

# **Emerging Possibilities of Social-Economic Landscapes**

## The Arising of the Ecological Class Struggle

Tom Silbiger

Writing Architecture 2023-24

Dag Petersson

Political Architecture : Critical Sustainability



## ***The Magnificent Seven: Table of Contents***

<i>Come Hell or High Water: Introduction</i>	2
<i>A Fistful of Dollars: Learning from Stages of Early Capitalism</i>	4
<i>Once Upon a Time in the West: The End of Capitalism?</i>	6
<i>Lonely are the Brave: The Beginning of a New Era</i>	8
<i>Blazing Saddles: The Traits of the Ecological Class Struggle</i>	
New Materiality	11
Cautious Scalability	13
Social Capital	14
<i>True Grit: Conclusion</i>	16
<i>Bad Company: Bibliography &amp; Figures</i>	17

## ***Come Hell or High Water: Introduction***

In the ultimate chapter of their memorandum '*On the Emergence of an Ecological Class*', Bruno Latour and Nicolaj Schults write "There are times when it's tempting to give in to despair."<sup>1</sup>

The decline of the Covid-19 pandemic allows the global economy, consumption, and consumerism to shift back into high gear. The Russo-Ukrainian war threatens to re-separate the 'West'—i.e. NATO members, and the 'East'—post-communist countries such as Russia and China. The conflict in the Middle East is spreading and affecting more and more nations world wide.<sup>2,3</sup> The cherry on top of these severe geopolitical confrontations and economic crises is the worsening ecological and climate catastrophe.

Latour and Schultz end their inspiring text with a chapter addressing the Russo-Ukrainian war that started just before the book was published. Latour and Schultz continue by pointing out that a period of 'interwar' is coming to an end, equivalent to the eve of World War II. This gloomy prediction of the future follows a 'call for action', a kind of a manifesto perhaps, for initiating a new class struggle. They claim that now is the time for a new uprising that stems from global events, and explain the reasons for a new type of classification method. One which will play a crucial role in mobilising the majority of humankind into action against ecological, social, and economical injustice.

In the following pages I will explain how an **Ecological Class Struggle** is possible.

Hence, does this mean we are on the verge of a new era? A few questions brewed inside me while reading Latour and Schultz's passage; can we prevail over the calamities that surround us, and rehabilitate our society? In order to recover, changes need to be made, but what changes can re-classification hold? And the one that got most of my attention—what traits does the new Ecological Class bring? I would like to discover what the architectural traits of the 'Ecological Class' struggle are. Or, better still, to suggest an approach for designers and participants for changing the built environment so it can accommodate the 'new reality'. I will propose what physical and systematic traits we should manifest.

Comparing Latour and Schultz's ideas with Slavoj Žižek's contemporary reading of the Communist Manifesto is an important jumping-off point.<sup>4</sup> I see relevance in combining the social approach for challenging the hegemony as seen by the former, with the economic analysis of the changes we experience of the latter [fig.1]. Through theoretical research and comparative reading I will clarify why Žižek claims that Capitalism is coming to an end, and how its collapse may help us in the upcoming struggle. Hopefully, this will reveal the options that lie ahead, supporting the argument for the changes to come and the actions needed for the Ecological Class Struggle to challenge the prevailing hegemony.

---

<sup>1</sup> Latour, Schults, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 85.

<sup>2</sup> While writing these words: American, British, Danish, Saudi Arabian, and other troops in the Middle East are shooting down missiles launched at them, at commercial freight ships, and at Israel from Yemen, by forces affiliated with the Iranian government. The engagement of the American Navy after October 2023 so far is unprecedented.

Freiman, "How the U.S. Has Increased Its Military Presence in the Middle East amid Israel-Hamas War."

<sup>3</sup> Scitutto, Liebermann, and Bertrand, "First on CNN: US Navy Warship near Yemen Intercepts Multiple Missiles, US Officials Say."

<sup>4</sup> Žižek, *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*.

What brought us to the point of ECS?

Economic analysis  
(‘The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto’)

End of Capitalism  
War  
Ecological crisis

- Collaborative Commons
- Spontaneous Ideology
- Privatisation of ‘just’
- Unfreedom (in disguise)
- Quick Mobilizing method
- Joined in arms

What will ensure ECS?

Social approach  
(‘On the Emergence of Ecological Class’)

Change of Materiality  
Mobilisation of people  
Social Capital

- Reproduction
- Scalability & Nonscalability
- Temporality
- Inclusivity
- Deterritorialization
- Mobilising casestudy—war & pandemics

What is EC?

Socially-Economically-Architecturally

What are the changes / traits that already exist?

What are the changes / traits to come?

If ECS is a social movement—how can we bring it into practice?

What is the phenomena of ECS?

\*ECS- Ecological Class Struggle

fig.1 Problem statement diagram: questions, answers, and ideas to explore through the threads of different approaches.

## ***A Fistful of Dollars: Learning from Stages of Early Capitalism***

Joyce Appleby defines capitalism as a system of investments in the production process of goods. In order for money to become capital it needs to be invested or destined for enterprise purposes with the intention of gaining more money or increasing the capital's value.<sup>5</sup> Appleby explains that the capitalist system didn't start as an '-ism', but as ways of conducting businesses that appeared to be successful and therefore thrived. Capitalism is not solely an economic method, it is also a political and moral structure.

