Passim

18 Ivan Illich. *Deschooling Society*. London: Penguin Books 1973. Passim

which want to control and manage the requirement or needs of people instead of letting them formulate “personal claims to freedom which would foster autonomous coping”.¹⁹ “Techniques of information, communication and management now define the political process, political life has become an empty euphemism”²⁰. As major legitimate political structures, Illich sees subsistence communities which have been able to preserve their traditional mode of production and sustained a life in harmony with nature. Of course, such communities were inherently connected to simplicity of 'conviviality' as Illich preferred to call it. Such societies do not only act in tune with “personal claims to freedom” but also preserve the natural environment which industrial society, based on “development, progress and growth” and pushed by government and capital is actively destroying.

Jacques Ellul and the Rejection of Technological Society as Anarchist Simplicity

Another radical advocate of simplicity can be found in the French Christian anarchist Jacques Ellul who argues, that industrial technology has run completely out of control, and that men is not in control of it anymore, but that „autonomous technique“ as he calls it, is in control of human kind through it dogma of efficiency. It is therefore contradictory to liberation and freedom and „eliminates or subordinates the natural world“. It is however the state as well as capitalism and technology, which, are engaged in a mutually supportive relationship to control humankind and push the “technological society” further and further. Finally technology and the faith in it constitutes the dominating modern religion in Western societies.²¹ In turn, Ellul, analyses capitalism as structurally destructive of nature, obsessed with growth and technological expansion at an ever accelerating rate which the earth can simply not sustain.²² Again consequently, in another writing, Ellul blends political theory with theology and history in order to declare Christianity to be intrinsically anarchic in character. Taking various passages of the Bible and Jesus as a person and crucially a dissident, he reveals that there is a strong tendencies in these holy scripts to reject any authority other than god. A consequent politically but at the same time religiously motivated rejection of government, the state and capitalism becomes the credo of this paper. Of course

19 Ivan Illich. 'Needs' in Wolfgang Sachs (ed.). *The Development Dictionary*. London: ZedBooks 1992.

20 Ivan Illich. 'Development as Planned Poverty' in Rahnema and Bawtree (eds.). *The Post-Development Reader*. London: ZedBooks. 1997. pp. 94-110

21 Jacques Ellul. *The Technological Society*. Toronto: Vintage. pp. 3-133.

22 Jacques Ellul. *The Technological Bluff*. Paris: Hachette. 1988. Passim

such anarchist stance and the struggle towards anarchy would only be successful if remaining consequently non-violent.²³

Mohandas Gandhi and Compassionate Non-Violence as Anarchist Simplicity

Mohandas Gandhi today, conventionalised as only leader of the Indian independence was another strong proponent of anarchist simplicity. Being highly influenced by Christian anarchist Leo Tolstoy , Russian anarchist communist Kropotkin, founder of the Arts and Craft movement John Ruskin and Thoreau's civil disobedience, Gandhis political theory opposed the state and it's government because of the structural violence it engendered and manifests itself within it. Consequently radical is Gandhis political and social perception of non-violence. It not only incorporated the non-cooperation with the state but also active resistance. As such political change as a means can not be separated from the ends: A non-violent, anarchist society of simplicity.²⁴ Both, a means and end is 'swaraj' or self-rule. In this political theory the individual and it's autonomy is at the core and meant the „continuous effort to be free of government control, whether it is foreign or whether it is national“. ²⁵ The individual is then a drop in the water from which an „oceanic circle“ originates. These outer circles would be the self-reliant and self-sufficient village economy, based on local and renewable resource, handicrafts and artisan production, where decisions are made in consensus by those concerned and social life would self-organise itself on mutual aid and voluntary agreements to a state in which “there is no political power because there is no state”. These communities would even be able to defend themselves non-violently in forms of peace brigades.²⁶ However in order for such a political order to prevail, simplicity was a core necessity and pre-requisite. Technology, according to Gandhi is undermining these subsistence economies of small villages, disconnecting humans from nature and destroying it, increasing alienating work and eroding manual work as leisure and leading to civilisation diseases. These were also one of the reasons because of which Gandhi radically rejected the capitalist imperialism that was imposed by the British rulers who sought to incorporate India as one of their resource providing peripheries.²⁷

