

The Nature of Anarchism

Exploring Complicity and Conflict in the Relations between Anarchists and Environmentalists (19th–21st Centuries)

5–6 November 2026

Beaux-Arts de Marseille

In an era when ecological emergencies are often minimized by authoritarian regimes displaying ecocidal tendencies—or reframed through fascist rhetoric—this international and multidisciplinary conference aims to reexamine both historical and contemporary relationships between anarchism(s) and ecology(ies).

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, anarchism has come to be recognized as one of the political traditions most closely aligned with ecological thought. Its rejection of centralized authority, its decentralizing vision of socio-economic organization, and its prefigurative ethos have all contributed to this association (Toro, 2021; Grillet, 2026). Yet the foundations of political ecology were established much earlier, at the turn of the nineteenth century, by thinkers such as Pierre Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus, as well as through the communal experiments of free communities (Linse, 1986; Gould, 1988; Maitron, 1992; Masjuan, 2000). Anarchism, in contrast to the prevailing industrialism of the “machine age,” distinguished itself from both liberalism and other socialist currents through its alternative conception of modernity: one shaped by romantic imaginaries and practices rooted in peasant and artisanal cultures (Probst, 2024). This conference invites reflection on how libertarian legacies have informed or subtly permeated environmental struggles from the 1960s to the present.

Designed as a transdisciplinary forum, the event seeks to explore the elective affinities between anarchism(s) and ecology(ies) across diverse contexts and periods. It aims to investigate the socio-intellectual conditions that have enabled articulations of anarchist and ecological thinking, from their nineteenth-century origins to their contemporary reconfigurations. The analysis will encompass the variety of anarchist ecological strands—social ecology, primitivism, bioregionalism—by examining their scientific and activist roots and their reinterpretations within movements such as anti-nuclear, feminist, animal rights, and anti-speciesist struggles (Zerzan, 1994; Sale, 2000; Bookchin, 2019). Given anarchism’s inherent heterogeneity and resistance to centralization, the inquiry will focus on two key dimensions: the density of activist and intellectual networks

(Bantman & Altena, 2015) and the nature of its characteristic social practices—strikes, free communities, libertarian pedagogy, trade unionism, and mutualism (Manfredonia, 2007).

Anarchism's significance extends well beyond its European "Golden Age" (1871–1914), manifesting in diverse forms shaped by historical and geographical contingencies (e.g. communism, squats, ZADs, or non-Western anarchisms). It has also recurrently hybridized with other critical traditions, including feminism, anti-colonialism, and primitivism. Submissions are therefore encouraged to address authors and experiences self-identifying as anarchist, while employing a broad, historically situated understanding of ecology that avoids anachronistic projection of contemporary concerns about climate change or planetary boundaries.

Since the nineteenth century, environmental issues—from workers' health and industrial pollution to deforestation, landscape preservation, and mechanization—have intersected with social movements and influenced certain socialist milieus (Audier, 2017; Löwy & Sayre, 2020). Within this framework, the conference proposes engaging with the notion of *environmental reflexivity*, understood as "the complex, historically situated, and often quite distant ways of thinking about the consequences of human action on the environment" (Fressoz & Locher, 2010).

This transdisciplinary and transhistorical conference welcomes contributions from history, political science, sociology, art history, anthropology, geography, and related fields. Its central focus is the dialogue between anarchism(s) and ecology(ies), fostering interdisciplinary exchange and advancing a nuanced understanding of their intersections. Papers may examine the so-called "Golden Age" of anarchism (1871–1914), the interwar years, the rise of political ecology (1960s–1990s), and its contemporary reconfigurations (1990s–present). Within this scope, four main axes of reflection are proposed:

1. Nature(s), Science, and Popular Knowledge

The rise of anarchism in the nineteenth century coincided with major transformations in scientific understandings of nature, which increasingly became the object of technological intervention. While the new discipline of ecology introduced an original perspective on living organisms, movements grounded in vernacular knowledge also emerged (Ambroise-Rendu et al., 2021), as some thinkers warned of environmental degradation such as deforestation and soil exhaustion. Rather than perpetuating a nature–culture divide, new conceptual frameworks in anarchist and socialist milieus linked social and political thought to ecological

concerns. Kropotkin and Reclus, for instance, articulated organicist or naturalist models emphasizing the individual's development within their environment (Taylan, 2018).

Throughout the twentieth century, the mutual entanglement of ecological warnings and environmental activism revealed convergences between anarchist thought and political ecologies, exemplified by the influence of Murray Bookchin in the 1960s.

Special attention may be given to the artistic dimension of anarchism—visual arts, poetry, music—as a form of eco-political expression, offering a sensorial critique of industrial modernity and proposing alternative relations to the natural world.

