Do We Have Time for Democracy?

Climate Action and the Problem of Time in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

The urgency of climate change has brought democracy to a critical juncture. Existing democratic systems struggle to address the pressing time frames required for effective climate action. This article explores a fundamental shift in temporal orientation caused by climate change. Democracy's linear and progressive image of time clashes with the expanding scales of temporality, encompassing both planetary and microscopic processes. More specifically, the article examines the theoretical links between democracy, climate change, and time in the Anthropocene through empirical engagements with the climate politics associated with deliberative assemblies, community organizing, and activist movements. The core argument is that within these democratic innovations, new future-oriented responses to the crises are beginning to emerge. These innovations experiment with extending democracy's temporal image beyond its conventional boundaries, paving the way for a multi-trajectory democratic politics. The article concludes by discussing the tensions and potential consequences of these democratic practices, ultimately arguing in favor of a multiple and layered understanding of democratic time that extends beyond distinctly human temporalities.

Keywords: Democracy, temporality, climate politics, the Anthropocene, democratic innovations, activism

> "What is certain is that the glaciers seem to be shrinking more quickly, the ice is melting more rapidly, species are disappearing at a faster pace than the majestic processes of politics, consciousness, and sensibility are progressing." (Latour 2017: 108)

1. Introduction

The fate of liberal democracy looms large in debates about climate change (e.g., Di Paola and Jamieson 2018; Mittiga 2022; Abadi 2022). The yearly Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings on climate change have become a public demonstration of the inability of existing political regimes to respond with the appropriate urgency, and the yearly emissions gap reports, which track the fulfillment of the 2015 Paris Agreement, are starting to sound like a broken clock: "the international community is falling far short of the Paris goals, with no credible pathway to 1.5°C in place" (UNEP 2022). The increasing distance between the pace of climate change and the political ability to process this change has produced a creeping sense that time is running out. As a result, liberal democracies have come under pressure, not only from within by authoritarian sentiments (Connolly 2017b) and neoliberal policies (Wainwright and Mann 2018), but also from scholars asking the question: Does the pace of climate change require giving up on democracy? (Mittiga 2022).

In this article, we explore how the roots of that question is both more fundamental and more complex than is often acknowledged. Instead of engaging in the current debate about whether liberal democracies fare better than other regimes when it comes to climate policies, we argue that skepticism about democracy arises not only from concerns about political efficacy, but also because of a more radical shift in temporal orientation revealed by the arrival of the Anthropocene. In short, our wager is that as climate change intensifies and the scales of relevant political temporalities expand from immediate societal concerns to both large planetary shifts

and microscopic exchanges (including everything in between), liberal democracy is thrown into crisis due to its own image of time as uniform, linear, and progressive. This is crucial, we believe, for understanding the current crisis of liberal democracies in relation to climate change.

Meanwhile, as we also show in this article, new and future-oriented responses to this crisis are already emerging from within liberal democracies, through innovations such as climate citizens' assemblies, experiments in green community organizing, and more radical types of climate activism. Although these democratic responses differ in their approach to politics and their understanding of democracy, they all expand the current understandings of temporality within liberal democracies beyond its current remit. The contours of a new and competing understanding of temporality still remain blurred, but as we argue these innovations point towards a new organization of a democratic politics that works along multiple temporal trajectories at once, which might be better suited to navigate the complex challenges and unpredictable futures that lie ahead.

To develop this argument, we begin in section 2 by outlining the connections between democracy, climate change, and time – including how these relationships are re-organized by the arrival of the so-called Anthropocene. Section 3 brings these theoretical reflections into conversation with the ongoing climate politics associated with three democratic innovations: deliberative mini-publics, community organizing, and activist movements. Finally, section 4 discusses the tensions between these democratic practices and their respective notions of time, and how they collectively might point towards a multiple and layered organization of democratic time.

2. Democracy and the Problem of Time in the Anthropocene

"Time is broken," writes the Danish cultural historian Sophus Helle in an article from 2019. The arrival of the Anthropocene, with its cascading ecological crises, has altered the way we think about time.[1] Geological processes that used to take centuries, millennia, or even millions of years – melting of the poles, acidification of the oceans, changes in atmospheric temperatures – are all happening at unprecedented and often unpredictable speeds. Meanwhile, the political processes meant to respond and eventually slow down these changes are standing remarkably still. The old rhythms that used to control and structure our shared world have been disjointed, leaving us in a weird sort of temporal limbo where everything is simultaneously moving both too fast and too slow at the same time (Helle 2019). How are we, as scholars and democratic citizens, to make sense of time and its relation to politics in this new epoch?