23 Jacques Ellul. *Anarchy and Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing. 1991. Passim

24 Peter Marshall. *Demanding the Impossible*. London: Fontana Press 1993. 422-427

25 George Woodcock. *Gandhi*. London: Fontana Press 1972. p. 86

26 Mohandas Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997. pp. 188-189

27 Mohandas Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997. pp. 107-111, 164-170, 190

The Politics of Aldous Huxley

Another rather unknown political theorist was yet another well known literate. Namely Aldous Huxley. His anarchist simplicity originates from a rejection of Western scientific technologies whose essence he portrayed in the dystopia of „Brave New World“ in which people see subordination as the essence of happiness. The critique he formulates therein, is one against authority and other modes of abusing power.²⁸ Further he argues in “Science, Liberty and Peace”, that applied science and technology has equipped “the political bosses who control the various nation states with unprecedentedly efficient instruments of coercion”²⁹. In 'Ends and Means' Huxley takes a clear anarchist position, identifying the modern state as authoritarian, centralised rule that undermines social and individual progress and serves the “ruling class to preserve its privileges”.³⁰ However in his utopian novel „Island“ which can be read at some stages as a political manifest offers an alternative vision to both state socialism and capitalism. This consists of self-governed individuals in small-scale, decentralised and ecological communes. Technology is nearly absent and if applied only very carefully and it locally suiting and producible. The political system on Huxley's island 'Pala' is comprised of a network of these communes and thereby highly federalistic, in which personal liberation and free lives are pursued and outspoken political aims. In short a vision of anarchist simplicity.³¹

Conclusion

The aim of this first chapter to illustrate what is meant by “Anarchist Simplicity”. In essence it can be described as radically rejecting any form of hierarchy, domination or authority, neither from the state and government or by property, money and capitalism. For the proponents of this political the exercising of power through the ruling elites is also somewhat linked to an technological and industrial paradigm. However simplicity is not only an ideal but also clearly politically practical decision. The political ideal

28 Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. London: Penguin Books 1969. Passim

29 Aldous Huxley. *Science, Liberty and Peace*. London: Chatto & Windus 1949. p. 6

30 Aldous Huxley. *Ends and Means*. London: Greenwood Press 1969. Passim

31 Aldous Huxley. *Island*. London: Vintage. 1962. Passim

of anarchism as in self-organisation, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and agreement is easier to achieve on a local, decentralised scale in federated ecological communes that in turn has to rely on local resources and materials to sustain itself and in order to stay truthful to the stated political aims. It is also interesting to firstly observe that many of the advocates of anarchist simplicity are at the same time pacifists or at least advocating modes of non-violent political resistance, as for instance civil disobedience and that they secondly have a tendency towards some kind of politicised spirituality .

The Political Practice of Anarchist Simplicity

Introduction.

In this second chapter of the paper it will be investigated how the politics of anarchist simplicity, defined in the first chapter are put into practice in the present. In order to do so, this chapter will firstly be looking into the political dimensions of the ethics of permaculture. Secondly the chapter will try to find traces of the political philosophy of anarchist simplicity in the practice of radical subsistence as in economic and politics self-reliance, autonomy and self-sufficiency practiced in both the global North and the global South. In doing so it will connect subsistence with the historic Arts and Crafts movement and investigate how the heirs of this movement are putting anarchist simplicity into practice. Third and lastly, then the chapter will look into the explicitly political if not anarchist communes and their associated networks throughout Europe and connect their practices to the anarchist political mode of engagement 'direct action'. It will then be argued, that these ecological communes, are putting this direct action into practice through the specific political philosophy conceptualized in this paper, namely anarchist simplicity.

