A New Era of Capitalist Central Planning?

Living Labour, Resistance and Mechanization

Capital is accumulated from living labour, but the character of living labour and the labour process is always changing. There are two constants, however. One is the potential for resistance that always resides within living labour power. The other is the potential for becoming living labour that always resides within resistance. Capital is not merely resilient; it has no choice but to coexist with and feed on the opposition that it breeds. That's why there can be no fixed formula for ending capitalism – but also why, to borrow the words of the Ecuadorian Indigenous leader Yaku Pérez, "resistance is life."

If this were a "theorem," you could take a step toward "proving" it just by dissecting the old labour movement tactic of "working to rule." Capital needs its workers to do what it tells them. But obedience always implies the possibility of disobedience. Lay down any rule for the worker and the worker can find a way to subvert it by taking the rule too literally or failing to provide the "supplements" or improvisation that any rule needs in order to be effective. If the capitalist has in mind a right way of doing things, there will also always be a wrong way that equally "follows the rule". Rules are always reinterpretable; that is their nature. In a never-ending dance, the worker slyly reinterprets the rule the capitalist formulates; then the capitalist angrily reinterprets the reinterpretation.

Fitfully, capital strives to halt this dance and eliminate the possibility of the worker's "wrong" interpretations. That's one reason for energy-intensive mechanization and ever-expanding global energy infrastructure, along with with faster, higher-volume, more standardized production and circulation of commodities. The idea is to replace rules with machines that can make capital's rules unreinterpretable.

But this tactic brings new problems. Since machines can't do their jobs the "wrong way," they also can't do them the "right way." When machines fail, or fill their surroundings with waste and high entropy, you need lots of people full of accumulated knowledge, improvisatory fizz and latent defiance to fix them or clean up after them or find new ways of feeding them or adjust them to deal with new circumstances that their builders never took into account, in order to force them to do the "right thing" from the point of view of the capitalist community at a given moment. Far from replacing living labour, machines only increase industrial capital's desperate need for it – and capital's paradoxical imperative to keep tapping into, and exposing itself to, deep, ever-shifting wellsprings of resistance. Leaps in mechanization are not only financed but also consolidated by large increases in the crude absolute exploitation of living human work. Industrial capital's intermittent dream that its new 19th-century concepts of "efficiency" and "productivity" might be a road toward eventual perpetual motion and elimination of the troublesome labourer entirely was quickly ended by its own discoveries about energy starting around 1824. Sadly for capital, it turned out that, as George Caffentzis jokes, "only *we* are in perpetual motion: eternally energetic, crafty, obedient, cowardly, insolent, revolting, but always in a motion that is the only source of work, development, surplus." And now capital also had to guard against those costly machines' being taken hostage by those sneaky workers. A century of discussion and experience of artificial intelligence has only confirmed these truths of the 19th-century industrial era.

Spelling out these reflections fully would mean revisiting classic arguments about the labour theory of value, the inability of machines and the modern 19th-century energy that feeds them to create capitalist value, the organic composition of capital, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and the definitions of exploitation, capital accumulation and capital itself. Here, following Caffentzis, let me mention just two examples from modern history. One is capital's partial absorption of labour revolt using a playbook furnished by marginalist economics. Capital learned to harness unions in the global North to "spur changes in the organization of work and stimulate productivity" and provide them with them wins that allowed their members to "participate more actively in the market as individual consumers." A subsequent example is capital's partial diversion of North Atlantic women's revolts into an expanded waged service economy and a market for self-care commodities and immigrant care labour. Naturally, capital had previously been happy for women's contribution to surplus to be largely unrecognized, but when their resistance became more visible, its despair was hardly terminal. The post-1970s profit crisis that continues to shadow capital spurred, in addition to a Great Acceleration of resource use (63 percent of all historical emissions have been produced in the past 40 years and 80 per cent of trade now flows through global value chains), a need to realize the surplus value of housework immediately, sucking it up "just at the moment of its exuding, rather than the next day in the reproduced line worker or the next generation in the new cohort of workers entering the labour market." With the so-called "energy crisis" of the 1970s, "Big Mother Nature is now used to squeeze Little Mother dry. If Big Momma is stingy and has turned cold, capital turns to little momma: 'Help me out or we'll all go down together.'" Which of course eventually issues in yet more refusals.

