Beyond Capitalism: Imagining Life After Ruin

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Abstract

This article approaches the climate crisis as a crisis of imagination, building upon post-capitalist thought and Mark Fisher's 'capitalist realism' to outline a framework for imagining beyond the capitalist present. Beginning with Maroš Krivý's examination of Estonian wastelands and adjacent nationalism, the article argues that a society's identity and imagination depend upon its relationship with history. Modern-day ruins become a conceptual space for situating 'precarity' in the present, entangling humans with extra-human nature and dismantling perceived economic homogeneity under capitalism. Anna Tsing's ethnographic study of Open Ticket Oregon underpins its conclusions, as do Roy Scranton's notions of death and rebirth. This article sits alongside emerging 'degrowth' and 'prefigurative' discourses to critique certain post-capitalist perspectives failing to provide alternatives or give space to economic diversity. Ultimately, it valorises 'pericapitalist' spaces as an intermediary step between present-day capitalism and a future beyond ruin.

Keywords: Pericapitalism, post-capitalism, capitalist realism, climate crisis as crisis of imagination, eco-fascism, post-capitalist future

Introduction

The matsutake mushroom, a particularly pungent Japanese delicacy, lures Anna Tsing into an ethnographic study of economics, history and community in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Tsing, 2017). Set in a 'ruined Oregon industrial forest', her exploration follows the environments, people and markets that make these fungi so special. With it, she outlines a model for life in post-capitalist ruins, where the wastelands of human destruction become ripe for new growth and economic prosperity.

This article, however, begins in another space of ruin. Maroš Krivý's study into Tallinn's post-socialist wastelands elaborates the politics and cultural identities entwined with areas of historical human disturbance (Tallinn, 2021). Both wastelands play an important conceptual role throughout this article in cultivating either positive and actionable, or negative and reactionary visions of the future. As I will argue, how cultures engage or reject histories of people and place can shape how they move forwards.

I will not attempt to convince readers that capitalism is the driving force behind anthropogenic climate change; there is already a wealth of literature, both scientific and academic, dedicated to the subject (see Moore, 2017). I will instead work with the assumption that capitalism must be dismantled if humanity is to stave off the worst effects of the ecological collapse. In the context of Krivý's analysis, brief discussion of neoliberalism will moreover be examined as a subset of capitalism. Situated alongside developing post-capitalist discourses, which tend to call for transitions away from exploitative and ecologically harmful capitalist systems, this article valorises multiplicity and experimentation as integral to transformation. It understands the challenges impeding future imaginaries are not so much due to 'the inconsistency of economic concepts, […] but rather their scarcity' (Zanoni *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore appreciative of different potentialities and imperfect realisations of alternatives.

Prefiguration and 'degrowth societies' are frequently proposed in progressive, left-wing movements; they encompass an expansive range of alternative modes of working, living and organising in more sustainable and harmonious ways. Denoting groups whose 'values of radical democracy, equality, diversity, freedom and community are embodied in particular organizing practices', prefiguration usually entails a 'means-ends equivalence' as well as a disinterest in institutional politics and seizure of state power (Schiller-Merkens, 2022). Meanwhile, degrowth movements frequently involve a 'planned reduction of energy and resource use designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human wellbeing' (Hickel, 2021). This article certainly falls under their scope, valorising eco-praxis as well as communities and landscapes that are, by their very nature, conducive to diversity, entanglement with extra-human nature and commodities. However, I am more concerned with developing a conceptual tool for facilitating experimentation, multiplicity and imperfection among communities and individuals who may desire transformation yet lack the capacity to imagine or enact it. This mode of thinking is in line with various calls for 'multiplicity and heterogeneity of practical knowledge' among academics, like Simone Schiller-Merkens (2022). It moreover resonates with the need to cultivate viable and appealing post-capitalist transitions for key social groups, such as labour unions and governments, that have rarely engaged with prefigurative politics and degrowth (Buch-Hansen, 2023).