A Politicised Permaculture of Anarchist Simplicity

Permaculture is a term coined by the Australians, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren and can stand for both 'permanent culture' and 'permanent agriculture'. The prior alluding to it as a method for designing

human settlements politically, socially as well as environmentally and the second alluding to permaculture's most frequent application in gardening and agriculture. Focussing on the former meaning, permaculture also embodies a political philosophy and ethic, which is described in several books on the topic. Mollison states that „the only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children“ and that another part of the political ethic is „Earth Care: Provision for all life systems to continue and multiply“.³² Such assumption was based on an inherently anti-industrial sentiment as Mollison saw the industrial system as systematically destroying the earth's ecosystems. This conviction obviously goes hand in hand with the notions of radical simplicity mentioned within the theory of anarchist simplicity above. Another of the principles formulated by Mollison is: „Cooperation, not competition, is the very basis of existing life systems and of future survival“³³. This is a clear political statement in the direction of anarchist political ideals such as mutual aid and voluntary cooperation and rejects competition both in its statist form a pursuit of power as well as in the capitalist mode in terms of competition over accumulation of resources. It also matches up with Thoreau's plea for the conservation of wilderness as a refuge for human inspiration and creativity, as permaculture realises the productive potential of wilderness and incorporates it into the design leading to a “forage economy”³⁴ which comes close to Thoreau's direct living off nature in Walden. Furthermore just as nearly all of the advocates of anarchist simplicity above advocate the abolition of private property and the re-establishment of the commons, Mollison writes to take “Care of People: Provision for people to access those resources necessary to their existence”³⁵. The parallels are obvious and highly striking. Lastly, even the political decision towards simplicity as an answer to domination and hierarchy is formulated not only by the anarchists above but by permaculturists in demanding the “setting of limits to population and consumption: By governing our own needs, we can set resources aside for further the above principles”³⁶. Even though Huxely was a strong advocate of population limits, such is also only agreeable with anarchist principles if such limits are agreed on a voluntary basis between all communities and individuals effected. Any authoritarian control enforcing such limits is to be consequently rejected. Especially, as the “setting of limits to consumption” in short simplicity, can

32 Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*. Tyalgum: Tagari Publications. 1988. p. 1,2

33 Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*. Tyalgum: Tagari Publications. 1988. p. 2

34 Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*. Tyalgum: Tagari Publications. 1988. p. 5

35 Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*. Tyalgum: Tagari Publications. 1988. p. 2

36 Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*. Tyalgum: Tagari Publications. 1988. p. 2

create a situation of abundance, in which a huge population can be supported. This abundance is also a stated political aim of permaculture. Similarly, politics Oxford scholar Uri Gordon, in his timely book on the current anarchist movement sees permaculture as a tool for a “slow-down that would also open a space for manifold forms of low-tech

innovation”. According to Gordon permaculture is “its more politicised section” actually very much involved in the anarchist movement. Permaculture is

a world-wide movement of designers, teachers and grassroots activists working to restore damaged ecosystems and human communities. The political connection to anarchism begins from permaculture’s emphasis on allowing ecosystems to follow their own, intrinsically determined course of development. The permaculture ethic of “care for the land and the people”, transposed into broader cultural terms, would involve facilitating that self-development of the plant or the person, the garden or the community, each according to its own context – working with, rather than against, the organic momentum of the entity cared for. Whereas in monoculture (or industry, or existing social relations) what is sought after is the opposite – maximal control and harnessing of natural processes and labour power. Turning away from control as a social project vis the natural environment easily connects to the same negation vis society itself.³⁷

Essentially, permaculture is a political tool for achieving the political autonomy of small-scale ecological communes and communities that seems to be at the heart of all the vision of anarchist simplicity. The mode of self-reliance that goes hand in hand permaculture means an offensive and most importantly a political rejection of state and government support as well as of the capitalist economy, which both constitute modes of domination and exploitation.

A New Arts and Crafts Movement through Radical Subsistence

On a similar note, Uri Gordon notes with regards to anarchist simplicity:

Finally, an important source for reviving decentralised, low-tech diversity are the revival of traditional and apocryphal science and lo-tech. [...] More pro-actively, the whole array of traditional plant-knowledge, artisanship and craft, could be revived for any number of everyday life applications. So could apocryphal

37 Uri Gordon. *Anarchy Alive!*. London: Pluto Press 2008. pp. 135-137

*technologies – small-scale inventions that proliferated in the early twentieth century but were sidelined by patents and monopolies. While it is likely that people will still choose to have, on however localised a level, “technology” as the recursive application of technique and the machines that are part of it, communities will truly be able to judge whether they are appropriate on conditions such as sustainability, non-specialism, and a human scale of operation and maintenance that encourages creativity, conviviality and co-operation.*³⁸