Here Comes Ecology

Now comes "ecology." For centuries, capital had been happy enough to see to it that the contributions of nature and the sacred to accumulation (*obra de la naturaleza* in the usual Spanish translation of Marx) went unregistered, to be more or less silently crystallized in those same factories, harbours and service sites. Now it has to position itself to take advantage when, faced with global warming and the progressive disappearance of "safe spaces for humanity", the old, low-cost or no-cost capitalist nature – including human capitalist nature – becomes noisily troublesome in new and more obvious ways. For example:

- Old resources go into hiding in out-of-the-way places and are more expensive to get access to, more fatiguing to extract and degrade. Such resources include not only minerals and water but also soil fertility and biodiversity.
- As the accumulated unpaid work that has gone into the creation and protection of the sacred over many generations, whose fruits capital has been accustomed to seizing and eating without undue hindrance (maize, potatoes, oil), becomes more visible, so too do the difficulties of economically replenishing or recreating this work in a short space of time as contemporary wage labour.
- The steep, pre-industrial "entropy slopes" that capital has been accustomed to being able to flatten quickly in order to feed its machines, employing cheap, easy "activation energies" (a spark applied to gasoline, a hydroelectric dam to falling water) become harder to find, and activation more expensive and complex. Ever more burdensome efforts are needed to recreate entropy inclines in territories accessible to machines by expelling high entropy to surrounding neocolonies.
- Even the weakest and most incomplete attempts to recreate such entropy slopes in new forms – or to make do with shallower slopes through "efficiency" – imply absolute increases in global exploitation, colonialism and centralized surveillance, information management and violence. Replacing a gas power plant with solar power generating the same amount of electricity, for example, can increase land use more than 100-fold, while the water needs of a

hydrogen economy would affect society across the board. The increased numbers of energy conversion steps associated with a "Net Zero" programme (solar radiation to electricity to chemical storage reliant on lithium chemistry to long-distance electricity transmission to heat for homes and mechanical energy for electric cars, etc.) also take their entropy toll. In line with the "work to rule" principle outlined above, mechanization-heavy industrial and transport decarbonization of the kinds discussed most widely today necessarily imply enormous increases not only in entropy colonialism, but also in the appropriation of absolute surplus value from the living work of humans and nonhumans, with all the political control that implies.

- Old infrastucture propping up traditional modes of capitalist production and circulation faces an uncertain future against a changing nature. It has become physically more vulnerable to climate change and microbe outbreaks at the same time it contributes to more climate change and microbe outbreaks.
- Yet what the needed replacement infrastructure needs to look like is still a bit hazy to capital, even though it has become increasingly evident that the choice is crucial "for all asset classes from real assets to manufacturing supply chains and beyond." "Transition risks" involving supply shocks, inflation, coordination of capital reallocations, insurance, social unrest, repression costs and so on preoccupy capitalist planners. Investors in the capitalist economy as a whole generally would prefer that the transition to new infrastructure be "smooth," "orderly," minimally inflationary, unthreatening to overall growth, and so forth, with political contingencies associated with various speeds of response to climate change carefully anticipated. For example, "demand for capital and labor in a net-zero economy must match with supply, over time and across regions. And these equations must be solved simultaneously while pursuing economic development and inclusive growth."
- Following the one-off mass mobilization of Chinese rural labour for industrial export purposes at the end of the last century, large reservoirs of relatively "unfatigued" or ecologically-subsidized cheap new workers are getting harder to find and mobilize. Connections with flattening entropy slopes and the dissipation of the sacred are not metaphorical.
- Environmental movements of all kinds are mobilizing ever more noisily, adding to capital's challenges. For instance, climate militants are rising up under the slogan that "this is not us revolting, this is nature revolting, of which we are a part."

Plans from BlackRock and McKinsey

Wall Street's BlackRock is the world's largest asset manager. Its job is to find destinations for the vagabond trillions of the rich's overaccumulated cash now washing around the world in search of profit. Its problem is that the list of plausible conventional investment outlets for this money is dwindling, partly due to the issues sketched above. What BlackRock has to say about how to address these threats to its globe-spanning business is therefore of considerable professional interest.

McKinsey is a globally-active think tank for capitalist movements that makes its money giving strategic advice to corporate managers across a variety of sectors. Its positions on ecology constitute another interesting chunk of capitalist analysis of the opportunities and challenges posed by climate change and the water, biodiversity, soil, forest, health and labour crises.

