Research article

Green Großraum: Carl Schmitt's political ecology of space

John Peter Antonacci[a]

Abstract

How scholars conceptualize the driving forces of planetary crisis is intimately connected to how they conceptualize solutions to it. Recent scholarship has drawn on the work of Carl Schmitt, Nazi jurist and political philosopher, to articulate concepts in political ecology. These works of political ecology, however, do not engage with the problematic political history of the work and concepts developed by Schmitt. This article asks: what kinds of assumptions do we adopt when deploying Schmitt's geographical, political, and ecological conceptual apparati? First, the article draws on the work of Minca and Rowan (2015, 2016) and Giaccaria and Minca (2016) to argue that Schmitt's thought is geographical, that Nazi geographical thought was intimately tied to geographies of conquest on the part of the Nazis. It argues that Schmitt's concept of Großraum or "greater space/ sphere of influence" is bound up with Schmitt's and the Nazi's politics of an ethnically/ racially motivated politics of "Friend versus Enemy." The article then evaluates Schmitt's concept of the political and considers its implications in relation to the environmental crisis of contemporary conjuncture, arguing that Schmitt's amorphous conceptualization of the political allows the distinction between friend and enemy to be left open to interpretation, making it possible for both intellectuals and green political parties to articulate xenophobic and reactionary political positions in environmental terms.

Keywords: *Planetary crisis, political theory, Carl Schmitt, political ecology, Third Reich Geography, world-ecology*

a Binghamton University, Department of Sociology, USA, jantona2@binghamton.edu

Introduction

Our conceptualizations of planetary crisis shape our politics. How we to respond to global environmental change depends on the strategies we use to conceptualize the problems we face, and informs our thinking as to how to solve them. At the same time, our politics shape our conceptualizations of planetary crisis. Our assumptions—at once political and analytical—make themselves felt in our formulations and narrations of the driving forces of the crisis. How we approach this thorny dialectic is of profound significance. The ways that we think about the origins and historical development of crises is intimately related to how we think about solving them. If our narrations of global environmental change foreground the burning of fossil fuels as a primary driver of climate change (Malm 2016) then the abolition of fossil fuels appears as a solution to the crisis. If we center capital's mobilization of systems of power over and domination of human and extra-human natures through formulations of empire (Moore 2016, 2017, 2018) an internationalist anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics is called for.

But not all conceptualizations of planetary crisis serve a liberatory politics. Recent scholarship has drawn on the work of Carl Schmitt, Nazi jurist and political philosopher, to articulate concepts in political ecology. These works of political ecology, however, do not engage with the problematic political history of the work and concepts developed by Schmitt[1]. The most problematic element of Schmitt's political though here centers on his conceptualization of the political as the field in which one makes distinctions between friend and enemy (Schmitt [1932] 2007: 26). To make the distinction, the political philosopher accepts that "history is a crucial device through which the relation between enemies is given meaning" (Lievens 2016).

This article aims to engage in a reflexive[2] critique of Schmitt's conceptualization of the political. It asks: What kinds of assumptions do we accept when we uncritically draw on the work of Carl Schmitt when thinking about politics and crises, particularly in relation to contemporary planetary crisis? This article will interrogate what such an ecological reading of Schmitt entails. First, it suggests situating Schmitt within broadly defined "Ecologies of the Third Reich", which is a play on Giaccaria and Minca's (2016) "Spatialities of the Third Reich", that is used to name the complex, interdependent co-production of Nazism as abstract project and Nazism as concrete process. The abstract biopolitical and ecological category of *Lebensraum* will be situated within these environmentalities. Second, Schmitt's critique of the abstract, biopolitical category of *Lebensraum*, in favor of the concrete, geopolitical category of *Großraum*, will be laid out, illuminating the form and content of Schmitt's metamethodological approach to history, which entails an effort to critique liberalism and universalism for their inability to draw lines of enmity between friend and enemy (Lievens 2016: 402). *Großraum* is here framed as a concept that Schmitt formulates in response to what he calls crises of de-territorialization[3] (Schmitt 1939). Finally, the article will conclude by reflecting on the significance of the deployment of a Schmittian conceptualization of the politics of planetary crisis. It argues that Schmitt's amorphous conceptualization of the political allows the distinction between friend and enemy to be left open to interpretation, making possible the articulation of xenophobic reactionary political positions to be articulated in environmental terms.