These words echo not only the argument formulated by Illich against the elitist and hierarchical specialisation instituted by both state and capital, but also calls out for a revival of the Arts and Craft movement that William Morris. While much of this knowledge on traditional on locally based crafts and artisan manufacturing has been lost in the industrial societies which are criticised by the anarchists advocates have politically criticised, subsistence communities in the global South and those areas spared of „development“ find the use of traditional techniques that can be used in a local environmental context useful political tools to political resist both the dependency on the market and state subsidies ranging from Africa, Asia, the Americas to Australia and the Pacific.³⁹ A concrete example is also delivered by Uri Gordon in his book on the present anarchist movement:

Mexican peasant movements, in planning their project of genetically modified crop decontamination, avoided the appeal for expansive and expensive scientific testing by the state. Instead, their decision was to conserve safe species which are known not to be contaminated, and to initiate experimentation intended to see if there are traditional ways to discern whether a plant is genetically modified – observing its behaviour, cycles etc. (Ribiero 2003, Vera Herrera 2004).

Such modes of political resistance would have definitely appealed to Gandhi who saw the village economy based on the indigenous crafting of local products as supporting the political autonomy of this prime unit in his political theory.

Another more elaborated presentation of an indigenous society that, based on subsistence and federation as well as mutual aid and voluntary cooperation practiced something like anarchist simplicity and also incorporated a seemingly emancipatory approach to spirituality and religion, that would have been able to ease Jacques Ellul's worries about the generally politically reactionary character of religion, is Helena

38 Uri Gordon. *Anarchy Alive!*. London: Pluto Press 2008. pp. 137-138

39 Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen et. al. (eds.). *There Is An Alternative*. London: ZedBooks 2001. Passim.

Norberg-Hodges description of political, social and economic life in a remote part of India in the Himalayas, named Ladakh.

Ladakh, or Little Tibet, lying deep in the Himalayas had been isolated from capitalist globalisation as well as Western-centric development policies originating from state and government. The local economy was completely self-reliant, may it be food, shelter, clothing or any other necessity of life. The life of Ladakhis was not about survival, but was entrenched by a prosperous culture, with lots of leisure time, feasting, singing, dancing and huge amounts of time for children. This strong and self-sufficient local community, knew nothing about industrial technology, electricity and nevertheless provided itself with abundance in an extremely harsh climate with 8 month of snow. Simplicity and frugality was an intrinsic prerequisite for such economic autonomy. Within their communities and villages, a strong interdependence was notable however. The basic political unit for decision making was the household which were then linked federally to each other in order to mutually support themselves. Political decisions were based on the principle of subsidiarity and made at the most local level possible. Wider community issues were resolved preventively before they could get any worse in a community forum in which the issue was debated until a consensus could be found. The different political units, being federated, would engage in mutual support and voluntary cooperation in times of hardship, such as the death of family members or the intensive working periods during harvest. As such traditional Ladakhi society presents itself a prime example of indigenous and pristine anarchist simplicity. It combined economic autonomy through simplicity with anarchist politics of mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and political decision making on the local level based on affection and subsidiarity.⁴⁰

Coming back to the emancipatory religious dimension, that Ellul highlights for the case of Christianity, it is crucial to mention, that Ladakhi society is strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism which stresses such truths as 'interconnectedness' and 'interdependence' which obviously can and seem to serve as a guideline for political interaction. If everything is connected with everything else and interdependence prevails, it does make complete political sense to engage in mutual aid and voluntary cooperation with other members of the community in order to contribute to both one's own good as well as that of the whole community which once more effects one's own well being. As such the Ladakhi example not only serves as an example for anarchist simplicity but also stresses, that religion and spirituality is not

40 Helena Norberg-Hodge. *Ancient Future: Learning from Ladakh*. London: Rider & Co 2001. Passim

necessarily anti-emancipatory but can be the basis for such anarchist simplicity.⁴¹ That the Buddhist tradition more generally has, with its value of 'Compassion a huge potential for being applied in radical politics such as that of anarchist simplicity has been shown in yet another study by David Edwards.⁴² Similarly it supports the argument of Illich, that many traditional communities are free of the "habits of needing" such as "electric power, synthetic clothing, junk food and travel" and are indeed practicing "personal claims to freedom which would foster autonomous coping".