In this chapter I will swiftly go through some steps in the progression of capitalism that I find relevant for the discussion of scalability, ecological economies, and human relations as part of commerce networks. Unfortunately, I cannot dive deeper into them and expand on a few more as I planned, however, I think that before approaching 'the end of capitalism' there are things to learn from its early stages.

### Early Capitalism

During the feudal regime and the middle ages two major transitions occurred. Roughly between the 9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the feudal socio-economic system started to crack the hegemony of nobility families and their control over land. In order to protect themselves, feudals used to pay mercenaries with land, not with money, allowing "*strong, brave, energetic, and fearless*"<sup>6</sup> men to accumulate real estate not only by inheritance. The second blow to the hegemony was the change of social status from slavery to serfdom for many peasants working in agriculture.

These cases of re-classification are not the outcome of an institutional manoeuvre, they didn't start nor were they supported by educational, cultural, or communication processes. As I will show in the next chapter, changes like those mentioned above align with my thesis that '*Spontaneous Ideology*' has a substantial part in making the first cracks in a totalitarian and dominant hegemony.

### Capitalistic Mentality

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, protestants, and especially Calvinists, gained many followers in England, Scotland, France, and the Netherlands after they detached from the Catholic Church. The puritan nature of Calvinism strengthened the notion of individualism among christians. This made performance of one over the collective more important; God's divinity is achieved by your own actions, rather than by the magical powers of a priest as Max Weber put it.<sup>7</sup>

In Calvinism any labour brings people closer to divinity. In other words, it doesn't matter what kind of work is done, it is just a technical means for attaining salvation. This approach of individualism and redeeming oneself by labour lead to the belief that 'doing a good job' is how one can achieve self-salvation. By this logic, domestic unpaid work should also lead to redemption, however it is overlooked, ridiculed, and estranged to the economic world. Nowadays, the topic of 'care', 'care work', 'care labour', as well as 'labour' in Hannah Arendt's writings<sup>8</sup> is trending in academic circles and feminist activism. There is great potential of

---

<sup>5</sup> Appleby, *The Relentless Revolution*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Sée, Vanderblue, and Doriot, *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

changing once again the capitalistic current mentality through a better understanding and dealing with this issue.

### The Industrial Revolution

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a hybrid of merchant-manufacturer (M-M) appeared; men who once only traded goods, now commissioned the work from craftsmen, while also providing the raw materials and tools. This made the M-M a “*master of industry*”.<sup>9</sup> The once artisan craftsmen (now working for the M-M) became wage earners, more dependent, and powerless.

Before the industrial revolution, class distinction was based on legal lineage. However, by the end of the 18th century, the British Empire controlled North America and India which enabled its economy to grow in hundreds of percentages. The demand for commodities and goods necessitated industrialised production.<sup>10</sup> The vast expansion brought upon the divergence of nobility, clergy, and commoners. Classification became fluid on the one hand, while the gap between the top and bottom of society grew further apart on the other.

Once again, re-classification is blurring the demarcation of society while polarising it further. This process of softening the division of socio-economic groups, which as briefly mentioned in ‘Early Capitalism’ began long ago, intensifies into the late capitalism period that Slavoj Žižek is referring to in his writings. Our entrepreneurial being and capabilities defined us today more than lineage, profession, or nationality.

### Late Capitalism

In reaction to the Great Depression and the 1970s’ economic crisis, a new branch of capitalism arose—Neoliberalism. With Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan taking office as prime minister and president; taxes were lowered, a shifting into a free market unadulterated with government interference began, as well as the promotion of economic competition, individualism, and privatisation. As David Harvey recognised, neoliberalism has become hegemony and ‘*common sense*’, he illustrates how it touches all aspects of our lives—“*divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart.*”<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, the spread of neoliberalism resurrected the guild-like associations, today there are more initiatives than before who take the role of government; alternative economic structures, social care, cultural reproduction, communication, etc. They are also the reason the capitalist hegemony is cracking.

---

<sup>9</sup> Sée, Vanderblue, and Doriot, *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*, 86.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 35–82.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

## ***Once Upon a Time in the West: The End of Capitalism?***

Slavoj Žižek is a Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist who's been active since the 1990s. He declared himself as first and foremost Hegelian,<sup>12</sup> However, It has been said by many critics that he incorporates different schools of thought such as the Frankfurt school, structuralism, and post-structuralism—for the most part Jacques Lacan, German idealism, Marxism, and others.<sup>13</sup>

Žižek categorises himself as a communist “*like Marx*”<sup>14</sup>. He differentiates himself and Marx from the 20th century Soviet renditions on communism and their failures. His book ‘The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto’ was published in 2018. It is a contemporary reading and analysis of the text written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. Žižek asks whether the canonical text is still relevant today. And what would a neo-communist society look like? Provocative as usual, his answer is that it would be “*where everyone would be allowed to dwell in his or her own stupidity*”, he continues, “[...] *imagine communism not as a perfectly normal society, but like a crazy society that you find like in some Bregel’s painting proverbs [...] all these madmen politely exist. Wouldn’t this be nice?*”<sup>15</sup>