It's not to be expected that BlackRock and McKinsey would have any fundamental criticisms either of fossil-fuelled industrial and digital capitalism or of past neoliberal responses to the profit crisis such as the gigantic expansion of consumer credit, the ballooning health industry, or expanded efforts to capture public subsidies through infrastructure investment. But because they believe that today's ecological threats to capital accumulation are both systemic and immediate, BlackRock and McKinsey are both now warning that they cannot be satisfactorily turned to advantage without new forms of central planning and collectivization that go beyond even those that made possible the "Golden Age" of US-based industrial capitalism of the mid-20th century as well as the post-1970s epoch of extreme dominance of the financial sector. The overall entropy slope, infrastructure and cheap work issues cannot ever be definitively solved, but their implications must be systematically addressed quite soon at the world scale if any major sector of industrial or digital capital in any country is to struggle through even in the short to medium term. For the same reason, ecological resistance must urgently be converted into paid, motivated living labour and the defence of commodity production, circulation and sale to the maximum extent possible, however limited that might be.

Hence BlackRock is making two interlocking demands of corporations that expect to benefit from the investment dollars that it channels to them. With differing emphases, these proposals are echoed by McKinsey. First, corporations must put pressure on states to back a new global political settlement to be mapped out and directed from Wall Street and other financial hubs. BlackRock and McKinsey are persuaded that a sweeping "reallocation of capital" is inevitable and are determined to organize their constituents for their own good to ensure that the accompanying regulation is structured to the maximum benefit of capital as a whole. As McKinsey puts it, private companies

> "will typically need to participate in shaping demand for their new low-carbon products and work with external stakeholders … in creating markets, scaling supply chains, or developing approaches to attract funding. To put this into perspective, think of how the era of large US oil companies shaped the evolution of the car-based economy a century ago. … many of today's institutions may need to be revamped, and new institutions may need to be created to enable best-practice sharing, drive capital deployment at scale, manage uneven impacts across stakeholders, and spur collective action. These institutions include standard-setting organizations, global platforms for collective action (including partnerships across public and private sectors), local chapters of larger organizations, and civil society institutions. … Hand-in-hand with this will be establishing standards and regulations … emissions [must] be appropriately factored into pricing and investment decisions, consumer choices, and regulatory and global trade regimes. … principles to define carbon credits and govern carbon markets … are also crucial. … Securing an orderly transition will require public-sector leaders who have the commitment and capabilities to develop coherent, reliable, and workable policies. … it would require leaders to act together, with unity, both to put the physical building blocks in place as well as to secure the economic and societal adjustments needed for an orderly transition [and d]etermine where regulatory intervention is most critical and which policy tools could be most effective (for example, subsidies, incentives, and safety nets). … leaders would need to consider compensating measures to manage negative consequences on the one hand and actively seek growth opportunities on the other. Public-sector leaders would have an important role in managing impacts on vulnerable populations, while simultaneously taking steps to support the economic diversification and labor force adjustments of affected communities."

Second, and simultaneously, each major company must upend its own individual way of doing business to harmonize with as well as promote the new collective structures. According to McKinsey, "private-sector leaders" must "advance their organization's interests by leaning into the transition through shifts in capital allocation and product portfolios and cooperation within and throughout their organizations' ecosystems." In BlackRock's view, "companies that are best prepared for the transition will provide better long-term returns, as they will be better able to function in an economy that looks vastly different from today's," while "[i]nvestors who factor in transition risks and opportunities will likely benefit from an accelerating reallocation of capital to sustainable companies." Corporations will have to do "more ESG [environmental, social and governance] research and analysis" if they want to continue to be able to "identify investment risks and generate excess returns." Each company's "political activities" must be consistent with "public statements on material and strategic policy issues" or an explanation provided "where inconsistencies exist." Companies that remain "dependent on producing or consuming fossil fuels for too long risk being left behind by their consumers and shareholders."