In a recent article in this journal, the science studies scholar Boris Shoshitaishvili suggests that what has happened in the Anthropocene is that time, somewhat paradoxically, has become both extended and compressed.[2] The "timescape has undergone a double distortion", so to speak, with time both "'deepening' into the vast timescales of evolutionary, geological, and physical cosmological history, yet 'compressing' into the accelerated time of techno-social development and human impact on the environment" (Shoshitaishvili 2020, 126). Today, human beings find themselves enveloped in planetary shifts that previously operated along the slow

[1] The concept of the Anthropocene was first introduced by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and marine biologist Eugene Stoermer around the year 2000 (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). For a more detailed, and critical, introduction to the Anthropocene, see, inter alia, Lorimer (2017) and Ejsing (2022).

[2] Over the years, many scholars have dealt with the complex questions of the role of time in the Anthropocene. In the social sciences, see for example insightful contributions by Swanson (2016), Fagan (2019), Nordblad (2021), Kelz and Knappe (2021), and Bensaude-Vincent (2022). In this section, however, we focus specifically on two contributions by Shoshitaishvili (2020) and Connolly (2017a) that help us theorize what we call a 'multiplication' or 'pluralization' of time in the context of democratic politics.

timescales of a deep geological time, which radically exceeded human experience and action. On the other hand, as suggested by concepts such as 'The Great Acceleration', the aggregate effects of human activities since the 1950s, in a matter of mere decades, now have the power to determine the future conditions of livability on this planet for millennia, perhaps even millions, of years to come (Shoshitaishvili 2020, 130; see also Steffen et al. 2015). Constantly oscillating between these two temporal perspectives, the ongoing activities of human beings in the Anthropocene appear both less significant and more significant than ever before.

In a similar vein, the political theorist William Connolly has argued that the time of the Anthropocene is characterized by a complex interplay of multiple temporalities that include both deep time, slow time, fast time, and futurity (Connolly 2013; 2017a). For Connolly, a particular point of concern is the way in which these multiple different, yet entangled, temporalities co-exist in ways that have hitherto been poorly described by the *sociocentrism* of mainstream theories of politics (Connolly 2017a, 15–16). Political theorists have tended to pay attention primarily to the *human* temporalities of politics and culture, while neglecting the many ways in which these temporalities, too, are imbricated with, and rely upon, a range of other non- and more-than-human forces, including the various geological, biological, chemical, and microbiological rhythms that operate at radically different temporalities than the daily rhythms of human experience (Connolly 2013, 7; see also 2019) .

This relative inattention, Connolly argues, has contributed to numerous problems for the ongoing political pursuits of humans today. For example, it is becoming clearer by the day that the temporal rhythms of fossil-fueled capitalism are fundamentally at odds with the geo-physical

rhythms on which they depend.[3] In order to understand our current political moment and address the ongoing ecological crises, humans will have to come to terms with the fact that we live in a world that is inhabited by multiple other agencies that operate along different, often complex and bumpy, temporalities. Another way to convey the point is to say that where Shoshitaishvili shows how time has become stretched and compressed into both deep planetary time and the accelerated urgency of the now, Connolly's work reminds us that time was always multiple and made up of several overlapping temporalities with different temporal rhythms (see also Fagan 2019; Bensaude-Vincent 2022).

Taking these perspectives together, we might say that time in the Anthropocene is expanded and multiplied both in a horizontal direction – as time becomes simultaneously long and slow, short and fast – and in a vertical direction – with several different temporal rhythms, human and otherwise, operating alongside each other. This double expansion creates a disorienting pluralization of time, which challenges existing theories and practices of liberal democracy. Democratic time is often depicted as cyclical, with elections recurring at a regular pace and with pre-established intervals, reaffirming or contesting the old configuration of the will of the people, and beneath this cyclical dynamic lies a more fundamental belief in progress that imbues democracy with a linear notion of time (Ochoa Espejo 2015). Given the multiplication of temporalities described by thinkers such as Connolly and Shoshitaishvili, it is no surprise that the linear imaginary of liberal democracies no longer delivers. Liberal democracy is in crisis, not only because of increasing polarization and internal political disagreements, but because its institutions and underlying assumptions no longer are sufficiently

[3] For related arguments about the overt tensions between capitalist systems and environmental stability, see also eco-Marxist critiques (e.g. Foster, Clark, and York 2011; Malm and Hornborg 2014; Moore 2015; Malm 2016; 2018).

layered to make sense of the complex challenges of the ongoing ecological crises of the Anthropocene.