Suggested questions:

- i. Do anarchist theories propose an original ontological regime? How do they articulate the concept of “nature” within their emancipatory political project, and what internal debates do they generate?
 - ii. How have anarchists engaged with, politicized, or disseminated scientific or vernacular ecological knowledge?
 - iii. How have environmentalists in turn received and reinterpreted anarchist conceptions of nature?
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2. Political Economy, Technology, and Anarchism

From its origins during the industrial revolution, anarchism confronted the dilemmas of technological progress. Some currents viewed machines as potential instruments of emancipation, while others critiqued the technicization of life. Figures such as William Morris and Edward Carpenter articulated aesthetic and ethical critiques of productivism (Jarrige, 2014).

This axis seeks to map internal tensions in anarchist thought regarding industrialization, mechanization, trade, energy infrastructures, commodification of life, and spatial organization (city/countryside, centralization/decentralization). It invites reevaluation of technology's role in libertarian projects: What might an anarchist conception of technology entail? Which forms of production are compatible with egalitarian and ecologically sustainable societies?

Empirical approaches—examining consumption patterns, cooperative practices, self-management, and activists' occupational profiles (workers, farmers, engineers, artisans)—will enhance understanding of how anarchist communities relate to nature, technology, and economy, while rethinking the boundary between “natural” and “artificial” needs.

Suggested questions:

- i. How have conceptions of technological progress evolved within anarchist thought?
- ii. What forms of production and consumption do anarchists envision or enact?

iii. How do socio-professional milieus shape anarchist politicization of nature and economic practice?

3. Theories and Practices of Social Change

Anarchist and environmentalist theorists and activists have developed multiple strategies for achieving radical socio-ecological transformation. These strategies generate recurrent debates on relations to the state, the legitimacy of violence, and the social actors seen as agents of change (Manfredonia, 2007; Bookchin, 2019).

This section also focuses on prefigurative practices—the effort to embody desired forms of life in the present—challenging the myth of revolutionary rupture. Such practices include popular education, lifestyle experimentation, and bodily or moral “self-reform” (Baubérot, 2014; Coste, 2023).

The section further explores encounters and tensions between anarchist and ecological activists in shared movements, addressing the circulation of practices, ideological transfers, and mutual critiques.

Suggested questions:

- i. Which strategies and repertoires of action—sometimes in competition—do anarchists and environmentalists adopt to foster ecological and social change?
- ii. What is the role and status of prefigurative practices within these mobilizations?
- iii. In what ways have anarchist actors influenced environmental movements (e.g. Rio Tinto, Larzac, Notre-Dame-des-Landes)?

4. Convergences and Divergences: Circulations, Hybridizations, and Debates

Despite shared genealogies and modes of action, anarchist and environmentalist movements have also diverged sharply at times. Yet their numerous areas of convergence—anti-militarism, anti-nuclear activism, anti-speciesism, and resistance to large-scale industrial projects—invite systematic analysis. Persisting research gaps concern the treatment of “life,” class struggle, and spatial scale (localism vs. internationalism).

This axis therefore welcomes studies of historical and contemporary hybridizations and debates, focusing in particular on tensions surrounding gender, sexuality, race, and coloniality.

Ecofeminist and eco-queer theories have revitalized critiques of the naturalization of social relations, often in dialogue—with or opposition to—certain anarchist currents.

From Edward Carpenter's libertarian vision of love (Alicia, 2019; Cleminson, 2019; Lecerf Maulpoix, 2021) to contemporary analyses of care, reproduction, and subsistence (Pruvost, 2021; Rimlinger, 2024), these perspectives open renewed questions about embodiment and ecology.

The section also considers how anarchist and environmentalist discourses engage—or fail to engage—with the colonial and racial matrix underpinning fossil capitalism (Dupuis-Déri & Pillet, 2019; Moore, 2020), and the contemporary challenges of decolonial ecology, ecological debt, and climate displacement.

Suggested questions:

- i. How do anarchist theories and practices circulate within ecological movements, and vice versa?
 - ii. How are questions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment integrated—or marginalized—in anarchist and ecological activism?
 - iii. How are race, coloniality, and global environmental justice addressed within these theoretical and activist spaces?
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Submission Guidelines

Contributions are invited from both academic and activist communities. Priority will be given to doctoral candidates and recent graduates; submissions from master's students are also welcome.

Each proposal should include:

- The title of the call to which it responds
- The author's discipline or field of engagement
- Five keywords
- A bibliography
- An anonymized text (maximum 500 words, including presentation of materials, methodology, and positioning within existing literature, issues, and themes)

Submissions (in .doc or .docx format) should be sent to:

ecologiesanarchistes@proton.me

Schedule:

30 March 2026 – Deadline for proposals

June 2026 – Notification of acceptance

5–6 November 2026 – Conference in Beaux-Arts de Marseille (Luminy)

List of references

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