Schmitt's influence on contemporary social scientific research should not be understated. Concepts first developed by Schmitt, such as the "state of exception",[4] "concept of the political",[5] "*Großraum*",[6] and theories of international law have, in recent years, been elaborated on and deployed by social scientists. Debate within the

field of international relations has developed in relation to the idea that climate change might serve as a crisis by which Schmitt's state of exception can, and/or should, be implemented (for an overview, see Habtom 2023). This converging of far-right and green politics is not limited to discussions at the academy. Green parties, from Austria (Opratko 2020) to Germany (Von der Burchard 2023) and New Zealand (Brown 2016), have recently articulated anti-immigrant political positions, aligning with far-right parties to call for the deportation of refugees fleeing climate disaster and war, and to curb the number of migrants allowed to enter these countries. As we shall see, this is no accident. Reconstructing Schmitt's conceptualization of the political as the articulation of the distinction between friend and enemy allows us to better grasp the contours of this unlikely alliance.

Third Reich ecologies and ecologies of the Third Reich

To ascertain the kinds of ecological thinking that might emerge from an engagement with Carl Schmitt's body of work, we must first locate him within the holistic structure of the "Ecologies of the Third Reich." Here, we investigate if Schmitt is critical of Nazi ecological thought, and if he is (un)interested in it. This investigation allows us to reconstruct a Schmittian reading of ecology. This reconstruction will begin by exploring the relationship between German academic geography, the Nazis' imperial ambitions, and the development of the concept of *Lebensraum*.

In an effort to develop a "Tentative Spatial Theory of the Third Reich" Giaccaria and Minca (2016: 19) identify two related but distinct bodies of literature regarding the spatialities of Nazism. The first, which they term "Third Reich Geographies," encompasses work that engages with "the body of spatial theories and concepts that populated the Nazis' racialized imperial fantasies and animated their *Lebensraum* policies" (Giaccaria & Minca 2016: 5). This body of literature engages with the role played by the production of knowledge in the Nazi project, focusing specifically on the colonial legacy of German academic geography, and its role in informing the Nazis' search for *Lebensraum,* or living space.

They identify a second body of literature, what they term "the actual Geographies of the Third Reich," which investigates the history of the Third Reich from a geographical perspective, aiming to reframe aspects of the history of the Second World War in spatial terms (Giaccaria & Minca 2016: 10). This body of work moves from an analysis of the ways that the production of geographical knowledge informed the Nazi project to an investigation of the concrete historical experience of Nazi territorial expansion and contraction.

Giaccaria and Minca's ultimate aim in charting a "Tentative Spatial Theory of the Third Reich" is to

> bridge the 'Third Reich (academic) geography' with the (actual) 'Geographies of the Third Reich' in order to cast new light on three key aspects of the Nazi 'spatial Weltanschauung' (worldview): (1) between biopolitics and geopolitics, (2) between a topographical and topological approach to the government of people and space, and (3) between spatial ideology and spatial practice (Giaccaria & Minca 2016: 4).

What Giaccaria and Minca offer in formulating the distinction between "Third Reich Geographies" and "Geographies of the Third Reich" is a theoretical framework that provides a way of thinking about the "body of spatial theories and concepts", the biopolitical lens, the topographical and the ideological content of Nazi thought employed by the Nazis as the *abstract* elements of the Nazi project, and the actual, geopolitical, topological, and the spatial practices lived and used by the Nazis as their historically *concrete* manifestation.