Before I begin, I wish to note that although this article focuses on 'bottom-up', localised approaches to socio-economic transformation, as defined by Jacob A. Hasselbalch and others, it does not refute the necessity of 'top-down' solutions and mass action to mitigate the worst effects of climate change (Hasselbalch *et al.*, 2023). Given recent scandals whereby PM Rishi Sunak opened hundreds of new licences for oil and gas extraction in the North Sea following his family firm's billion-dollar deal with BP (Peat, 2023), as well as persistent, unmitigated growth of private fossil fuel companies, it simply seems that 'bottom-up' may be the most plausible course of action at present (Milman, 2023).

Wasteland imaginaries

Tallinn, the capital of the former Soviet republic Estonia, is the setting of Krivý's work on the ideological impact of post-socialist, ecological imaginaries in delegitimising contemporary socialism (Krivý, 2021). Notably, 'post-socialist' refers here to society after 'really existing socialism', like that imposed by the USSR in Eastern Europe, rather than a Marxist conception (Nove, 1990: 172). Krivý examines Estonia's rising neoliberal and nationalist politics, where local elites have been using 'imaginaries of ecosystems and wastelands to "other" the Soviet-socialist past' (Krivý 2021: 233). His analysis unravels through two vignettes: Estonia's largest and oldest national park, Lahemaa, and the abandoned Soviet housing project, Lasnamäe (2021: 233, 236–37). As an 'ecologically valuable ecosystem', Lahemaa has become 'symbolic of national identity' and co-opted as an imaginary by nativist groups to exclude ethnic others (2021: 236). It is the latter, however, that is most relevant here.

Ideologies of ethnic and ecological nationalism can be mapped onto Lasnamäe, both as a failed Soviet project home to 120,000 predominantly Russian-speaking residents viewed as 'culturally alien to and threatening Estonians' natural homeland', and as a site where activists have attempted to revalorise the vast wastelands as diverse ecologies and spaces for cultural activities through guided walks (Krivý, 2021: 237–38). In both cases, Lasnamäe has formed an ecological imaginary contingent on the erasure of its Soviet history and the exclusion of peoples deemed 'other'. Neoliberal urbanisation projects have, for example, sought to gentrify the wastelands for young middle-class professionals (2021: 238). In this way, the lands are valorised through economic imperative, necessarily paving over environmental ruin and alienating ethnic Russian locals for

profit (2021: 238). It resembles a branch of American eco-tourism, where wealthy tourists fund national parks to view wild animals in landscapes cleansed of its local people (Zimmerman and Toulouse, 2016, vol. 3: 64–68). This may be the more explicit example of nativist racism in this vignette; wastelands reappear as valuable for ethnic Estonians once 'unsullied' by their local people and history. However, Krivý also condemns activists for their role in facilitating such projects. He contends that they challenge stigmatisation of wastelands while 'stopping short of questioning the role of class and ethnicity in the wider structures of exclusion' (Krivý, 2021: 237). It seems that they valorise the land according to an ahistorical notion of nature, disentangled from its human histories and habitation. Estonian national identity is consequently defined through absence, or in the negative, contingent on othering communities and erasing its past.

Krivý's examination reveals how ecological imaginaries based on an ahistorical notion of nature can be used in capitalist, nationalist discourses to perpetuate a nativist racism and justify the gentrification of land for profit. Consequently, Estonia's current politics and cultural identities are constituted in opposition to its Soviet past and in rejection of its reminders. This cultural positioning is useful to consider in relation to post-capitalist discourses. Although Krivý's analysis examines a post-socialist context, the prefix 'post' in each case signifies a negative construction of the cultural imaginary, in which the present or future are defined by erasing their past and beginning anew. Considering the present state of global climate emergency and rising wealth disparity, this may not sound like such a bad proposition. However, as I will now explore, historicity and economic diversity are essential to imagining beyond capitalism. Attempting to construct a post-capitalist future without adequately defining it or the tools necessary to achieve it fails to meet the challenge of the climate crisis as, in part, a crisis of imagination.