However, it is also worth noting that the arrival of the Anthropocene does not signal a complete break with the past or suggest that prior to the Anthropocene people lived in the smooth and linear time of Western modernity. As the indigenous scholar and environmental philosopher Kyle P. Whyte has argued, many of the dominant narratives of the Anthropocene tend to perpetuate a linear Western notion of time, where man-made climate change marks a break between past and present, which rests uneasily with the cyclical temporal orientations of many indigenous communities – for whom the threat of climate change is more like a reiteration of familiar pasts and extended colonial presents (Whyte 2017; 2018). Thus, it seems more apt to say, with Stacy Alaimo, that the arrival of the Anthropocene is an event that "extends back into the murky reaches of time, to multiple, diffuse, and rather arbitrarily designated origins, [and] adds another dimension to the epistemological anxieties of the early twenty-first century" (Alaimo 2017, 158).

These insights help underscore the point that time is not, and never was, a stable background to politics, but something that is continuously enacted and reconfigured across multiple strata of human and more-than-human existence. While modern liberal democracies have been able to ignore or neglect this insight, it now seems that time has caught up with them, creating a sense of inefficiency and slowness that critics are eager to point out as reasons to give up on its privileged position in the world of politics. The point, therefore, is not only that the problem of time has itself become increasingly complex, but also that this new temporal condition urges us to re-evaluate the way we think about democratic politics.

3. The Temporalities of Climate Action: Between Deliberative Assemblies, Community Organizing, and Activist Movements

In this section, we aim to situate the theoretical reflections about time in the Anthropocene within the realm of concrete democratic and political practices aimed at tackling climate change. Methodologically, we are situating ourselves within a recent tradition within political theory, which others have called political theory with an ethnographic sensibility (Herzog and Zacka 2019; Longo and Zacka 2019; Zacka et al. 2021). Here, we focus specifically on three cases from Denmark, each of which exemplify different ways of responding to the inertia and impotencies of existing liberal democracies: the *Danish Climate Citizens' Assembly* (a deliberative mini-public), the *Green Neighborhoods Project* (a community organizing initiative), and *Extinction Rebellion Denmark* (a climate activist movements). Our engagements with these cases draw on several years of combined ethnographic research conducted by the authors since 2020.[4]

While the Danish context is economically and culturally particular, and in that sense limits its applicability to other cases, it may still provide a glimpse into how Western liberal democracies, even relatively well-functioning ones, struggle with their own blind spots and sense of being insufficient. Our point is not that the democratic initiatives we discuss here will necessarily work everywhere. However, we do believe that these three cases offer an instructive view into how the Anthropocene's multiplication of temporalities engenders a new set of

[4] Three of the authors have followed the Danish Climate Citizens' Assembly closely and conducted both online and on-site fieldwork in the assembly process that ran from 2020-2022, while one of the authors has carried out interviews with both assembly members and organizers. Two authors have followed the work of the green neighborhoods project since its inception in 2021, while one authors has observed first-hand the work of the organizers in the initiative over a period of three months in the spring of 2022. Finally, one author has participated in actions and observed actions carried out by the Danish fraction of Extinction Rebellion since 2020. As a result of these combined efforts, the empirical material behind the analyses of this article ranges from fieldnotes and on-the-ground participant observation, interviews with actors, secondary interviews with relevant experts, as well as publicly available documents and other written materials published about the three initiatives, including newspaper and journal articles. Data from interviews and fieldwork observations can be shared upon request.

opportunities (as well as barriers) for pursuing democracy today. What those dynamics look like in notably different political and cultural contexts will, of course, have to be explored in their own right by other scholars more well-versed in those contexts.

3.1 Deliberative Mini-publics: The Structured time of Climate Assemblies

We begin with the example of climate citizens' assemblies, which have grown in numbers in recent years, leading some scholars to suggest that especially Europe and North America are experiencing a "deliberative wave" (OECD 2020; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022; Boswell, Dean, and Smith 2023). For governments, citizens' assemblies can help build and strengthen public legitimacy around a green transition. For NGOs, on the other hand, the assemblies can be a vehicle to raise the pressure on the political system by demonstrating broad-based support for more ambitious climate policies. The tension between these two sides creates a split in temporal orientation that interrupts, sometimes productively, sometimes not, the citizens' assemblies' ability to democratize green transition efforts.