### Analysis

Slavoj Žižek opens his re-reading of Marx and Engels’ communist manifesto by questioning whether it is still relevant today. Moreover, he is looking “*How, then, are we to find a revolutionary perspective and redefine it in today’s conditions?*”<sup>16</sup>

Instead of defining our time as *the end of capitalism*, it might be easier to think of it as a period of slow shift to neo-communism. Žižek points out that intellectual property could not be fully privatised. In the documentary film ‘*Marx Reloaded*’ Žižek gives an example he calls the paradox of knowledge—with ordinary material property “*through use, it gets used*”<sup>17</sup> and therefore useless for someone else. However, by using or sharing knowledge, it doesn’t become less functional, but it actually gets enriched. Knowledge as seen by Žižek is an “*anti-capitalist commodity*”<sup>18</sup>. He argues that the more developed capitalist nations become, the more they tend to make their national intellectual properties accessible, and by that unintentionally overthrowing capitalism from within. In his words, instead of privatising the general intellectual, in the form of intellectual wealth, which can be later translated into monetary wealth, there is a shift into “*collaborative or cooperative commons*”<sup>19</sup>. Hence, wealth is being shared.

This kind of wealth sharing is a process of intense digitalisation which consists of advanced data collection and its sharing. Millions of devices around the world are able to gather data and communicate between themselves, without a human-to-human interaction. The more they have their own discord; the more efficiently they will work. This relatively new industry is called ‘the internet of thing’ (IoT) and includes all devices with censoring and processing abilities that are able to connect and exchange information through a network.<sup>20</sup> IoT can be taken as an example

---

<sup>12</sup> O’Hagan, “Slavoj Žižek Interview.”

<sup>13</sup> Butler, *The Žižek Dictionary*.

<sup>14</sup> Cowen, “Slavoj Žižek on His Stubborn Attachment to Communism.”

<sup>15</sup> *Marx Reloaded*. Min: 44.52

<sup>16</sup> Žižek, *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Marx Reloaded*. Min: 46.25

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, Min: 46.40

<sup>19</sup> Žižek, *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*.

for what Jeremy Rifkin calls “*collaborative commons*”, which is what he predicts will slowly replace the capitalistic system. Competition leads to a “[near] zero marginal cost” of production, as Marx saw it to. However, in today’s case, as Rifkin shows, the low cost of production allows kicking off start-ups, writing code in open source, signing for cheap online high education, transferring money and data, and many other formally expensive actions. IoT has also brought the abundance of free access to basic platforms and services, which afterwards try to lure users to purchase the full/pro version of it. Think of Google’s gmail services, as of 2023 there are 1.7 billion active users who send 121 billion emails a day.<sup>21</sup> Sending an email takes on average 1.9 microwatts.<sup>22</sup> This means that gmail services consume roughly 230 KWh, the same as 24.5 households in Denmark (as of 2021).<sup>23</sup> Out of 1.7 billion users, none are paying the electricity bill through subscribing to gmail services.

Similar to the time of Marx coining the term ‘production forces’ (also referred as ‘force of production’),<sup>24</sup> i.e. tools which nowadays are more prevalent as digital format, are not owned by the public. However, they enable the public to gain wealth or sell their labour without the mediation of the Bourgeoisie. This in fact cracks the dominance of capitalistic structures and its very essence. The IoT also prompts economical changes in the form of digitalised rent, or technology rent which means that there is value in digital property in the same manner of land value.

Žižek brings up the term ‘spontaneous ideology’, coined by Louis Althusser,<sup>25</sup> to explain how contemporary capitalism eliminates classification as we are all seen as entrepreneurs, on different ends of a financial-abilities spectrum. Although I agree that ‘the people’ identify themselves as entrepreneurs and act accordingly, which would make sense in borrowing Althusser’s term. I argue that it is the ‘Ideological State Apparatus’, or ‘material ideology’ that compels us into this state of mind—the production of social practices by institutions, both public and private, by using media, education, and communication systems. By shifting Žižek’s accusation to the latter we align ourselves with Latour and Schultz’s plea for initiating the struggle from the bottom, as I will show soon. They call for an ecological spontaneous ideology that will come from the everyday practices and beliefs and warn that if not; “*the ecological class will always remain the rump of a party*”.<sup>26</sup> As I see it, working with ‘spontaneous ideology’ can move us forward with the upcoming struggle.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ruby, “58 Gmail Statistics For 2023.”

<sup>22</sup> “What’s the Carbon Footprint of ... Email?”

<sup>23</sup> Danish Energy Agency, “Data, Tables, Statistics and Maps Energy Statistics 2021.”

<sup>24</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

<sup>25</sup> Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*.