What is impressive in Giaccaria and Minca's approach is that, instead of collapsing the abstract and the concrete onto each other in an effort to provide a sort of essentialist dualism, they keep them in dialectical tension, which allows them to investigate the fundamentally co- productive and historical relation between spatial ideology and spatial practice. They strive for a broadly conceived cultural materialist (see Williams 1973) understanding of Nazi geography, in which ideas matter in the history of Nazi geographies and in which geography matters in the history of Nazi ideas.

Giaccaria and Minca's cultural materialism enables them to mobilize an appreciation for the role of the *real abstraction* in history (see Bentancor 2016; Jakes 2020; Sartori 2014; Toscano 2008). When we, as intellectuals, conceptualize something as an abstraction, we usually recognize it as such—an abstraction is a partial, selected, and incomplete picture, it is an analytical or conceptual tool used to make sense of a complex social world. Abstractions abound in the history of thought, included but certainly not limited to their racial, gendered, and class- based expressions. The problem of the *real* abstraction asks us to consider: *what happens when these abstractions are taken to be real, and are deployed as such by states, empire, and capital?* As I argue below, the Nazi's idea of *Lebensraum* was an abstraction, derived from German geographer Fredrich Ratzel's conceptualization of the nation as population. We can recognize that *Lebensraum* was an idea. But this idea was taken seriously, deployed as if it represented concrete reality. War and genocide were waged in the name of this abstract idea. This abstraction had *real* consequences in the material world.

To our benefit in attempting to locate Schmitt in Environmentalities of the Third Reich, Giaccaria and Minca's work situates the ideas and biographies of key Nazi geographers and spatial thinkers within the structure of the bio- and geo-political co-production of Third Reich Geographies and Geographies of the Third Reich. They detail the work of Walter Christaller, whose work was employed by the Nazis to develop Germany's geographical and economic strategies for *Generalplan Ost*, as well as Fredrich Ratzel, the geographer who coined the term *Lebensraum*. On this basis, we can recognize the work of Nazi geographers in their historical and political context, illuminating the perspectives and assumptions which inform their thought. I argue that in doing so, actors both directly engaged with the production of geographical knowledge (abstract Third Reich Geographies) and actors reflecting on and employing this knowledge (those who lived the concrete Geographies of the Third Reich) emerge as implicated in the "Spatialities of the Third Reich."

In a similar framing move, we might understand the Nazi's interest and engagement with ecology along similar lines, that the structure of the "environmentalities of the Third Reich" is comprised of both abstract "Third Reich Ecologies" and concrete "Ecologies of the Third Reich."

The object of Jason W. Moore's methodological and historical framework of world-ecology is structured along similar conceptual lines as Giaccaria and Minca's "tentative spatial theory of the Third Reich." Moore argues that capitalism should be understood as a world-ecology, or "a way of organizing nature." Key to thinking capitalism as a

world-ecology is a dialectical distinction, similar to Giaccaria and Minca's. For Moore, capitalism is a mode of organizing nature. Central to this project is capital's ability to code, quantify and rationalize environments towards the end of endless accumulation. This is capitalism as an epistemic *project*. The *process* of accumulation moves through the subordination and conquest of environments, securing labor, food, energy, and raw materials, keeping systemwide costs of production down and profits high (see Moore 2015: 2). Project and process here, as in Giaccaria and Minca's conception, are intimately linked—the way that Nazis, and capital see the world, and the way they move through it, continually interpenetrate one another.

Applied to the context of the Third Reich, "Third Reich Ecologies," which are systems of meaning employed by the Nazis, constitute an epistemological praxis that embodies *Nazism as ecological project*. This ecological project, the codification, quantification, and rationalization of abstract social nature, to serve the "higher goods" of Nazism, were articulated along the generally abstract lines of population ("population as general abstraction" Marx [1973]1993: 100) which embodied the real abstraction of *Lebensraum*, or "living space".