To better appreciate this, consider the case of the *Danish Climate Citizens' Assembly*, which ran from October 2020 to March 2022. The assembly was part of the 2019 Climate Act that commits the Danish government to reduce CO_2 emissions by 70% in 2030 (KEFM 2020). The call for an assembly had been a prominent demand in a large civil society mobilization effort, and it was seen as a way of experimenting with new forms of citizen participation. Inspired by other cases, including countries like France and Scotland, the assembly was eventually set up as a deliberative assembly with 99 participants, selected through sortition and asked to provide recommendations on policy matters related to climate change, including education, transportation, food, and energy policies (KEFM 2021). The participants themselves

experienced the assembly work as both meaningful and frustrating: meaningful because the assembly offered an opportunity to learn more about climate change; frustrating because it seemed unclear whether and how the assembly's work would change the government's path to a sustainable future for all.[5]

Much of this resonates with the theory of deliberative democracy, which the Danish climate citizens' assembly organizers saw as their guiding framework (e.g. Benhabib 1996; Cohen 1997; Dryzek 2002; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2019; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). Apart from adhering to the theory's principle of communicative rationality, which states that consensus and convergence on a shared common interest is possible through deliberation, the organizers based their work on (a) recognizing everyone as equals and (b) promoting evidence-based and expert-driven knowledge. The organizers of the assembly's third-party secretariat placed these insights within an analysis of contemporary democracy, which sees representative institutions (parliament, parties, etc.) as necessary but insufficient to full citizen participation, justifying the use of citizens' assemblies as modes of "democratic innovation" (Smith 2019; see also Elstub and Escobar 2019).

The Danish climate citizens' assembly invoked a mix of both linear and cyclical modes of time. The Danish citizens' assembly was primarily introduced to speed up the process: citizens' assemblies are "urgently needed," as the Danish Minister for Climate and Energy stated when the assembly held its first meeting in October, 2020.[6] The assembly, however, also provided an occasion for slowing down time in order to secure the space needed to deliberate, inaugurating what we later in this article will refer to as 'deliberative' time. The organizers

[5] This latter point draws on a series of interviews with members of the assembly carried out by one of the authors. This work has not been published yet.
[6] Based on fieldnotes from the very first meeting on October 24, 2020.

sought to manage this need by asking the citizen participants to trust the process, which had been designed to fit a set number of weeks and months, and which included a carefully designed process structured around three steps: "observation," "evaluation," and "recommendation." These three steps, which were organized sequentially to secure progress, allowed the participants to cover all the chosen topics, creating the basis for the final set of more than 200 policy recommendations delivered to the Danish government and parliament on two separate occasions in April 2021 and March 2022, respectively. On both occasions, the goal was to create a process that would be in sync with the larger political system, recognizing how this system works in a distinctively cyclical manner, with elections and changes in governments happening on a regular basis.

In other ways, too, the temporalities of the Danish climate citizens' assembly were rather limited. At first, considering the subject of climate change, one would think that the assembly would entail an expanded sense of time allowing for multiple temporalities. But in practice, the assembly struggled with this expansion, in part because the theory of these deliberative processes – and deliberative democracy more generally – apply to humans alone, who are granted an exceptional status with regard to agency and cognition. In the case of the Danish assembly, this implied exceptionality engendered a certain externalization of climate change as something that exists 'outside' the assembly from where it conditioned the scope of the assemblies' deliberations but in manner that had no material consequences for how democracy as such is practiced and understood. Hence, the assembly's deliberative task was to make climate change fit with human time in order to generate the most rational type of responses.

All this is to say that the temporality engendered by the Danish citizens' assembly (and, we would argue, other similar attempts) can be seen as an effort to 'structure' the time of climate

politics in a way that fits with the existing rhythms of parliamentary politics. In the Danish case, this structuring took place, first, in the immediate sense of adjusting citizen deliberation to the ongoing processes and negotiations happening in parliament. In a more general sense, however, the structuring also entailed a subsumption of other temporalities, human and non-human, under the routinized and often short-sighted temporal rhythms of representative parliamentary politics. The very same political processes that the citizens' assembly was meant to circumvent thus provided the temporal backdrop for its work and ability to make a difference.

3.2 Community organizing: The Organic Time of Green Neighborhoods

Sparked in part by the relative ineffectiveness of parliamentary temporalities, a more participatory-based approach to climate politics has emerged alongside the interest in citizens' assemblies – what we here refer to as green 'community organizing' (Alinsky 1989; Ganz 2010b; 2010a). Historically, this tradition has its roots in the civil rights and labor movements in the United States. At the heart of the community organizing approach lies the belief that ordinary people can make a difference in their communities and in society at large by building relationships, developing leadership, and taking concerted action.

To see what this looks like in practice, consider the Danish *Green Neighborhoods Project*. The project began in the spring of 2020 with the aim of creating local and self-organized neighborhood communities all over Denmark that could help "help accelerate the green transition around the country with more wild gardens and more collaborative economies." (Omstilling.nu n.d.). The project was originally started by a small group of concerned citizens without any ties to formal politics, who simply sought to make a concrete, practical difference by promoting the green transition in their daily lives.