<sup>26</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 56. Note no.50



## ***Lonely are the Brave: The Beginning of a New Era***

'On the Emergence of Ecological Class' was published in January 2020, only ten months before Bruno Latour died of cancer at the age of 75. The memorandum is structured as 76 notes divided into ten chapters. Latour and Nikolaj Shultz's language is in unison, there is one voice talking to the reader. It shows us that although Latour is a well known figure in current political, climate, and philosophy fields, his ideology of 'New Climate Regime' is cross-generational. In his early 30s, Nikolaj Shultz is an inspiring thinker and sociologist. In their collaboration they strive to mobilise 'the people' in one joint movement, they call to temporarily abandon the factors that segregate us in order to form an Ecological Class. Latour and Schultz's way of writing together is an allegory of that.

### Analysis

Latour and Schultz talk about the current ecological movement's failure to penetrate the shield of hegemony, mainly due to its *"immense diversity of conflicts"* which is *"preventing these struggles from being given a coherent definition."*<sup>27</sup> They call for a three phase preliminary action: a) accepting the division. b) mapping the conflict. c) defining collective targets, objects, and procedures. This recipe is how we become a class, rather than individuals, minorities, or small activists groups. They deliberately use the term 'class' considering the historical implications of the struggle that comes with it, *"The commitment to preserving the basis of life is not a peace negotiation. It's a declaration of war."*<sup>28</sup> Re-classification is the way to collaborate across differences, borders, and other political arguments.

The Ecological Class needs to self determine its identity on its own terms rather than basing it on former frameworks such as 'anti-capitalistic'. By doing so it will allow more people to affiliate with its means and goals. The class definition should address the material reality and conditions that are no longer the same as seen by Marx. We are no longer defined solely by production, meaning manufacturing a commodity and its cost. There is a growing awareness of reproduction—*"what it would take to keep a worker alive"* in the words of professor Linda Scott.<sup>29</sup> We also slowly change the way we are concerned with our finite resources—extracting materials in order to sustain our prestigious lifestyle takes into consideration the *"habitability conditions of planet Earth."*<sup>30</sup> This idea is also reflected by María Puig de la Bellacasa in her book 'Matters of Care', where she talks about human-soil relations and the understanding that soil is a 'living matter' that needs to be taken care of. She points out that soil related production—mindless extraction of and from soil for consumption, is what endangers our ecosystem. By switching to reproductive methods we can still keep our ecosystem livable.<sup>31</sup> Addressing the need for soil care through reproduction is seen by Puig as a direct way to challenge hegemony.<sup>32</sup>

Latour and Schultz identify that the problem with mobilising people is their dependence on growth and production, as it has been in the past two centuries. They call the new class to find new apparatuses and driving forces for the cause which are not destructive to our habitat. The

---

<sup>27</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, 3. Note no.4.

<sup>28</sup> Neubauer, "Kulturkampf kann man nur verlieren (You can only lose the culture war)."

<sup>29</sup> Linda Scott, "Production and Reproduction."

<sup>30</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 13. Note no.14

<sup>31</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 170.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 174.

uniqueness of the Ecological Class Struggle is the attempt to restrain the forces of production.<sup>33</sup> This is a sensible movement that deals with expansion of Marx' conditions for 'keeping a worker alive' on one hand, and rational when trying to juggle with multiple aspects on multiple fronts on the other. The reason this is possible is the suggested connection between the 'world we live in' and the 'world we live off'. The claim of rationality by old-fashioned ruling classes is dismissed by Latour and Schultz due to their lack of foreseeing the destruction and catastrophe that they brought about. Another important trait in the Ecological Class is the commitment to deterritorialise borders and fight globalisation as they are preventing the discourse of habitability from happening.<sup>34</sup>

It is hard to mobilise the people when promises of growing wealth and development are heard from the 'other side', why would *"hazy promises of envelopment"*<sup>35</sup> fuel actions? Latour and Schultz suggest redefining the freedom that will come with the new class, in contrast to the fake freedom offered by the current hegemony. Žižek also talks about how false freedom in neo-liberal capitalism is reduced into multiple choices, which paradoxically *"deprives us of the true choice of change"*.<sup>36</sup> This *unfreedom* in the guise of freedom leads to territorialisation, he claims. In both texts they see the fictitious freedom as a cyclical apparatus to rule minorities and the weak in a way that won't allow an escape to real liberty. Latour and Schultz argue that part of the liberation is to understand that we are dependent on others. This lines up with the call for acknowledging care labour that started with feminist groups in the 1970s and continues today with scholars and activists like María Puig (but impugned by Žižek). Another setback in mobilisation is the lack of time for a slowly growing audience, perfecting practises, and creating new aesthetics in order to make a change. The previous hegemony challengers, such as liberals, had centuries for preparing. We simply can't afford to waste time while our habitability is being consumed.<sup>37</sup>

Not only is it crucial to act quickly, we also need to find a way to get back our future. As modernism limited our future by using it in advance, the task of fixing the Earth and humanity has been left for later generations. *"Youth no longer represents, as it once did, the future of the system of production"*<sup>38</sup>—as they feel betrayed by the old-fashioned classes. Once again I will use the words of Puig as she explain why 'making time' is a crucial practice for reproduction, caring, and as I see it—the emergence of the Ecological Class:

*"[...] looking at temporality from the perspective of everyday experience, time is not an abstract category, or just an atmosphere, but a lived, embodied, historically and socially situated experience. Time is not a given; it is not that we have or not time but that we make it through practices"*.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, Latour and Schultz see the youth and next generations as crucial players in the struggle. They identify a few more key players: the proletariat, feminists, postcolonial movements, and indigenous people.<sup>40</sup> Žižek adds to this list the precariat, refugees, sexually

---

<sup>33</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 21. Note no.19

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 28. Note no.25

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Žižek, *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 36. Note no.30-32

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 49. Note no.44

<sup>39</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 175.