The concrete historical expression of "Ecologies of the Third Reich" should be understood in relation to the dynamics of imperial and monopoly capitalism. It is generally accepted by political economists studying the Third Reich that Nazism functioned as an alignment of the interests of the Nazi party, the German military, and German capital (see Neumann 2009; Poulantzas 1979; Tooze 2008; Toprani 2014). Nazism as project was oriented towards the attainment of the higher goods of a German *Volk* freed from the spatial constraints of population, and of German capitalists being able to compete with Anglo-American firms. The rearmament of Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, which was the goal of the German military apparatus, was both supported by and required the capacity of large German industrial firms to succeed. Conquest of territory would provide these large firms with cheap[7] raw inputs not found in Germany (Tooze 2008; Toprani 2014, 2016). The party would provide, and be provided with, legitimacy in and through the undertaking of these imperial ambitions. Nazism as process thus mobilized the epistemological formulation of *Lebensraum* as project through the dynamic of the real abstraction, which was realized as a process in historical terms by waging of a war of appropriation, genocide, and conquest.

As Moore argues, to fully understand the connections between capitalism, ecology, and empire, we must center in our analyses the "geo-cultures of accumulation" that have animated and oriented capital accumulation, conquest, and genocide over the *longue-durée* of the history of capitalism (Moore 2019). Here, ideas matter in the history of capitalism. If the guns and maps and factories are the hardware of historical capitalism, then ideology works as its software (Moore 2023), where the production of knowledge constitutes the production of abstract social labor and abstract social labor (see Moore & Antonacci 2023).

Moore writes that capital's abstractions—conceptualized to render "natures" socially abstract—should not be understood as mere social constructions. Rather, these abstractions are both violent and real. The violence of abstractions come through their sacrifice of too much of reality in the name of clarity. The reality of them comes through their ability to structure capital's ways of knowing and acting in the world (see Moore 2015: 27).

Lebensraum was the quintessential "real abstraction" for Nazism as ecological project. *Lebensraum* was an abstract "bio-geographical" concept developed by German geographer Fredrich Ratzel in 1901. The "bio" in "bio-geographical" connotes both

the fundamentally ecological character of *Lebensraum* (Ratzel was strongly influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution) and the fundamentally bio-political nature of the idea (returning to the conceptualization offered by Giaccaria and Minca of biopolitics as a key element in the abstract "Third Reich Geographies").

Abrahamsson (2013) charts the adoption of Darwin's ideas by German geographers at the turn of the 20th century, contextualizing the development of *Lebensraum* as abstraction. Key to understanding Nazism as ecological project is to see the link early 20th century German geographers made between the general abstraction of population (which they perceived of as pertaining to the "limits" imposed by external "laws of nature") and the real abstraction of *Lebensraum* (a normative praxis by which to "solve" their problem of population).

Abrahamsson writes that the reception of Darwin by German geographers was informed by

> *the nascent national project of the Second Reich, which saw Germany as being left behind in the Western European race to acquire colonies. The colonial project was simultaneously conceived as answering to economic and demographical challenges (Abrahamsson 2013: 38–39).*

The ecological principle animating the conception of *Lebensraum* turned on the relationship between a population and its environment. Ratzel produced a

> *synthetic concept […] its aim was to theorize the biological conditions and changes within a delineated area to describe the relationship between a species and a particular environment. Thus, the Lebensraum is "the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence (Abrahamsson 2013: 13; quote from Smith 1980: 53).*

A growing population, seen as an indicator of national health, would require an expanded territory to support it. Imperial expansion would thus make the growth of a population possible in metabolic terms—enough food to feed a population is required. Imperial expansion, especially in the context of the 19th century, meant inter-imperialist struggle. Space would be struggled over by different populations in a zero-sum competition (see Abrahamsson 2013: 40).

The normative and practical element expressed by *Lebensraum*-as-concept was clear. For the German population to thrive, it would need space, and this space could, and "should," be won through geopolitics: the conquest of territory, the establishment of colonies, and the building of an empire.