Because of its immediate success, the green neighborhoods project was quickly adopted into a larger initiative aimed at mobilizing more than 100,000 citizens around the green agenda before 2025 (Baastrup 2021). In the process, the practical facilitation of the green neighborhoods was taken over by the non-profit organization, Participant Denmark, who works professionally with community organizing. Within that organization, The Green Neighborhoods Project now employs a handful of full-time organizers working with community-building all around Denmark, ranging from on-the-ground work in small rural towns to collaborating with larger municipalities and helping them improve citizen involvement around public climate and biodiversity issues. Almost 200 green neighborhood groups have been established all over Denmark, with at least one green neighborhood in each of Denmark's 98 municipalities. Ongoing activities in the green neighborhoods entail anything from hosting green dinners, establishing repair cafés, planting trees, to hosting climate-related talks and larger cultural events.

The theoretical outlook that informs the green neighborhoods project is explicitly inspired by an American organizing tradition formulated by, among others, the Harvard University social movement scholar and activist Marshall Ganz.[7] Key to this outlook is a relational understanding of how collective power can be built and exercised. One that relies on identifying and training talented community leaders, who, in turn, organize and educate others to become leaders themselves, thereby creating a sort of ripple effect, sometimes referred to as a 'snowflake' approach (Ganz 2016, 2). Before any large-scale changes can happen, relationality and capacity-building, or what Ganz calls power *with* others, must be built horizontally within

[7] Ganz is one of the heirs of the Chicago-based activist and organizer Saul Alinsky, who formalized some of the key strategies and tools of community organizing in his book *Reveille for Radicals* (Alinsky 1989), which is considered an intellectual crystallization of the tradition and a manual for political organizing.

the particular communities through personal 1-on-1 conversations between organizers and citizens, house meetings and recurring campaigns – a process that takes time and sustained effort (Ganz 2016, 49-51).The underlying assumption, which is backed up by historical evidence, is that transformative and sustainable change is more likely to come from civic self-organization rather than outside pressure.

Temporally speaking, this approach to democratic mobilization can be described as 'community-centric' in the sense that the ongoing activities are synchronized with the everyday lives and activities of the people involved in the local groups. In other words, the democratic temporalities of climate politics engendered by these practices of community organizing rely on what we might also call 'organic' time: It is the social relations of the particular communities that decide the pace of transition, not what e.g. the IPCC, other expert assessments or political decision makers designate as the required pace of change.

While the community organizing activities of the green neighborhood initative seek to speed up the process of change by catalyzing action, the organizers themselves are very aware that the process cannot be forced beyond what is acceptable to and supported by the people making up those communities themselves. Hence, a lot of patience is required, which often creates tensions between the inherent urgency of climate politics, the relative inaction of the state, and the slow-paced work of mobilizing and organizing people in communities on the ground. As one of the community organizers put it during an interview, "We must hurry slowly."[8]

[8] Personal interview with a community organizer from DeltagerDanmark on March 8, 2022.

3.3 Activist movements: The Bifurcated Time of Climate Activism

Consider now our third example. In recent years, a new wave of climate activist movements has emerged. Operating under the banners of groups like Ende Gelände, Extinction Rebellion (XR), and Just Stop Oil, these decentralized activist networks are using disruptive tactics and non-violent direct action to push for a just and sustainable future.[9] Representing a new type of climate activists, the movements are determined to take bold and unprecedented action to demand systemic change. As Extinction Rebellion UK writes on their website: "We must act. And we must act now. The future of our children, and our grandchildren, is at stake" (Extinction Rebellion UK n.d.).

The Danish fraction of XR, *Extinction Rebellion Denmark*, emerged shortly after the movement's origin in the UK in 2018. During the year of the national elections in 2019, the XR organized its first series of high-profile actions in Denmark, including targeted blockades and protests at the Danish Parliament and the Danish Ministry of Climate. Since then, XR has been an active and influential force in the broader Danish climate movement with sub-groups in several Danish cities, and its members continue to engage in disruptive actions and public happenings aimed at raising awareness of the ecological crisis and demanding systemic change.

Philosophically speaking, activist movements like XR can be situated broadly within a theoretical tradition of post-Marxism sometimes referred to as 'radical democracy' (see Tønder and Thomassen 2005; Breaugh et al. 2015). The French theorist Jacques Ranciére, for example, has argued that the true democratic moment is not found within the ritualized politics of elections and parliaments, but in the moment of political disruption: it is when the hitherto unaccounted

[9] During the same years, the world has also seen the rise of influential climate youth movements, such has the Sunrise Movement (2017), which organizes young people in the US around environmental issues, and the global Fridays for Future (2018), which began when the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg decided to skip school in order to protest outside the Swedish Parliament building and calling for action on the climate crisis.