<sup>40</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 46. Note no.41-46

oppressed, and others.<sup>41</sup> All three indicate that the minorities can become the majority. The list is growing the more you read the memorandum, joining engineers and inventors, intellectuals, and people that saw the ruin of their own land.

Although the Ecological Class encompasses the majority, it lacks the driving forces to replace the hegemony. The paradox is that in order to challenge and fight the expansion of production, and therefore destruction, it needs to stay in small-scale practices. In this sense, scalability could be dangerous to the struggle's goals while important for achieving them. Latour and Schultz contribute the last part of their text to remind us that economical change alone is not sufficient for new classification and struggle. They are calling for "*establishing a cultural inventory*"<sup>42</sup> before even beginning the full attack on hegemony. I identify a resemblance between their term 'cultural inventory' and Pierre Bourdieu's term 'Cultural reproduction'<sup>43</sup>—the procedure of forming and delegating social values, practices, and common sense from one person to another and from one generation to another. And 'Habitus'—the collection of social norms and rules that structure human behaviour and our disposition in society, shaped by interactions with others and not as individuals.

Similar to Žižek's understanding of the need for 'spontaneous ideology', Latour and Schultz realise that this important process of self description cannot be manifested by the government or the elite alone, it comes from the bottom—the inhabitants that no longer live in the old fashioned world. It is crucial for the Ecological Class to amplify cultural baggage that is being reproduced by its own people, "*The more they describe themselves, the more they give vent to their grievances, the more audible those grievances become to the others.*"<sup>44</sup> Only then, as Latour and Schultz claim, can it start conversing with other classes in an attempt to draw them closer into the new class.

---

<sup>41</sup> Žižek, *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 56. Note no.50

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

<sup>44</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 78. Note no.70

## ***Blazing Saddles: The Traits of the Ecological Class Struggle***

The traits of the Ecological Class Struggle can be seen as both its causes and its effects. This endogeneity aligns with the concept of non-human actors and their crucial involvement in the future conditions of habitability for all life and matter on Earth. In this chapter I will bring forward what I believe to be important steps for intensifying the struggle, as well as, the new practices that come with it.

### New Materiality

The theory of new materialism, also called neo-materialism, sprung in the late 1990s. It opposes the notion that matter is lifeless. Furthermore, it recognises that matter has agency—it is both active and equipped with its own ‘capacities’ and ‘tendencies’.<sup>45</sup> This philosophy opened the anthropocentric discourse to non-human actors. Bruno Latour has been an important thinker and contributor to the approach of new materiality.

Although many consider Slavoj Žižek to be ‘old school’ in his Marxist way of thought and philosophical background, I find him liberated from some of the shackles of the ‘old materiality’. His comic approach, superstar persona, and multiple self-contradictions in his theory brings me to think that he uses ‘new materiality’ logic more than he gets credit for. Still there is a huge difference between the two approaches; while Latour and Shoultz emphasise the habitability conditions of Earth and engage with acting agents (“*actants*”<sup>46</sup>), Žižek focuses more on knowledge, digital platforms, cyber assets, and the IoT, which are mistakenly thought to be part of the old paradigm. For Žižek the ‘actants’ are AI and sensing devices. Nevertheless, there are many resemblances when comparing their ideas on categorisation of labour (e.g. service, skills, hobbies, and gigs), means of subsistence, whom they address (i.e. their targeted audience), call for bottom-up changes, and the understanding that in order to replace the hegemony—something big needs to happen.

Latour and Schultz explain that the new class struggle cannot completely detach itself from Marxist material conditions of production, yet as we are no longer solely defined by the means of production, we are facing a different material reality. Earlier, I also touched upon another attitude to the ‘new materiality’—accentuating ‘*care labour*’ and domestic unpaid work. When this kind of new materiality is adjoined with Žižek, Latour, and Schultz’s notions of new materiality it allows us to break through the demarcations that construct the ‘*vita active*’ and enables new spatial opportunities. As Hannah Arendt shows the outcome of the opposite, of hiding activities:

*“[...] this manifestation, though it appears in the space where other activities are performed and depends upon it, is of an actively negative nature; fleeing the world and hiding from its inhabitants, it negates the space the world offers to men, and most of all that public part of it where everything and everybody are seen and heard by others.”<sup>47</sup>*

Even though the attempt to bring the domestic into the public realm started decades ago, it still has a crucial part in the upcoming struggle. Dolores Hayden coined the term ‘*material feminist*’

---

<sup>45</sup> DeLanda, Manuel, “The New Materiality.”

<sup>46</sup> Latour and Porter, *Politics of Nature*.