Post-capitalist politics

Fredric Jameson's truism – that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' – reverberates throughout post-capitalist discourses (Jameson, 1994: xii). It is frequently cited to articulate a failure in the cultural imagination, where humanity's existence is perceived as so inextricably bound to its capitalist systems that death feels more probable than change. While new fictional genres are emerging to fill this gap, such as 'solarpunk' (Lai, 2022), criticism of recent science fiction reveals that future-oriented imaginaries often tend towards the negative and catastrophic. Sherryl Vint, for example, notes the 'overwhelmingly dystopian tenor of recent science fiction' where societies collapse at the hands of zombie hordes or utopian imaginaries are so banal that they reveal the extent of current desperation (Vint, 2016: 106). Yet, while many existing works fail to imagine a world after capitalism, Vint contends that they do 'express a desire for life' beyond it (2016: 106). Rather than failing to recognise the faults of capitalism or desire transformation, it instead seems that the cultural imaginary lacks the tools to envisage new and viable potentialities.

This failure of imagination is the same as that in Estonia, albeit under a different politico-economic context. How its capitalist, nationalist imaginaries have developed in opposition to the socialist past has not only limited them to defining themselves in the negative, but it also inhibits the culture from building upon and recognising the attributes of contemporary socialist options (Krivý, 2021: 233). Similarly, a post-capitalist politics imagines the future in the negative, recognising the need to end the capitalism without articulating what that constitutes. This is the critique that Owen Hatherley launches against two prominent post-capitalist works, writing that 'post-capitalism, like post-modernism, is the name of an absence, not a positive programme' (Hatherley, 2016: para. 19). He instead suggests that a positive and clearly defined programme, like socialism, is more attainable because it means something (2016: para. 19). Speaking of socialism,

communism and anarchism, Hatherley argues that '[e]ach is something you might want to fight for because you believe in it' (2016: para. 19). Post-capitalism, in contrast, can never truly materialise since it has no meaning beyond what it is not.

Hatherly's critique is not, of course, applicable to the entirety of post-capitalist politics, many branches of which have developed models and practices based on 'alternative moral values' such as 'equality, democracy, community and sustainability' (Schiller-Merkens, 2022). Comprehensive models for alternative economic organisation include, for example, degrowth and community economies (2022). More specifically, Luke Yates' study into prefigurative politics in Barcelonan social centres examines groups that host workshops, foster community building through cohabitation and engage in political actions said to embody their core ideals, ranging from active campaigns to 'skipping' waste food and squatting (Yates, 2015). Contemporary British alternatives include transition towns that, according to the Transition Network, constitute community-led groups 'working for a low-carbon, socially just future with resilient communities, more active participation in society, and caring culture' (Transition Network, 2023). However, as mentioned, such groups often represent left-wing niches that have not yet been able to expand beyond so-called 'islands of socialism'. Like degrowth, they usually lack support from key social forces such as 'business associations, governments, labour unions or international organisations' that would make them more broadly viable (Buch-Hansen, 2023). That seems to be the catch: constructing communities in opposition to the dominant structures may necessarily weaken their influence on the majority. This is not to dismiss or reduce the impact of degrowth and prefigurative movements; in contrast, I would consider them essential to undermining capitalist hegemony and demonstrating viable transformations by performing and circulating alternatives in the present. Large-scale changes also will not occur without some level of mass organisation. As Schiller-Merkens states, 'the contribution of prefigurative initiatives to a broader social change' would be challenged 'without building connective structures among each other', ultimately 'deny[ing] their transformative potential' (Schiller-Merkens, 2022). These alternative case studies nevertheless represent a subset of groups and people who have already defined and acted upon their ideals, while I am more concerned with the communities and individuals who may desire transformation yet lack the conceptual tools to articulate or perform it. Constructing a framework that makes room for experimentation and various potentialities, to quote Zanoni *et al.* (2017) responds to 'a time in history in which the problem is not so much the inconsistency of economic concepts, [...] but rather their scarcity'. Roy Scranton's proposition of 'learning to die' encapsulates the necessity of both ending capitalism and using history as a conceptual tool for imagining beyond it (Scranton, 2015). Firstly, he stages present crises of global climate, thought and capitalism as part of a larger crisis: 'the suicidal burnout of our carbon-fueled global capitalist civilization' (2015: 26). Framing these crises as 'suicidal' maps a literal figuration of death onto global systems in a way that emphasises its culpability, or self-affliction. The double entendre of 'burnout' as both the unsustainability of fossil fuels and cultural, intellectual fatigue moreover situates the crisis within a shortening timeframe and creates a sense of inevitability. To this extent, Scranton argues for death, albeit 'not as individuals, but as a civilization' (2015: 21).