for, those marginalized by the existing political system, takes to the street and subvert the current configuration of politics (Rancière 2003; see also 2004; 2014; 2015). Another philosophical source of inspiration are various forms of eco-Marxist thought. Andreas Malm, for example, has recently published *How to Blow up a Pipeline* (2021), where he argues in favor of escalating the disruptive tactics of climate activist movements beyond their current non-violent commitments to speed up political action on climate change.[10]

As both their practices and these sources of inspiration suggest, activist movements like Extinction Rebellion are temporally oriented towards what we might call an 'accentuated now'. The position promoted by these movements is that we must act *now*, because what we do in the next few years is going to determine the livability of this planet in the long-run. For many of the activists on the street, this accentuation of the present reflects the material reality of the ongoing ecological crises, but it is also an intentional political strategy to emphasize the urgency of the present and mobilize people to change.

While these movements' temporal orientation seem quite straightforward on the surface, it entails a set of underlying tensions. On the one hand, the narratives of the climate activists exhibit an understanding of time that recognizes the existence of multiple non-human temporalities, namely those of geological and planetary change, that are moving extremely fast today and threaten to make the earth unlivable if we, humans, do not radically change our ways. On the other hand, in their ongoing political practices, the activists emphasize a human-centric notion of time that focuses almost entirely on the actions of human beings – in particular those in

[10] These theoretical debates are very much alive within Extinction Rebellion Denmark as well. For example, two of the authors of this paper took part in a workshop about Malm's work on climate sabotage in the spring of 2022, which had both members of Extinction Rebellion and other green organizations in Denmark present.

powerful positions in politics and the economy – while the natural world remains, at best, a passive (albeit rapidly changing) background.

In a more conceptual language, we might say that climate activist movements enact a configuration of democracy, climate change, and time that can be described as a 'bifurcated'. It is a model of time that emphasizes that we have a very short geological window to act on climate change and that human actions are moving all too slowly, which is why the only politics of climate change that really matters today is immediate disruptive action and militant opposition to the status quo that might, eventually, bring about a wholesale system change. As Malm puts it: "it's either militant opposition or watching everything go down the drain" (Malm 2018, 226). Salvation or apocalypse.

In other words, the climate activists enact and promote a bifurcated vision of democratic politics that utilizes climate urgency to *compress* time into an accentuated now, into a binary human decision between action or inertia that is going to determine the future of the planet.

4. Towards a Democratic Politics of Multiple Temporalities

As the previous pages illustrate, the multiplication of time that characterizes the Anthropocene has not only put existing practices of democracy into question, but also prompted different actors to engage in new ways of practicing democratic politics. While we admit, as noted above, that Denmark is a particular place for democratic innovation, and while there certainly are important differences across the world, especially with regard to democracy's history and socio-economic conditions, the presented cases might at least suggest a series of more general lessons about democratic ways of responding to the ongoing climate crisis. Rather than signaling the death of democracy, the Anthropocene is also an invitation to rework and redefine the ways in which

democracy delimits and organizes the temporal dimensions of political agency. The results of these efforts may still seem blurred, and yet it is possible to detect a number of characteristics summarized below:

Table 1. Three democratic visions of time in the Anthropocene

	Time	**Horizontal axis**	**Vertical axis**
Deliberative assemblies	Structured	Aim to promote *legislative* change by making time for deliberation about climate within existing politics	Seek to expand existing politics to also include *deliberative* time.
Community organizing	Organic	Aim to catalyze processes of *social* change by integrating climate concerns into local ways of life	Seek to expand existing politics to also include *community* time.
Activist movements	Bifurcated	Aim to speed up *systemic* change here-and-now by dramatizing the urgency of the climate crisis	Seek to expand existing politics to also include *emergency* time.

These different visions of democratic time might, at first, seem like a problematic fragmentation of democratic politics where different projects are competing against each other with incompatible visions of what is at stake. This multiplicity, however, can turn out to be a strength rather than a weakness. Given the complexity of the challenges involved in securing a deep and structural transformation of our societies in the Anthropocene, democracies are going to need multiple instruments and initiatives that can operate along several temporalities. Admittedly, even put together these fragmented democratic practices might look radically insufficient to address the systemic drivers that have put us on an accelerated path towards climate breakdown. That is true. But it is also true that there is no single – or simple – strategy or type of climate action that is sufficient today. We are going to need a multiplicity of strategies and initiatives among multiple scales at the same time.

Thus, instead of thinking of the three cases of democratic innovations as competing temporal visions of democracy, we might think of them more along the lines of what William Connolly calls a politics of swarming, where you "multiply sites and scales of political action" and move back and forth between small-scale experimentations, electoral engagements, and mass-mobilizations to create a 'citizen movement' across the globe (Connolly, 2017, 125). Below, we sketch out two aspects of what such a politics of swarming might entail: First, a *pluralization* of the types of democratic spaces of participation in a green transition and, secondly, an *expansion* of democratic time beyond the restrictiveness of distinctly human temporalities.