BlackRock, McKinsey and friends are naturally wary of the hazards attached to their call for a new regime of global regulation, central planning and coordinated infrastructure investment. It's challenging to organize diverse states to do Wall Street's bidding without opening the door to unwanted compromises with popular movements, public interest organizations, local circumstances and long-term ecological imperatives. In practice, there is a lingering emphasis on short-term, collective "self-regulation," informally coordinated and enforced among corporations themselves exclusively for their own communal interests. Thus Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England and currently a Special Envoy for Climate Change of the United Nations – who tries hard to convince himself that US$130 trillion is already lined up behind achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions through a world bankers' alliance advertised as capable of riding herd over Southern governments – is urgently campaigning for a stupendous 15-fold expansion of the voluntary carbon market over the next decade, together with the unprecedented land and labour grabs that implies. ExxonMobil, meanwhile, publicly "advocates" carbon taxes only because it is convinced they cannot be implemented in the near future.

Nevertheless, no one is in any doubt that the state eventually needs to pitch in big time worldwide to reorganize labour, seek out and discipline ecosystem care workers and waste labourers, give corporations more access to basic commodities like water, land, rare earths and genes, expand plantations, make photosynthesis more "efficient," roll out new electricity infrastructure, and create and enforce the new property rights required to confront the ecological challenge to capital. Even 40 years ago it was already perfectly obvious that it was going to be up to the state to devise private regulatory property rights ("regprop") in pollution sinks for private firms to trade among themselves in order to keep down rising costs of resource extraction and use. The new centralized economy envisaged by BlackRock and McKinsey requires even more state hands on deck – more extensive harmonized environmental legislation and technologically-assisted mass surveillance and control of absolute surplus value extraction – to guarantee both demand for and supply of "green steel," "green cars," "green air travel," "green cement," "green oil," "green hydrogen" and thousands of other fantasy products.

In this context, it's easy to see why forward-looking capitalist strategists welcome angry environmentalists invading the UNFCCC's Conferences of the Parties to demand "action" (as long as the protesters don't turn such events into unruly Seattles). Shrewd capitalists love climatologists like Michael Mann, who can be relied upon to help keep liberal reformers occupied with the story that carbon markets can turn around the climate crisis. They can probably even find a place in their heart for James Hansen and his advocacy of carbon taxes. In no way opposed to sustaining fossil fuel use all the way through the "transition" they advocate, strategists such as BlackRock and McKinsey can only sit back and enjoy the performances of environmental economists promulgating what physicist Julia Steinberger calls the "laughable" fantasy that "you can just gently dial up the price of carbon past the point where you've put Exxon-Mobil, BP, Shell, Gazprom, Saudi-Aramco & Co. completely out of business, without them noticing or intervening in any way."

Greatly appreciating the potential of such fictions for preserving the rule of fossil fuels as long as possible under a "green" cover, leading capitalist strategists are at the same time often enthusiastic about efficiency nerds' schemes for packing every crevice of production with little information-wielding Maxwell demons under centralized control in order to slow down increases in entropy and devastating declines in the rate of surplus extraction. From the perspective of capitalists alert to the virtues of "creative destruction," such networks are intriguing in that they seem almost capable of reviving the defunct ideology of perpetual motion. (After all, each individual computation is already perhaps a trillion times cheaper than it was at the beginning of the computer era, and much less energy-hungry, suggesting that weightless, green "information" is well on the way to replacing fossil fuels and staving off future ecological disasters.) While progressive "computerization of a production process creates no new value," it does make it "possible to make the variable part smaller while guarding against the too rapid exhaustion of constant capital." Small wonder such forms of mechanization are also worming their way into the production of ecosystem service units used as tokens of cheap regulation. Alas for capital, however, the ecological costs each supposed Maxwell demon incurs in terms both of energy (e.g., to clear memory) and of unpaid human interpretive labour means that this process, while it may seem a handy stopgap, only jacks up the magnitude of the inevitable collapse.

Progressive capitalist strategists are also very appreciative of the mainstream conservation organizations, largely Washington-based, who have likewise met big capital more than halfway in helping to transform environmental resistance into new forms of work and commodities. These organizations include Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, Resources for the Future and WWF. More broadly, progressive capitalist strategists have positioned themselves to be comfortable with, or even to pre-empt, certain atavistic Green Lefts, especially in the global North. Examples include corporate or state capitalist Green New Deal Lefts, Nuclear Lefts, Carbon-Market Lefts, Wind Turbine Lefts, Solar Farm Lefts, Battery Lefts and lefts that call for more financial subsidies for corporate Northern "green" technology exports to the Global South, as well as other backward-looking techno-lefts that, obedient to 20th-century capitalist climatology, centre their programmes on *de jure* technical decarbonization. As the visions of BlackRock, McKinsey and the like develop, the important global political divide will not be between these various green lefts and capital, but between the tacit alliance of the two on the one hand and, on the other, hundreds of millions of commoners and workers, particularly in the global South. As always, the *a priori* assumption that thermodynamic energy and the 19th-21st century industrial and digital machines that it drives are somehow politically "neutral" – and that if those machines could all be nationalized under working-class control, social and ecological exploitation would cease – serves in the end to put power ever further out of reach of those very workers.