His notion of death is not fatalistic, however; he contends that learning to die is a necessary step in 'freeing ourselves to deal with whatever problems the present offers without attachment or fear' (2015: 27). Connoting loss and grief, a language of death facilitates mourning for habitual ways of life and future sacrifices, as well as threatened species and habitats. It is also particularly significant in the context of ruin since a language of death recognises loss rather than plastering over it. I will expand upon Scranton's framework soon, but it is important to note that his notion of death soon transforms into one of rebirth. It offers a useful dualism for imagining how cultures could move on from a place of ruin: through recognition,

not alienation. This is essential in the context of climate justice, where global cooperation and resolution will likely depend on the Imperial Core recognising their historical and financial debt to poorer countries who have contributed less to global climate change yet stand to lose the most (Warlenius, 2018: 32–47).

Mark Fisher describes the ideological hegemony of capitalism as capitalist realism, that is 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it' (Fisher, 2009: 8). This reaffirms Jameson's truism, but Fisher focuses his argument on the role of history and capitalism in compounding a certain sterility in thought. 'The power of capitalist realism', he writes, 'derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history' (Fisher, 2009: 10). Political and economic diversity is erased from history under the pervasive, homogenising influence of capitalism. Put simply, capitalism won. It is in this way that he frames capitalist realism as an elaboration of Jameson's post-modernism: a cultural scene dominated by 'pastiche and revivalism' (2009: 11). Advanced in the 1980s when, according to Fisher, 'there were still, in name at least, political alternatives to capitalism', capitalist realism refers to the 'deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility' of the contemporary (2009: 12). This is particularly important in understanding the relevance of post-socialist countries, like Estonia, as sites where capitalism's alternatives collapsed. 'Really Existing Socialism' may not have realised socialist ideals of dismantling class conflict and social problems, but it braced against capitalism's total subsumption of global politico-economics and history alongside other significant holdouts, such as the Miners' Strike crushed under Margaret Thatcher (2009: 12). Positive conceptions of the future beyond capitalism are near impossible to imagine without alternatives, as Fisher notes by the shift in dystopian fictions towards 'extrapolation or exacerbation' of the capitalist present, rather than – as they formerly were – 'exercises in such acts of imagination' (2009: 8). Sterility, in this context, is thereby culture's inability to produce anything new, where tradition is rehashed and unchallenged (2009: 8–9). To this extent, it resonates with Scranton's notion of death as a slow, 'suicidal burnout'. Sterile and dying, civilisation cannot continue without the new.

Scranton's emphasis on rebirth and historicity through the lens of death goes some way in dismantling capitalist realism. He valorises studying history and genealogies for how they 'help us see that our particular way of doing things right here, right now is a contingent adaptation to particular circumstances' (Scranton, 2015: 98). This somewhat removes the assumption that capitalism is ahistorical, inevitable or default by contextualising our present. Likewise, asserting the need to continually 'renovat[e] and innovate[e] perceptual, affective, and conceptual fields through recombination, remixing, translation, transformation, and play', he envisages how societies could use history as a playground of ideas to inspire, reimagine and test different socio-economic models (2015: 108). Scranton's concept of death and rebirth therefore confronts sterility by expounding the past as a fertile landscape beyond capitalist realism's hold. Both he and Fisher privilege the valorisation of various socio-economic forms throughout history as vital to imagining and constructing alternatives in the future. To this extent, their frameworks resonate with ongoing post-capitalist discourses. 'Archiving' is, for example, expounded by Zanoni *et al.* as an exercise that 'bear[s] witness to oppressive and exploitative power relations and their historical articulation and pain, but also to the desires for joy, for solidarity, recognition, equality, and self-determination' in a way that 'delivers and reproduces real alternatives in the present' (Zanoni *et al.*, 2017). Meanwhile, Buch-Hansen contends that degrowth societies would only ever 'evolve from transformations of the structures of currently existing capitalist societies [...] rather than from a process starting from scratch' (2023). When history is viewed in this way – as a building block, archive or 'pick and mix' of sorts – imaginations can be inspired by a number of potentialities, accounting for different peoples, places and moments. It moreover reframes the future as more malleable, making way for visions beyond capitalist realism's hold.