<sup>47</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 77.

for the women who called for a “*grand domestic revolution*”.<sup>48</sup> They choose attacking economic structures in pursuance of changing their material conditions. It exposed the private realm to broad daylight and made sure men started seeing women as equals. Both women-rights and civil-rights movements drastically changed the public sphere for minorities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet, there is still work to be done. The demand to monetize domestic work could do more harm than good, considering the tendency of modern economics to be “*fundamentally distinct from ethics*”<sup>49</sup>. However, we need to remember that the domestic realm is fundamental to the economy. The origin of the word ‘*economy*’ comes from the Greek ‘*oikonomia*’ (*οικονομία*) which is a portmanteau word of household-management, the ancient etymology connects the household with contribution and participation in the public life of the city state and bonds it to the community and its ethics.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of glorifying shiny corporate spaces and bragging about the newest ‘tech-parks’ [fig. 2], bringing forward the practices that are hidden in homes and closed rooms needs to be one of the struggle tactics. To use Žižek, we need to re-learn the ‘unknown knowns’—“*the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values.*”<sup>51</sup> or in other words—expose care-labour in public by the use of economic structures.



**fig.2** The empty Siemens Square (Berlin) with the development banner of the upcoming tech-park. By author.

<sup>48</sup> Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*.

<sup>49</sup> Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Leshem, Dotan, “Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by Oikonomia?”

<sup>51</sup> Žižek, Slavoj, “What Donald Rumsfeld Doesn’t Know That He Knows About Torture and the Iraq War.”

### Cautious Scalability

Alongside domestic and care labour, there are more possibilities that can drive forward the new era's economy, such as community associations and non-profit organisations. Learning from the past, when '*mercantile capitalism*' in the middle ages made merchants manage their own banking operations<sup>52</sup> or when guilds were able to accumulate wealth by ensuring worker's safety, managing investments, sharing profit, and regulating work forces.<sup>53</sup> These communal initiatives thrive albeit the competitive capitalist framework and existing oligopoly structures.

Ecological initiatives [fig.3] prove themselves efficient on a small scale. However, in order to make these practices common sense we need to scale-up their operation. The problem that Anna Tsing showcases is when projects have "[...] *the ability to expand [...] without rethinking basic elements*"<sup>54</sup> they bring ruin and disaster with them. The Ecological Class has to find a way to keep its engendering practices relevant for the struggle even on a large scale.

As I mentioned earlier, it is paradoxical that in order to become 'common sense' the Ecological Class needs to expand; in contrast to its own beliefs. Therefore, I argue that in the interest of facilitating the struggle we need to utilise 'adaptability'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, adaptability is the capability of changing for the sake of accommodating various conditions.<sup>55</sup> Hence, we cannot look for a 'one size fits all' solution for the problems we are facing, nor should we jump to scale-up successful ecological projects.



**fig.3** '*The Floating University*' (Berlin) a self-organised space and association. By author.

Latour and Schultz's call for mobilisation comes with the attempt to assemble groups of people with different backgrounds, political views, and agendas to form a cohesive opposition. They bridge the differences dividing these groups with the 'new materiality' attitude. To use their own words, "*Ecology is neither local nor global – it exists at all scales, and its metrics vary according to*

<sup>52</sup> Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus (Capitalismus)*.

<sup>53</sup> Sée, Vanderblue, and Doriot, *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*.

<sup>54</sup> Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, "On Nonscalability: The Living World Is Not Amenable to Precision-Nested Scales," 505.

<sup>55</sup> "Adaptability."

each object of study and each subject of dispute [...] It has to develop its own ways of putting together collectives and forming 'totalities'!"<sup>56</sup> Not only that a vast catalogue of ecological initiatives and ideas are needed, but also methods and ways to spread them while involving more and more people in those practices. To back their social approach with an economic reality, the shift from capitalist economy to '*collaborative commons*' and shared wealth needs to develop further, as foreseen by Žižek.

### Social Capital

As Paul Chatterton indicates, modernised urban areas discourage residents from using them by being over-orchestrated and homogenous.<sup>57</sup> Jan Gehl noted that municipalities run the cities according to company-management tactics.<sup>58</sup> These are examples of commercialising public spaces which further exclude marginalised residents and segregate them from the more welcomed residents. Erasing these barriers is crucial for empowering the relations needed for 'social capital' that can benefit not only the people, but also the municipality. Deterritorialization of geographical, cultural, and economic boundaries will have a positive effect on traits I mentioned before, such as assembling communal associations and introducing 'care labour' practices into public or even corporate realms.

Whereas 'human capital' refers to education and 'physical capital' to tools,<sup>59</sup> 'social capital' is the relations and networks between both individuals and the collective as a whole. It is accumulated by making connections, establishing bonds, and increasing the flow of information through interaction. This process forms communities and increases the feeling of belonging to them. The Formation of 'social capital' can happen inwards—by 'bonding' people within the same socio-economic group or with the same interests, outwards—by 'bridging' individuals from different groups, and outburst—by 'linking' individuals across classes or socio-economic statuses. It has been shown that communities that exhibit high 'social capital' are happier, healthier, safer, and more able to achieve communal and individual goals [fig.4].