No wonder, then, that Vicki Hollub, the chair and CEO of Occidental Petroleum, speaking at a COP 26 event organized by McKinsey in Glasgow, found it easy to identify herself as a "climate activist" along with all the other climate activists present. "What we have to attack is the emissions, not the oil companies," she explained. "Oil and gas does not have to go away" as long as, channeling environmentalist pressure, states can jump-start new regimes of extraction and exploitation to shift the burden onto offsets through plantations, direct air capture or "carbon-negative" barrels of oil extracted via deep-well injection of carbon dioxide. Ecosystem service sales can boost oil sales and vice versa: a "double-headed snake" in the phrase of Nigerian poet-activist Nnimmo Bassey. Here, once again, the state is indispensible, not only to subsidize carbon capture and storage infrastructure, but also to oversee manufacture of units of cheap regulatory relief by a suitably-disciplined compensated workforce supervised by self-proclaimed expert managers wielding appropriate "nature conservation" or "plantation management" rules. The imaginary rehabilitation and maintenance of capitalist nature, while not itself a commodity in the strict sense, is now to be unitized, produced and paid for out of your pocket.

No wonder, too, that Alphabet, Amazon and other IT companies have enthusiastically climbed on board the Net Zero train precisely at a time when industrial capitalist imperatives are forcing them to expand their energy use and extraction of resources and labour power many-fold. In international business's new greenhouse regime, data centre construction, too, is to be subsidized via the crushing fatigue visited upon the absolute surplus labour and hapless nonhuman recruits assigned to manufacturing carbon, water or biodiversity credits. Each new continental or intercontinental infrastructure corridor, as well, is likely now to come furnished with land-extensive, labour-intensive integrated components "offsetting" its destructive nature. Everywhere, capital has, as ever, no choice but to respond to the growing fragility of industrial ecology by spreading and deepening that fragility further, often with the active if unwitting participation of green left movements. While criticism of offsets, Net Zero, carbon neutrality and green capitalism has very belatedly gained some ground recently in environmentalist and academic circles, there is no room for self-congratulation. Greater efforts have to be made to anticipate capitalist strategy as a whole if middle-class social movements are to avoid the delays and confusions of the past and cope effectively with inevitable efforts at cooptation.

The Tesla Example

Which existing companies fit best into the "green" capitalist model propounded by the likes of BlackRock and McKinsey? One guiding light is the US electric car and energy storage firm Tesla. Admittedly, in terms of corporate style, Tesla can be a bit of an embarrassment to the mainstream capitalist world. Its CEO, Elon Musk, is too brash to be a regular fixture at corporate webinars or UN business conclaves, and is reputedly suspicious of the gravy train operated by consultants such as McKinsey. But money talks: among Tesla's biggest institutional investors is none other than BlackRock, which has joined so many other speculators excited by the company's "green" promise in backing the company that it would take it over 1000 years for it to make as much money as the stock market has invested in it, with even Musk (now the richest person in the world) expressing concern that the company is enormously overvalued. Tesla offers one prime prefigurative example of how the new "green" regulatory state will be used over the next decade or two to help eke out a few last lucrative investment outlets for the super-rich's overaccumulated cash amid growing ecological resistance and collapse.