4.1 Pluralizing Democratic Temporalities and Sites of Participation

When looking at the three cases from a more systematic perspective, rather than in isolation, we can begin to see how the different democratic attempts to promote climate politics might work together and reinforce each other in this swarming-like way. For example, part of the political advantage of deliberative assemblies is that they are calibrated with the rhythms of ongoing parliamentary politics, and hence have the potential to change ongoing political negotiations and decision-making here and now. This advantage, however, is also their weakness, because it can prevent them from engaging in more visionary attempts to imagine futures and transformations that reach far beyond existing systems (Ejsing, Veng, and Papazu 2023).

Similarly, while community organizing can help situate climate politics along the slower and more long-sighted temporalities of capacity-building and citizen mobilization, it inevitably brings up concerns about how such local efforts can come to scale fast enough. Here, disruptive climate activist movements can help bring about a sense of urgency and a system-level critique.

But without the more long-sighted temporalities of both institutional reform and democratic organizing, climate activists risk turning democratic politics into a matter only of the here-and-now, which raise the question: What happens, then, five, ten, or twenty years from now, when the world has not been saved? In other words, structural transformations are going to require both the slower, social, and cultural dimensions of change that take place at the level of local communities, as well as the more radical appeals to systems change carried out by activist movements.

Therefore, even though the three cases of democratic innovations presented here operate according to their own temporalities, which at times might seem mutually exclusive, a democracy fit for the multi-faced challenges of the Anthropocene age will have to democratize and legitimize its operations along all three temporalities. Formal parliamentary politics must be democratized further through additional opportunities for deliberation and collective learning. Communities need to experiment with more sustainable ways of living at a pace that is congruent with local rhythms of social life, otherwise the legitimacy of the green transition might be jeopardized. Meanwhile, the required transitions will not be propelled forward at sufficient speed if not ordinary politics are continually challenged through disruptive bouts of activism that help climate politics retain its urgency.

In other words, each of the three practices are, in their different but potentially resonating ways, engaged in a reconfiguration, perhaps even ‘reassembling’, of a broken democratic time in novel, workable ways.

4.2 Synchronizing democratic politics across multiple levels of existence

There is, however, another reconfiguration of democratic time that might prove more challenging. As suggested above, contemporary liberal-democratic politics have tended to marginalize or even exclude temporalities that do not synchronize well with the hegemonic time of institutional rhythms (Connolly 2013, 2017). Similarly, as eco-feminist scholars have repeatedly pointed out, contemporary politics (and theories hereof) are generally not well-suited to deal with the representation of marginalized others, regardless of whether those excluded groups are human beings, other animals, or multispecies ecologies (Merchant 1990; Plumwood 2002; Bennett 2010; Cielemęcka and Daigle 2019; Savransky 2021).

In line with these critiques, all three democratic innovations described here resonate somewhat uneasily with temporalities at some remove from 'human-induced' time. While the ecological crises of the Anthropocene reveal the relevance of many other temporalities for the survival of humankind – ranging from the microscopic genetic evolution of viruses to the slow-moving transition between geological periods – the experiments in democratic innovation presented here all tend to stay close to the human zone of temporality. They exhibit, in other words, different variations of what Connolly calls 'sociocentrism', i.e. the "propensity to interpret or explain social processes by reference to other social processes alone," and "minimize the self-organizing amplifiers and internal volatilities of planetary processes themselves" (Connolly, 2017: 15-16).

Sociocentrism is not a unified phenomenon, however, and when taking a closer look we can observe some variation across our three cases. Each of the democratic practices include different attempts to synchronize their activities with other temporalities. Or more precisely, they

are part of an ongoing political struggle to determine what the primary temporal logics are to which other temporalities must be synchronized (see column 4 in table 1). Take deliberative mini-publics: While they generate their own temporal logics in order to make space for citizen involvement and reflective dialogue – what we call 'deliberative' time – they aim to structure these in accordance with the temporal dynamics and cycles of representative politics. In a similar way, the community organizing approach is required to adjust its own rhythms to the organic time of the communities that they are hoping to transform – they operate according to what we might call 'community' time. Finally, the bifurcation of time enacted by climate activists is structured both by the lacking pace of existing democratic politics and the approaching tipping points designated by climate scientists, which in combination necessitates what we might call the 'emergency' time of urgent and intentional human action.