**fig.4** Clay workshop held by author at the Tårnby Park Performance Festival, 2023. During the festival participants made symbolic artefacts and contributed them to the festival's Time Capsule. By author.

<sup>56</sup> Latour, Schultz, and Rose, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo*, 70. Note no. 64.

<sup>57</sup> Chatterton, "'Squatting Is Still Legal, Necessary and Free.'"

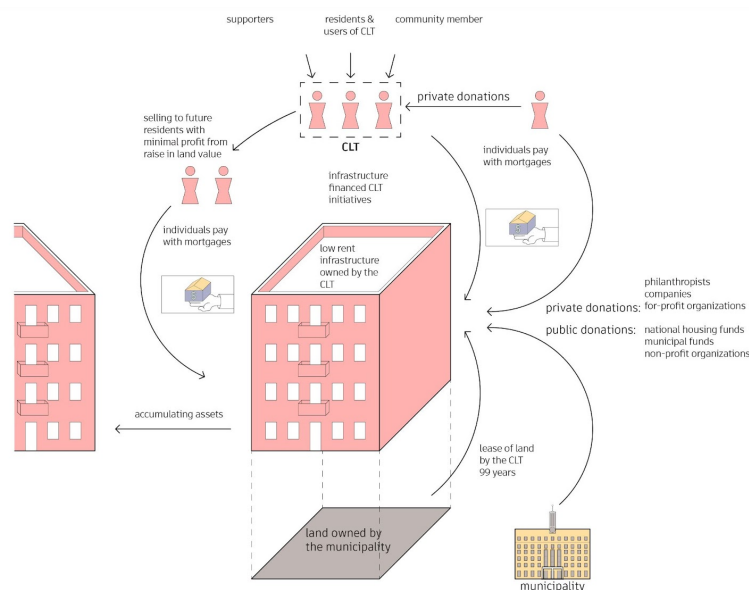
<sup>58</sup> Gehl, *Life between Buildings*.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen, Putnam, and Feldstein, *Better Together*, 15.

To give an example once again for the hidden synchronisation between Žižek, Latour, and Shultz (and by that also the two approaches apparent from the texts analysed in the former chapters), in both texts the same quotation appears: “*All that is solid melts into air*”<sup>60</sup>. It originated from Marx’s writing on the destabilising forces of capitalism over social relations. Later in the manifesto Marx and Engels explain that through these relations knowledge can be shared, which is a crucial process for the development of the class consciousness and self emancipation. Therefore, the Ecological Class Struggle needs to intensify these processes or at least allow them to evolve. This specific quote, when used by Latour and Shultz, also represents the erasure of boundaries (e.g. social, physical, and academic). An important theme in the new materialism interdisciplinary school of thought; if it makes sense to fuse feminism with ecology (‘ecofeminism’), so does combining Latour and Shultz’s definition of new materiality with what I propose as Žižek’s approach to it.

Institutional relations and their potential as resources are formed by the community’s identity and common sense. They are forged by continuous communication on an individual level on one hand, and on a collective level on the other. The decentralised nature of media nowadays helps us communicate with each other; social media, digital publications, self broadcasting, universal connectivity to the internet, etc. Digital accessibility is an important asset for the ecological class, especially when it is accompanied with physical bonds in the public realm. The struggle cannot happen in the binary world alone, therefore, collaborations are vital to sustain the relations and connections that can start or increase by digital aids.

Social relations can also form through economic processes, such as communal enterprises. The sector of financial collectives has been thriving in the past few decades. This is demonstrated by the abundance of Co-ops, Community Land Trusts [fig.5], Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), Universal Basic Income (UBI), Community Group Buying (CGB), and others. Not only that relations are being structured between individuals within those economic arrangements, they can also expand further between different groups.



**fig.5** Diagrams of CLT strategies in Northern America and Europe, part of a case study of communal financial organisations. By author.

<sup>60</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 16.



### ***True Grit: Conclusion***

The more I dove into writing this paper, the more I found it difficult to answer my posed question from the opening chapter—'what is the phenomena of the Ecological Class Struggle?' As Latour and Shultz explain, it is already present through some noticeable manifestations in the form of protests, collaborations, and discourse. Knowingly or not, Žižek identifies these occurrences in the patterns of economic changes which symbolise the death of capitalism.

The characteristics mentioned in the former chapter correlate and feed one another. The combination of a theory of 'new materiality', together with adaptable cautious scalability, and emphasising social relations, form the practice of the new era. They are simultaneously what provoke the struggle and its own manifestation. These features prompt inclusivity in public spaces both physically and digitally, as they allow different voices to be heard, alongside putting the spotlight on engendering practices that need to reappear and take pivotal part in our public life. Together they form a plan that combines both financial sense and social sensitivity. They help grow awareness of the distraction that comes with development and growth, in addition to suggesting a better way of living and being, by shifting to prosperity and envelopment. A way that considers both the world we live in, and the world we live off.

I understand 'On the Emergence of Ecological Class' and 'The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto' as declarations, intentions, world views, and motives of the three authors. Through the agency of the two texts I am putting the spotlight on what stimulates the Ecological Class Struggle, in conjunction with its expression.