Eight features of Tesla's success seem particularly worthy of note:

- Demand for Tesla's products is and will be largely due to state regulation or the anticipation thereof. The idea that electric cars can contribute to solving the climate crisis – a linchpin of mainstream, carbon-oriented capitalist environmentalism – has been processed into widespread pro-electric vehicle legislation even though (or perhaps because) it makes no scientific sense whatsoever.
- Tesla's profits between the second half of 2019 and the first half of 2020 were attributable entirely to carbon offset income provided and certified by state legislation. In the second quarter of 2020 the company was in effect awarded US$428 million in handouts calculated on the basis of fictitious future "carbon savings" chalked up to the sale of its electric cars, as compared to $104 million in profit. To put it another way, Tesla has made its money during key stretches of its existence not by manufacturing and selling cars but by selling the "regulatory property rights" created for it *gratis* by the state out of whole cloth. Again, these subsidies have no ecological benefits, strictly speaking, but are entrenched in the regulatory logic propounded by BlackRock, McKinsey, the United Nations and other champions of the new "green" central planning.
- It will be impossible to operate Tesla's products in the long term at the scale anticipated without massive, far-flung new electric infrastructure underwritten by billions of dollars of public tax money. Early on, Tesla received a $465 million loan directly from the US Department of Energy for its electric cars.

- Tesla production lines will grind to a halt without gigantic increases in mineral extraction, especially but not exclusively in the global South, accompanied by the widespread use of local human and nonhuman bodies to absorb the resulting pollution and abuse. This, too, will be impossible without state intervention on a large scale, including military and police operations. It's not just braggadocio when Musk says "we will coup whoever we want" to get lithium for energy storage and that anyone holding adverse views of the procedure will just have to "deal with it." Effectively, such coups are already taking place. In order to secure a potential launch site for his SpaceX company on Biak island in West Papua, for example, Musk has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the occupying Indonesian military and its illegal seizures of local resources using rape and other time-tested methods of repression.
- "Mini-coups" have already been executed by Tesla within the US itself as well, enabling the company to seize resources from states and municipalities virtually at will.
- The subsidies Tesla receives from direct degradation of human labour in its factories are also considerable even if they cannot be assigned a definite numerical value. California officials, for instance, agreed to breach their own laws regarding worker exposure to Covid in order to allow a Tesla factory to compel its labour force to return to work in 2020, resulting in hundreds of infections. Tesla workers have also raised concerns about safety, low wages, and long hours.
- Further state subsidies are provided via the privatization of tax legislation. In effect, the state accepts that top Tesla executives, in common with the rest of the one per cent, are entitled to write their own tax law. Tesla benefits from tax break after tax break, while Musk himself paid no tax whatsoever in 2018. This too is a key feature of the centralized "green" system envisioned by the capitalist vanguard.
- As in traditional capitalism, fantasy plays a constant structural role in organizing Tesla-style "green" corporate parasitism and repatternings of the organic composition of capital. One example is the December 2021 *Time* "Person of the Year" coverage of Elon Musk, in which the magazine's liberal journalists and editors, channeling Marvel Comics' Tony Stark/Iron Man series, assured readers that Tesla's billions, instead of resulting from a leech-like sucking down of the poor's vitality, land, water and tax dollars with the help of the state, are instead the just reward bestowed by an appreciative free market on technical ingenuity and masculine "hard charging".

Neither Green nor Greenwash

Three conclusions need constantly to be kept in mind. First, the progressive "green" state/corporate system being promoted today by capitalist visionaries in fact constitutes both an intensification and an extensification of ecological plunder and degradation:

- If a labour-exploiting global machine mass designed to be driven by coal, oil and gas is to continue to function and proliferate without fossil fuels, biological devastation on an unprecedented scale will be necessary because of the inferior energy density of non-nuclear fossil alternatives.
- Insofar as environmental resistance is channeled into new waves of high-tech, Tesla-style mechanization worthy of investment, large new transfers of surplus value must be organized from low-tech, more labour-intensive sectors, backed by diversification in the ways nonhuman work is appropriated.
- Insofar as environmental resistance is channeled into carbon or biodiversity pricing, and those prices kept low enough for capital accumulation to continue, vast new reaches of cheap land and labour must be recruited to provide services that a large new capitalist

consultariat can falsely portray as “cleaning,” “compensation,” or “rejuvenation.” (As long as the inability of regulation to distinguish fake emissions reductions or fake energy transitions from genuine ones can be guaranteed, capital’s target must remain regulatory capture rather than climate action, because fake reductions and transitions are cheaper than real ones.)