I began this article by discussing the nativistic, ecological imaginary of Tallinn's wastelands to outline the danger of orienting wildlife restoration and conservation efforts around absence – or, specifically, an ahistorical notion of nature dependent on the exclusion of the past and its people. Through Krivý's case study, wastelands and areas of ruin are revealed to be spaces of vast ideological, conceptual potential, where landscapes, national identity and politics become defined through either rejecting or accepting its history. Post-capitalist imaginaries, however, seem stuck in this conceptual space of ruin; apocalyptic dystopia and vague, anti-capitalist demands to end the capitalist present fail to imagine a positively defined, viable future and thereby struggle to mobilise society towards it. Fisher's concept of capitalist realism and Scranton's call for death and rebirth go some way in highlighting the conceptual traps that stunt this imagination, emphasising the need for historical engagement in revealing politico-economic alternatives. They effectively combat the apparent impossibility of looking forwards by looking back. However, a short-term and actionable transition away from capitalism towards post-capitalism remains necessary. Defined positively, with a developed sensitivity for historical, interpersonal and extra-human relations, such a transition seems possible in the ruins of an industrial forest where Tsing's study of Open Ticket Oregon once again reveals the ideological potential of a wasteland.

Pericapitalist politics

Matsutake's most common host is red pine, 'which germinates in the sunlight and mineral soils left by human deforestation' (Tsing, 2017: 6). These are the 'capitalist ruins' in which life is possible, sites of deforestation and ruination that become hubs of new cultures and trades within capitalist society, all oriented around this one, lucrative fungus. In Oregon, diverse communities of pickers divided along racial, ethnic lines crop up seasonally to forage for matsutake, often searching for freedom in labour and profit at market, either haggling or relying on close bonds with buyers (2017: 33, 272). Matsutake as a commodity is itself entangled in a web of cultural meaning, traditionally exchanged as a 'treasured' gift in Japan (2017: 105, 123).

The specificity of matsutake makes it inseparable from history. Since its growth depends on prior human disturbance through deforestation, matsutake is inextricably bound in historical, as well as human and extra-human, 'entanglements' (Tsing, 2017: 271). The processes of searching and exchanging it as an entangled commodity have grown to reflect this. However, the Oregon forest as an ecological imaginary itself deserves consideration. Wastelands and other sites of ruin appear, according to Tsing, when a 'singular asset can no longer be produced' and the space is subsequently abandoned (2017: 6). Alienated from their entanglements, commodities are extracted without regard for the surrounding human and extra-human environments, or what she calls 'living-space' (2017: 5). The way in which matsutake foragers and buyers have approached this space with a respect for entanglements and its specificity as a commodity may not be without its problems, but it demonstrates how the forces of capitalist realism and the crisis of imagination can be slowly dismantled through reframing ruin as a space of continuity and history, not opposition.

Tsing concentrates on the matsutake commodity chain as pericapitalist, 'too small and too "Japanese"' to be reformed by capitalism (2017: 70). Mingling both capitalist and non-capitalist economic forms, pericapitalist spaces are sites of economic diversity for Tsing, who looks for 'the noncapitalist elements on which capitalism depends', rather than 'alternatives to capitalism' (2017: 60, 66). The specificity of matsutake and its foraging communities facilitates a small-scale alternative to homogenised capitalist structures, representing a certain fluidity within and resistance to their hegemony. This emphasis on economic diversity, rather than outright rejection of capitalism, is arguably more effective at tackling the crisis of imagination

posed by capitalist realism since it dismantles the perceived homogeneity within the current politico-economic system. Tsing critiques the post-capitalist politics as 'premature' (2017: 65). In seeking to escape the capitalist present, they are said to overlook the diversity and fluidity of economic forms already existing within it, forms that potentially offer a more feasible and indeed actionable transition towards their desired future (2017: 65). And while Tsing emphasises that those in pericapitalist spaces are 'never fully shielded from capitalism', she valorises them as 'unlikely platforms for a safe defense and recuperation' (2017: 65). Following Fisher's thesis leads me to believe that this pericapitalist platform, in which alternative and potential economic forms may exist, is a better tool for imagining the future than strict anti-capitalist posturing.