It is by harnessing the opportunities that the phenomena of the Ecological Class brings with it, that we can continue increasing the defiance of capitalist neo-liberal hegemony, its destruction of our conditions of habitability, and destabilising forces that tear apart our society both locally and universally.

## ***Bad Company: Bibliography***

“Adaptability.” In *Cambridge Dictionary*, n.d.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/adaptability>.

Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London: Verso, 2014.

Appleby, Joyce Oldham. *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism*. First Norton paperback edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. 11. print. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002.

Butler, Rex, ed. *The Žižek Dictionary*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Chatterton, Paul. “‘Squatting Is Still Legal, Necessary and Free’: A Brief Intervention in the Corporate City.” *Antipode* 34, no. 1 (January 2002): 1–7.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00223>.

Cohen, Donald J., Robert D. Putnam, and Lewis Feldstein. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Cowen, Tyler. “Slavoj Žižek on His Stubborn Attachment to Communism,” n.d.

<https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/slavoj-zizek/>.

Danish Energy Agency. “Data, Tables, Statistics and Maps Energy Statistics 2021,” December 1, 2022.

DeLanda, Manuel. “The New Materiality.” *Architectural Design* 85 (January 9, 2015).

<https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1002/ad.1948>.

Freiman, Jodan. “How the U.S. Has Increased Its Military Presence in the Middle East amid Israel-Hamas War.” *CBS News*, June 11, 2023.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-military-assets-in-middle-east/#:~:text=U.S.%20troops%20in%20the%20region&text=Most%20are%20in%20Kuwait%2C%20but,Israel%2C%20since%20the%20war%20began>.

Gehl, Jan. *Life between Buildings: Using Public Space*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981.

Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Latour, Bruno, Nikolaj Schultz, and Julie Rose. *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class - a Memo: Subject: How to Promote the Emergence of an Ecological Class That's Self-Aware and Proud*. Cambridge; Hoboken: Polity Press, 2022.

Leshem, Dotan. "Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by Oikonomia?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30 (1), no. winter (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.1.225>.

Linda Scott. "Production and Reproduction." *Double X Economy* (blog), February 7, 2020. <https://www.doublexeconomy.com/post/production-and-reproduction>.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 22nd printing of 100th anniversary ed. New York: International Publishers, 1979.

Barker, Jason, director. *Marx Reloaded*. Documentary. Arte, 2011.

Neubauer, Luisa. "Kulturkampf kann man nur verlieren (You can only lose the culture war)." *taz FUTURZWEI*, September 15, 2023.

<https://taz.de/Luisa-Neubauer-ueber-Wege-zu-Klimapolitik/!5960416/>.

O'Hagan, Sean. "Slavoj Žižek Interview." *The Guardian*, June 27, 2010.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jun/27/slavoj-zizek-living-end-times>.

Puig de la Bellacasa, María. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. Posthumanities 41. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Robbins, Lionel Robbins. *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science*. Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2007.

Ruby, Daniel. "58 Gmail Statistics For 2023," August 4, 2023.

<https://www.demandsage.com/gmail-statistics/#:~:text=Today%2C%20Gmail%20has%20over%201.8,121%20billion%20emails%20among%20them>.

Sciutto, Jim, Oren Liebermann, and Natasha Bertrand. "First on CNN: US Navy Warship near Yemen Intercepts Multiple Missiles, US Officials Say." *CNN*, October 19, 2023.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/19/politics/us-navy-intercept-missiles-yemen/index.html>.

Sée, H., H. B. Vanderblue, and G. F. Doriot. *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*. Adelphi Company, 1928. <https://books.google.dk/books?id=XfA5AAAIAAJ>.

Sombart, W. *Der Moderne Kapitalismus (Capitalismus)*. Duncker & Humblot, 1902.

<https://books.google.dk/books?id=8N0VNQEACAAJ>.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. "On Nonscalability: The Living World Is Not Amenable to Precision-Nested Scales." *Common Knowledge, Duke University Press* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 505–24.

Weber, Max. *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013.

"What's the Carbon Footprint of ... Email?" n.d.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/green-living-blog/2010/oct/21/carbon-footprint-email>.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019.

Žižek, Slavoj. "What Donald Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Torture and the Iraq War." *In These Times*, May 21, 2004, Unholy Empire, 21.06.2004 edition, sec. Culture.  
<https://inthesetimes.com/article/what-rumsfeld-doesn-know-that-he-knows-about-abu-ghraib>

## Figures

- fig.1 Problem statement diagram: questions, answers, and ideas to explore through the threads of different approaches. by author.
- fig.2 The empty Siemens Square (Berlin) with the development banner of the upcoming tech-park. By author.
- fig.3 'The Floating University' (Berlin) a self-organised space and association. By author.
- fig.4 Clay workshop held by author at the Tårnby Park Performance Festival, 2023. During the festival participants made symbolic artefacts and contributed them to the festival's Time Capsule. By author.
- fig.5 Diagrams of CLT strategies in Northern America and Europe, part of a case study of communal financial organisations. By author.