- This recruitment greatly speeds the wearing out of the world, not only by unkinking conventional extraction pipelines that might otherwise be kinked by regulation, but also in its own right, by opening new exhaustible frontiers of extraction of environmental services: nature and workers must now do double duty. How many planets of trees and rapeseed monocultures will be needed to fuel “green” airlines? How many open-pit copper and coal mines to make computerized micro-exchanges of environmental services possible? How many Indigenous park rangers to make steel and cement “green”?
- These reorganizations of land and labour often demand novel scales or types of social control that go beyond greenwashing and have their own intended and unintended anti-ecological effects.

If any doubt remains about the speed with which the new “green” economy is hastening the one-way capitalist trip to oblivion, the strident championing of offworld colonies by figures such as Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk gives the game away. As Musk puts it, “[a]n extinction event is inevitable … either we spread Earth to other planets, or we risk going extinct.” When the clock runs out on the carbon offset scams, the land grabs for wind farms and plantations, the infrastructure corridors fitted out with integral ecosystem service production and all the other Ponzi schemes on offer, the fantasy is to take surplus appropriation to earth orbit, the moon and beyond. According to Musk, Mars, for example, must now be terraformed, the most efficient means of doing so being “to drop thermonuclear weapons over the poles.”

A second conclusion is that, contrary to much environmentalist rhetoric and accusations from within the financial sector itself, these processes amount to a great deal more than “greenwashing.” They represent something far more serious and systematic. Greenwashing is when you disguise business as usual with a thin green coat of paint. But for capital there can never be any such thing as business as usual. Ecological crisis and resistance is forcing it to contemplate revamps from top to bottom – just not in a way that has anything to do with human survival. The changes being urged by BlackRock, McKinsey and other capitalist vanguards do not amount merely to shifting advertising budgets and putting a few more environmentalists on the PR payroll of major companies, although for sure that’s also happening. It’s not just about finding new propaganda to cover up the structure of tired old methods of surplus extraction, although, again, that’s one key part of the picture. The more significant proposed changes, rather, involve, as suggested above, wholesale reorganization of labour and land to meet fresh crises as they develop.

Mere greenwashing can often be effectively countered at the level of ideology, with exposes, counter-propaganda and regulation of advertising. The larger global settlement being advocated by BlackRock, McKinsey, the United Nations and other capitalist visionaries cannot. For example, it’s not enough just to note that Tesla is greenwashing the unsustainable pattern of individual automobility and massive transfers of wealth from poor to rich established by fossil capitalism, although that’s certainly true. Nor, when faced with a new generation of young environmentalists streaming into careers in ecosystem service exchange, is it enough to reprise arguments used in, say, 2000 against their now-elderly neoliberal predecessors in organizations such as EDF or RFF. Such arguments remain valid, but in themselves cannot realistically be expected to have any effect whatsoever on young people incentivized with fresh billions of dollars in corporate and state money. What is required, in addition, are fresh alliances that confront the new central planning as a whole, linking feminist and antiracist movements with those battling austerity, precaritization, offsets, wage cuts, new enclosures, financialization, free trade agreements, neoliberalized housing and neoextractivism. It goes without saying that responses must also be planned well in advance to the obligatory future attempts by capital to convert these alliances, too, into living labour, commodity production, and captive regulation.

Third, for ecological resistance movements, the message is clear that the state is not going to be able to save you with regulation. The original New Deal of the 20th century, and certain subsequent efforts at social and environmental regulation, were able to hold off anticapitalism in very particular places in the global North for very limited times. The Green New Deal of the 21st century, together with the global schemes of forward-looking firms such as BlackRock, aspires to do the same, but is confronting a different kind of crisis that has already shown itself to be less responsive to temporizing measures from which ordinary people in any part of the world might expect to glean much benefit. Current state schemes for capitalist rescue simply have little use for traditional forms of protection for labour or land anywhere. They need to be met with a response that is equally free of nostalgia, clearheaded, sensitive to context and history, and open to novel kinds of alliance. Thus Kali Akuno of Cooperation Jackson in the US offers one appropriately sober retort to the enthusiasm of Asad Rehman of Global Justice Now! for preservation and defence of current UN climate planning and regulatory initiatives: "Not highlighting … our own truth, our own lessons, our own strength, and not creating our own spaces … based on our own self-organization … weakens our hand in the battle with the corporations and nation states that dominate the [UN climate] process." In somewhat different language, Chief Ninewa of the Huni Kui people in Acre cuts through much current environmentalist confusion over strategy with a single sharp aphorism: "We don't want a climate agreement. We want a values agreement."