These subversive spaces of economic diversity are also useful in combatting the specific mechanisms of capitalist alienation – that is, where human and extra-human beings are disentangled to stand alone as commodities. For example, Tsing describes the 'community, family, and ethnic-and-linguistic ties between the bosses and the pickers' that encourage an economic structure dependent on trust (2017: 272). As a pericapitalist space, the incentives and precarity of capitalism admittedly remain; yet with greater, interpersonal entanglement, there is a greater reciprocity between land, labourer and capitalist (2017: 272). This reciprocity recognises each step in the commodity chain as essential and, in doing so, begins to unravel the hierarchies and alienation inherent in capitalist structures.

Tsing also sees entanglement in the act of searching or, more specifically, matsutake foraging (2017: 243). Searching requires a deeper connection to the environment and an alignment with extra-human rhythms, simultaneously combatting capitalist alienation by 'bring[ing] us to the liveliness of beings experienced as subjects rather than objects' (2017: 243). She writes that '[f]ollowing the traces of animal lives, we entangle and align our movements, searching with them' (2017: 247). Foragers become aligned with a different mode of accumulation; like the bears, deer and elk who 'never take all the mushrooms', they are entangled in their extra-human environments and are lulled to work within a different temporal coordination to industrial capitalism (2017: 247). Indeed, this alternative temporal coordination underlies Tsing's notion of 'salvage rhythms' as an 'unorganised' charting of the assemblages of people, economies, histories and commodities that run counter to twentieth-century conceptions of business-led expansion and progress (2017: 132). In this sense, human and extra-human entanglements disrupt teleological, capitalist temporalities. Salvage rhythms impose a cyclicity on processes of recuperation that is more harmonious with nature than the forward, expansionist logic evoked by Scranton's 'burnout' imagery. To this extent, searching could constitute a subversive, ecological praxis; it is an act of labour or leisure that subverts capitalist hegemony and cultivates individual attachments to the environment. Searching or foraging models a positive alternative to capitalist rhythms and alienation by foregrounding entanglement and 'natural' cyclicity.

Through salvage rhythms and entanglements, Tsing's pericapitalist spaces offer some reprieve from capitalist realism and cultivate reciprocity throughout the matsutake supply chain. To understand how her conceptual framework could offer a transitory space between capitalism and post-capitalism, facilitating a greater capacity to imagine beyond the present, it is however necessary to examine the role of ruins and salvage more explicitly in her work.

Tsing's notion of salvage draws on more conventional connotations of rescue or recuperation. To visualise this, she retells a 'story' of a community in Borneo whose livelihoods and homes depended on a great forest (2017: 131). Stripped by a timber company and subsequently abandoned, the residents were left without the means to make a living and forced to salvage the metal scrap from the disintegrating machines left behind

(2017: 131). Presented as a cautionary tale, this vignette captures a distinctly post-apocalyptic imaginary of 'life in ruins' within the contemporary. It is as if, for this community, a Scrantonian 'death' has already happened, disrupting the strict temporal delineation between 'alive' capitalism and capitalist ruins. Tsing's focus on this localised example of ruin demonstrates two things.

Firstly, it again exhibits that a 'death' alone cannot sufficiently address the ecological crisis. Taking advantage of value produced 'without capitalist control', salvage responds to the existing environment and history, imposing a kind of neutrality on those who follow its rhythms. The specificity of matsutake and the need for searching necessitates foragers' entanglement with nature and history. Indeed, Tsing notes how 'Open Ticket's performances of freedom require following histories' (2017: 83). In contrast, this Borneo vignette reveals how similar conditions of ruin can lead to an unsustainable, sterile practice of salvage, leading Tsing to worry about 'when the scrap metal will run out' (2017: 131). Precarity certainly dominates both spaces, many matsutake pickers initially arriving as refugees and unable to rely on state welfare (2017: 101–02). Yet the ruins in Oregon differ to those in Borneo precisely because they birth a new community, a new natural rhythm and a new entangled commodity; there is a sustained reason for assemblage. Left without livelihoods, forest or the means to reconcile its past, the capitalist ruins of Borneo become sterile.