That such a revival of local economy and with it of local craftsmanship, which is extremely well developed in Ladakh and other traditional and indigenous communities, will also take place for political reasons in the already industrialised countries seems remote. However it could be argued that such a necessary process for the achievement of anarchist simplicity could source from the Arts and Crafts movement that Morris was part of. Based on the social and political theory of John Ruskin, it was trying to preserve the traditional artistic modes of production against industrial standardisation. Therefore it rejected the division of labour, arguing that the machine was the end of autonomy and pride of the craftsman, advocating instead that the master craftsman should create all the parts of an item and also take part in its assembly and finishing, with some possible help by apprentices and suppliers of raw materials. It might seem hard to identify the political dimensions of such an argument. However communities of these craftsmen would be necessary for sustaining the political autonomy and self-reliance that would be needed in a society of anarchist simplicity. It would furthermore decrease political power relations and hierarchies between the user of the product and the craftsman as producer probably even integrating the later in the process of crafting their items.

An ancient European tradition that could be drawn upon, if politicised in an anarchist simplicity context, is the tradition of Journeymen. It means the travelling of master craftsmen after having completed their apprenticeship from village to village and town to town without having to rely on the money economy but receiving board and lodging for the work they are doing in the specific community. There is already evidence that this tradition of 'Journemanship' is emancipating itself in an anarchic manner of simplicity. This is firstly the case because their tradition resides on the pre-industrial, medieval society which, as ecological anarchist Bookchin shows, bears many marks of anarchist simplicity⁴³. Secondly, in

41 Helena Norberg-Hodge. 'Economics of Happiness' in Resurgence No. 245. Bideford: Resurgence 2007.

42 David Edwards. *The Compassionate Revolution*. Totnes: Green Books 1998. Passim

43 Murray Bookchin. *The Ecology of Freedom*. London: AK Press 2006. Passim

Germany for instance many of the current Journeyman emancipate themselves from the hierarchical structures and organisations called 'Schächte' to which they were traditionally linked and which they used as a network. While these organisation were often exclusive of women and rather dominative in structure, nowadays most craftsmen travel as so called 'Free Journeyman and Journeywomen' which keep up a loosely organised network and are often rooted in the alternative, anarchist political community. Many of these have helped in the building of ecological alternative communes and projects in the spirit of anarchist simplicity and also helped to set up protest camps as at the G8 summit in Germany in 2007 for instance. Trying to stay independent from the money economy, networking themselves horizontally and often practicing traditional ecological crafts, these young Journeymen and Journeywomen are definitely part of a future society of anarchist simplicity.

The Politics of Ecological Anarchist Communes as Anarchist Simplicity

Direct Action as an anarchist political practice can be defined as a „dual strategy of confrontation to delegitimise the system and and grassroots alternative-building from below“⁴⁴. Ecological Anarchist Communes that are existing throughout all of Europe, are putting both into practice. As their projects are statedly political, the alternative practice they conduct as in self-organised production is in itself trying to delegitimise the system of domination politically. Nevertheless, they also often serve as a hub for activists which are engaged in the direct action which goes beyond the project and is directly intervening with mechanisms of domination. Therefore, in the following part it will be investigated how communes, embedded in the Peoples Global Action (PGA), Communities of the Ark and Longo Mai networks are putting anarchist simplicity into practice.

The first network, Peoples Global Action has formulated the following hallmarks:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation.
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such

44 Uri Gordon. *Anarchy Alive!*. London: Pluto Press 2008. p. 18

biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker.

4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism.
5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy. PGA is a tool for coordination, not an organization. PGA has no members and does not have and will not have a juridical personality. Nor organisation or person represents PGA.⁴⁵