In other words, all the three of these democratic practices help expand existing political temporalities beyond those of existing parliamentary politics – something that is direly needed to move beyond the political gridlock the status quo. At the same time, however, all of these three democratic practices do little work in terms of bringing democratic politics into closer temporal conjunction with the many more-than-human rhythms on which, as the Anthropocene has revealed, human survival also depends (e.g. Tønder 2017; Fagan 2019; Randazzo & Richter 2021; Ejsing 2022). Another way to make this point is to say that while these democratic innovations can help us pluralize the practice of democracy – by reminding us that we will have to work along multiple temporalities, both fast and slow, short and long-term – more work is still left to be done in terms of expanding these temporalities beyond existing human frameworks. Democratic responses to the ongoing crises will also have to entail experiments with how we might expand existing democratic politics to better account for, and become more sensitive

towards, the myriad other temporalities and rhythms of life, both human and more-than-human, that co-structure the Anthropocenes and its crisis-ridden futures.

To get a better sense of what this might entail, we can find inspiration in a range of more explorative practices that are proliferating today, although sometimes overlooked because they exist at the edges of what we usually think of as 'political'. Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, for example, has shown how a new generation of farmers engaged in regenerative farming practices enact what she calls 'soil time', which requires slowing down and adjusting oneself to the rhythms of the soil and its many inhabitants (Puig De La Bellacasa 2015; 2019). One of the lessons here is that practicing care for the earth is not only going to require an expansion of human temporalities, but also the subjugation of human temporalities to the multispecies rhythms of many other forms of life on which we depend (see also Puig de La Bellacasa 2017).

What would such a reconfiguration of political temporalities, which also included the rhythms of nonhuman timescapes, look like in the context of existing democracies and democratic institutions? It might be too early to say, but several experiments are being carried out around the world as we speak. Among these are attempts to expand formal-legal structures to better account for the needs and desires of the more-than-human world by extending legal representation to other species as well as entire ecosystems, such as forests, rivers and areas of land; what is sometimes called the 'rights of nature' movement (Fitz-Henry 2022; see also Boyd 2017; Cano Pecharroman 2018; Tănăsescu 2020). Meanwhile, local communities, like the regenerative farms mentioned above, are experimenting with various forms of opting-out and slowing down the accelerated processes of industrial farming (Egmose et al. 2021); a kind of slowing down that is increasingly being argued for in relation of the economic system as a whole

under the umbrella of ‘degrowth’ or ‘postgrowth’ alternatives (e.g. Kallis et al. 2018; Jackson 2019; Paulson et al. 2020; Hickel 2020; 2021).

Moreover, artists, scholars, and activists are currently joining forces to experiment with various forms of more aesthetic and embodied forms of nonhuman representation, which includes attempts to listen to and speak on behalf of multispecies ecosystems, such as the Embassy of the North Sea (n.d.), as well as ongoing activist attempts bring the voices of other species into the negotiations of existing politics through disruptive and artistic public happenings, as in the case of the art-activism group Becoming Species, who are taking on the crucial task of becoming political spokespersons for other species, including animals, plants, and fungi (Linh Le 2022). All of these political experiments, and many more, are needed if we are to truly bring our existing democracies beyond its sociocentric origins and begin recognizing our ecological dependence on the myriad other beings and forces that co-inhabit this planet.

5. Conclusion

In this article we have argued, first, that the temporal disjunctions of the Anthropocene with its ongoing ecological crises have thrown existing democracies into its own existential crisis, where most of the temporal rhythms of the old institutions are constantly proving unable to address the problems at hand. In response to this democratic impasse, we have investigated three ongoing democratic practices – deliberative assemblies, community organizing, and activist movements – that, in different ways, are trying to reconfigure the temporal relationship between democracy and responses to climate change. Instead of viewing this development as a problematic fragmentation of democratic efforts, we have argued that we might think of them, more constructively, as working towards similar ends, albeit different temporal trajectories, all of

which remain relevant. Meanwhile, we have argued that despite their democratic promise, these practices remain relatively human- or socio-centered, leaving more work to be done to make contemporary democratic politics, and existing institutions of democracy, more attentive to the rhythms of the more-than-human world.

In the end, none of the democratic practices outlined in this article are, by themselves, sufficient to grapple with the crises posed by global warming and the myriad other ecological threats entailed by the Anthropocene. This is not a knock against them. After all, there is no isolated thing we can do today that is not in itself radically insufficient to respond to the complex and multi-faceted ecological challenges of the Anthropocene. The hope is, however, that by working along multiple axes at the same time, and adding more and new dimensions as we go, the concerted efforts of many different collectives engaged in different-but-related struggles might come to resonate at large scales and help bring about some of the deep, structural, changes of our existing societies that are needed for our ongoing survival.

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