Secondly, by locating her conceptual framework in ruin, rather than preceding ruin, she helps to dispel the inert thinking that can impede climate action, produced in part by an inability to imagine the future. This vignette demonstrates that precarity and states of ruin exist within the present, necessitating more immediacy and disrupting the notion that apocalypse, dystopia or death is a future event. Indeed, this is what Scranton refers to when he posits humanity as 'already dead' (Tsing, 2017: 95). Tsing's framework goes further, however, to illustrate states of life, death and rebirth as simultaneous and cyclical. Waiting for global collapse under these circumstances is less feasible; areas of ruin in the present reveal that collapse is slow, local and now. In doing so, Tsing's analysis of matsutake's entanglements models a transitional space, both through pericapitalism and a new temporality that blurs past, present and future as more continuous and tangible.

The pericapitalist spaces of Open Ticket Oregon are not a perfect alternative to the capitalist present; unsustainable capitalist elements admittedly continue within them, such as profit-driven accumulation. Furthermore, the politically, ethnically and historically diverse patches that constitute these spaces are not necessarily unified or oriented towards collective action. Tsing underlines that '[s]alvage accumulation reveals a world of difference' where 'there is no automatic urge to argue together, across the viewpoints emerging from varied patches, about the outrages of accumulation and power' (2017: 134). There are therefore limits to relying on such communities to organically enact a cohesive eco-politics. 'Since no patch is "representative,"' she states, 'no group's struggles, taken alone, will overturn capitalism' (2017: 134). Pericapitalist spaces do, nevertheless, respond to the perceived lack of alternatives under capitalist hegemony and the subsequent struggle to imagine viable transformations. It is by making room for diversity in thought, culture and economics that these spaces begin to deconstruct capitalist realism; capitalism is revealed to be one of many politico-economic structures and the result of specific, fleeting historical conditions. As Zanoni *et al.* write regarding the archive's production of 'real alternatives', 'this is part of a post-capitalist politics in the making since such experiments, practices, subjectivities, and contradiction are active participants in building the future' (Zanoni *et al.,* 2017).

Pericapitalist spaces need not only arise in wastelands; activists and scholars have articulated various alternative economic models that can be performed within urban centres under and alongside dominant

capitalist systems. 'Cooperatives, post-growth organizations, common good organizations, community-supported agriculture, transition towns or ecovillages are', according to Schiller-Merkens, 'examples of alternative forms of organizing economic exchange' (Schiller-Merkens, 2022). Such alternatives promote feasible ways of undermining capitalist hegemony for those compelled to live and work under it.

In the interest of circulating and expanding different models, it is imperative to consider how they appeal to a wider public. Attempting to frame degrowth as more desirable to a larger number of people, Buch-Hansen posits the movement as a series of 'less and more' transitions: 'less (or nothing) of all that which is currently destroying planetary life and the planet more generally as well as all that which undermines social equity' and more of the practices that add to human and extra-human wellbeing, such as 'cleaner energy forms', 'biodiversity', 'compassion', 'flat hierarchies' and 'joy' (Buch-Hansen, 2023). Degrowth, in this sense, would give people something to look forward to with every sacrifice, hope in every instance of 'loss'. Equally, the range of 'more' items presented considers the different people, motives and places that shape communities, including individuals attracted more by pragmatic solutions – to energy insecurity or waste management, for example – than holistically 'gentler' futures (2023). Or, indeed, his attention to the individual 'self-transformations' involved in systemic change makes room for those who do not welcome 'active participation in decentralised decision-making, communal living [or] conviviality' and prefer their own space (2023). Clearing the way for various potentialities could help to cultivate more attractive and sustainable futures in which alternatives to capitalism are considered, adapted and performed according to the specific people and places they serve.