In summary, these highly political statements, come close to the anarchist politics, defined by the advocates of anarchist simplicity. In the gathering of the network in 2006, two communes took part through offering a space for political discussion and by that adhering to the anarchist politics by the hallmarks defined above. The first was called 'Frayssinous', defining itself a „collective hamlet in a rural area“: „People who live in this place share the day to day live and they work together around diverse activities which follows the path of autonomy such as gardening, crafting, woodcutting, woodworks and carving, masonry“⁴⁶. The other one was 'Bellevue', practicing „shared bulk buying, self-built housing, alternative press, organic farming, cooperative sawmill, diverse sorts of non-monetary exchanges (swapping, bartering...)“⁴⁷ in interaction with the local community. Accordingly, the topics for discussion for the meeting in these anarchist communes were „environmental destruction, capitalist ecology, anti-industrial struggle, struggles for subsistence, strategies for direct action, concrete practices, industrial capitalism, the techno-scientific maelstrom“⁴⁸ and so forth. They also draw directly from readings of William Morris⁴⁹. In consequence, the PGA network, with it's definition of anarchist politics in combination with it's horizontally federative character that can be used by ecological communes, and these communes being moreover engaged in practicing radical subsistence and promoting, discussing and practicing direct action against the technological and industrial establishment which in essence represents the spirit of simplicity, can together amount to what has been called anarchist simplicity

45 Peoples Global Action. *PGA Hallmarks*. 2002 <<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/pga/hallm.htm>>

46 Peoples Global Action. PGA Conference. 2006.
<http://europe.pgaconference.org/es/francia_06/parte_descentralizada/frayssinous>

47 Peoples Global Action. PGA Conference. 2006.
<http://europe.pgaconference.org/es/francia_06/parte_descentralizada/bellevue>

48 Peoples Global Action. PGA Conference. 2006.
<http://europe.pgaconference.org/en/france_06/topics/environmental_destruction>

49 Peoples Global Action. PGA Conference. 2006. <http://europe.pgaconference.org/en/france_06/topics/anti-industrial_struggles>

throughout this essay. Not to mention, of course, that the authors in the first chapter actually dreamt of federative communes as a possibility of putting anarchist simplicity into action.

Yet another form of commune that could be described as such anarchist simplicity in action could be the Communities of the Ark which are standing in the direct tradition of Gandhian political ideals of civil disobedience, non-violence, voluntary simplicity, inter-faith dialogue and commune life.⁵⁰ While definitely practicing simplicity in its fullest extent, the extent to which the communes, however can be described through the anarchist political paradigm can be debated. Even though some members of the community stick very directly to the teachings of the founding father of the movement, Lanza del Vasto, who was a scholar of Gandhi, decision in everyday life are made in a less hierarchical and dogmatic manner. The political relevance of the movement however is to combine politically, the aim of simplicity as a way to autonomy and self-reliance, the emancipatory interpretation of religion in the Gandhian tradition as well as thirdly carrying on the heritage of anarchist simplicity that was practiced by Gandhi himself.⁵¹

Third and lastly in this section, the European cooperative network Longo Mai should be mentioned. Growing out of the rather anarchistic student or in this case apprentices and craftsman movement of 1968, the Longo Mai, network wanted to create long lasting alternatives⁵². Today more than a dozen crafts and agriculture collectives all throughout Europe are linked to the network. Their aim is to create a „solidarity economy based on subsistence and experiment with collective modes of living“. The cooperatives produce a wide range of products. From food, to cloth, to construction materials and market this in the local area, through “micro-economy”⁵³. Such approach to economics has definitely linkages to the ethos of simplicity. Politically, decisions are made as locally as possible with the anarchist principle of federation being applied for broader questions that need to be discussed. Also being involved in all kinds of anti-capitalist networks throughout Europe, the Longo Mai network also coordinates transnational projects and inter-cultural exchange⁵⁴. It is standing both historically, practically and politically within the tradition of anarchism. Thereby, fusing, both the production aspect of the network, with the political engagement, the Longo Mai network can be included in the list of

50 Communities of the Ark. *Presentation*. <<http://www.arche-nonviolence.eu/arche.non-violence/presentation.html>>

51 Jan-Hendrik Cropp. *Personal Experience*. 2005

52 Hof Ulenkrug. *Presentation 1*. 2007. <<http://www.tippelei.de/ulenkruug/>>

53 Hof Ulenkrug. *Presentation 2*. 2007. <<http://coforum.de/index.php?3598>>

54 Hof Ulenkrug. *Presentation 1*. 2007. <<http://www.tippelei.de/ulenkruug/>>

communes that would fit into the category of anarchist simplicity.

Conclusion.