Importantly, 'both by creating imaginaries of an alternative future and by showing their viability in their everyday practices', prefigurative movements – like foraging, cooperatives and transition towns – make a post-capitalist future seem possible (Schiller-Merkens, 2022). In fact, my argument for transitional, diverse spaces that value and support multiplicity shares many similarities with transition towns, albeit in a less organised way. According to the Transition Network – a UK charity seeking to inspire, support and connect transitions – 'grassroots' transitions consist of self-organised individuals and communities who attempt to foster positive changes locally, without 'waiting for permission to act' (Transition Network, 2023). I simply chose to highlight Tsing's pericapitalist model in this article because, despite a lack of overall cohesion, its prefigurative elements inherently involve a greater level of engagement with extra-human lives and spaces. While foraging as praxis combats capitalist alienation through extra-human entanglements, the wasteland itself embodies a 'means-ends' dynamic through the implicit sense of precarity, history and plurality that define it. This deeper engagement with our environment seems essential if we are to transform our communities, politics and economies in ways that support extra-human life.

Conclusion

In this article, I sought to respond to the specific challenge that capitalist realism poses to imagining alternative futures. By examining a conceptual landscape that facilitates experimentation, multiplicity and imperfection among groups who have typically remained outside post-capitalist discourses, I attempted to strike a balance between proposing yet another idealistically defined alternative and avoiding a vague *post-*capitalist posturing.

Drawing parallels between post-capitalist thought and Krivý's Estonian vignettes, I hope to have shown how sterility is cultivated through opposition to the past. Open Ticket Oregon, in contrast, was used to exemplify a landscape defined by its precarity, history and many human and extra-human entanglements. In a sense,

both wastelands offer conceptual blank slates for envisaging the future and are shaped by their acceptance or erasure of ruin.

Through Open Ticket and its prefigurative eco-praxes, I sought to demonstrate how a plurality of people and economic forms can undermine capitalist hegemony, even in the absence of a cohesive eco-politics. Indeed, this apparent disorganisation gives hope of organically developed, accessible alternatives for people who are not necessarily politically, socially or environmentally motivated; amid reflective capitalist practices of accumulation, diverse pericapitalist spaces can develop in a way that disrupt capitalist rhythms and entangle individuals in extra-human webs of life. Dismantling perceived economic homogeneity and imagining beyond capitalism is, I would argue, both more feasible and desirable when a variety of people, environments, histories, desires and potentialities are accommodated. This 'bottom-up' approach may be limited in terms of mass mobilisation and systemic change, yet it could help engage people who do not identify with certain post-capitalist ideals, or whose actions are impeded by feelings of inertia and/or despair. Hence, thinking through wastelands is a particularly useful exercise in imagining from a starting point of loss and hopelessness.

Rather than dismiss or devalue the many alternative forms that constitute positive post-capitalist alternatives, like degrowth and various prefigurative models, this article simply sought to elaborate a conceptual tool for imagining alternatives beyond those that already exist. With this, hopefully new potentialities that respond to the specific need and desires of different people and places can be developed.

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Glossary

Capitalist realism: The pervasive belief that capitalism (where trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit) is the only viable economic system.

Eco-politics: A political ideology that aims to foster an ecologically sustainable society often, but not always, rooted in environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice and grassroots democracy.

Extra-human: Lifeforms beyond humans, often referring to animals, plants, fungi etc. but inclusive of entire ecosystems or 'inanimate' entities such as rock or soil.

Matsutake: A species of mushroom considered a delicacy in Japanese cuisine.

Non-capitalist: Undefined economic system that is not based on or conducive to capitalist modes of organisation.

Pericapitalist: Used to describe spaces where capitalism is blended or coexisting with one or more alternative economic systems.

Post-capitalist: An envisaged future in which socio-economic systems are no longer organised through capitalism.

Post-socialist: Often referring to an Eastern European context where states have adopted new or alternative economic systems after a fall or decline of 'actually existing socialism' (rather than a Marxist conception of socialism).