This chapter was thought to show how lively the political tradition of anarchist simplicity is in the present world. It has been shown, that firstly permaculture if interpreting it's ethics politically is a prime example of how anarchist simplicity can be applied. Secondly it has been shown, that many of the theories and traditions that were advocated by the political philosophers in the first chapters are extending into the present and that both the subsistence practice in the global South and within indigenous and traditional communities as well as the present extension of the historical Arts and Crafts movement in the global North are indeed examples of anarchist simplicity. Third and lastly it has been argued, that political actors that in a way create a symbioses of all of these practices are political, anarchist and ecological communes, which once again partly have direct linkages to the political philosophers of the first chapter and carry own their heritage of anarchist simplicity. It remains to be noted in this part, that all of these current projects of anarchist simplicity are not to be seen as isolated units but rather as a web of interrelations. Journeyman and women have been playing a big role in the setting up, of the Longo Mai network. Permaculture is a tool that is being used throughout both eco-anarchist communes in the global North as well as indirectly and not knowingly through traditional practices of subsistence in the global South.

Conclusion

Conceptualizing Anarchist Simplicity

In order to formulate a final conclusion it makes sense, to re-visit the central themes of anarchist simplicity and explain both their theoretical and practical relevance in order to conceptualise the political philosophy coherently.

Autonomy and Cooperation. The political philosophy advocated by the authors in the first chapter is very much based upon the anarchist principles of autonomy and cooperation. Autonomy in the sense of freedom from domination in all its forms may that be more classical in the sense of state domination or capitalist oppression or more locally in the political decision-making process. And cooperation in the sense of free agreements between groups and individuals. Such values are practiced both in the present mode of the Arts and Craft movement, the networks of Free Journeymen and -women as well as in traditional societies like in Ladakh or present radical projects such as anarchist communes.

Simplicity and Anti-Industrialism. What makes this strand of anarchism unique however is it's advocacy of simplicity through a radical critique against industrialism and technology. May that be on the grounds of work alienation as Morris formulated it, of direct domination of machines over people as Ellul and Huxley put it, of Western ideology over culturally indigenous values as Illich and Gandhi argued or of the deprivation of wilderness as Thoreau was reasoning. The overarching consensus is however, that without such a notion of simplicity, the afore mentioned political goals of autonomy and cooperation are harder to achieve. Such an inbuilt criticism exists in the political interpretation of permaculture as well as in the practice of grassroots alternatives as in communes or traditional societies, which defy technologies from political grounds.

Radical Subsistence. In order to put these two political concepts together, the political philosophers have often argued for something that has been defined as radical subsistence which they either practiced as Gandhi and Thoreau and partly Morris, or at least defended, as Ellul, Huxley and Illich. It meant economic and political self-reliance and self-sufficiency not as a goal in itself but rather as a political act of emancipation from structures and institutions of hierarchy and domination and therewith an act of resistance. That many of the present examples of anarchist simplicity are organising themselves in radical political networks, as the mentioned anarchist communes and cooperatives, shows that these

political ambitions are indeed existent in the present movement.

Direct Action. A crucial second part of the political practice of anarchist simplicity is direct action. May that be in the sense of civil disobedience as Thoreau and later Gandhi argued, as an act of religious emancipation as Ellul and once again Gandhi were saying, as resistance to the oppressive forces of modernity that Illich and Huxley identified or a lastly social revolution, that Morris was hoping for. Even if the revolutionary concept has somewhat lost some of its credibility through the turn in history, anarchist activist in the present are trying to intervene from their alternative projects, directly with mechanisms and structures of political domination and hierarchy, especially in the ecological kinds. Just as well as post-development grassroots communities in the South are trying to resist enforced development paradigms.

Finally it is an anarchist principle to take control over one's life and hence but these four core ideas of strategy for liberation from industrialism and technology into practice in the here and now.

Whatever the pace of mechanical progress; though machines should be invented a hundred times more marvellous than the mule-jenny, the knitting-machine, or the cylinder press; though forces should be discovered a hundred times more powerful than steam, — very far from freeing humanity, securing its leisure, and making the production of everything gratuitous, these things would have no other effect than to multiply labor, induce an increase of population, make the chains of serfdom heavier, render life more and more expensive, and deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.

- Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. *The System of Economic Contradictions or the Philosophy of Misery.* 1874.

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