German geographers' adoption of Darwin employed the Malthusian imaginary, that an increase of population would be constrained by the capacity of the earth to support it (Malthus [1798] 2015: 16) on a global scale. Nations could become great powers only by occupying a larger territorial space than their competitors, allowing them to support a larger and healthier population than their rivals. "Natural selection," the struggle between peoples for space, would dictate the global balance of geopolitical power (Abrahamsson 2013: 39).

The Nazis took this struggle for space as a world-historical and trans-historical fact, demonstrated "scientifically", and saw their world-historical mission as one to lead the German people to victory in the struggle against competing empires and races, such as the "Judeo- Bolshevik" Soviet "empire," and the "eternal enemy" embodied in Europe's Jewish population (Chapoutot 2013: 48). At stake, for the Nazis, was biological "health" of the *Volk*. Chapoutot writes

The Nazi view of history was heavy with this biological and historical fear, this (literally) depressive outlook on the passage of time as a weakening and degenerating force […] In order to avoid the decline in geopolitical conditions, biological degeneration, and cultural decadence, it was necessary to attack and to strike the enemy and release Germany from the vice that was suffocating it (Chapoutout 2013: 2–6; see also Chapoutot 2018).

Appropriated by the Nazis, *Lebensraum* served as a way to see their supposed role in world-history, observe and politicize natures, rendering them socially abstract, and thus amenable to control. As a spatial concept it was biopolitical, topographical, and ideological. Through scientific analysis, the "amount" of *Lebensraum* required by the German *Volk* would be clearly identified and articulated. Here, the dialectic of the enfolding and unfolding of human action with the rest of nature is useful. *Lebensraum* as a real abstraction was born in a particular historical context, that of Germany in the late 19th century. It would be erroneous, however, to assume that only the history of German geopolitical economy, abstracted from the rest of nature, matters. Nature has a history as well (Lewontin & Levins 1997). The imperial ambitions of German statesmen and capitalists informed the quick adoption of *Lebensraum* as project and praxis.

The historical linkage of coloniality, population, capitalism and geopolitics only makes sense when we center the bio- and geo-physical conditions present in late 19th century Germany. A few examples illustrate the point. Germany had modest reserves of coal, and no oil reserves within its territory (Tooze 2008; Toprani 2014), having to purchase most of its oil either from Romania or from Anglo-American firms, imposing constraints on profitability. The failure of Prussian state-sponsored forest and soil science in the late 19th century to maintain harvest yields (Scott 1998) put similar pressures on German capital in relation to the provision of cheap food and cheap wood for industrial production. A dearth of cheap natures, accessible for appropriation by German capital meant that, in relation to other European capitalist powers that had colonies they could exploit for material resources, German capital was relatively uncompetitive. Only the conquest and control of territory could return Germany to global power status.

In the mobilization of population as general and *Lebensraum* as real abstraction, German academic geography enfolded these bio- and geo-physical conditions, as concrete historical facts, into their abstract conceptualizations of the connections among capital, space, and population. These conditions, of unfavorable bio- and geo-physical conditions and of the contradictions of monopoly capitalism converged here, and unfolded through both Nazi academic geography's projects and the actual process of the construction of German empire.

The aim of this discussion of the relationship between Nazism and ecology has been to articulate a vision in which "Third Reich Ecologies" and the "Ecologies of the Third Reich", or "Nazism as Ecological Project" and "Nazism as Ecological Process" are fundamentally co-productive. In this schema, the Nazis would take the identification and conquest of *Lebensraum*, born out of the academic body of spatial theories and concepts as their statist and world-historical ecological project, which itself enfolded particular historical bundles of social and natural relations present in Germany during the late 19th century. *Lebensraum* allowed the Nazis to abstract, identify, and quantify territory to realize their "higher goods" of a dominant and prosperous German population and German capital. The employment of *Lebensraum* as a real abstraction, as an abstraction with material force in the world, resulted in the unfolding of Nazism

as an ecological process, manifested as a geopolitical conflict over these seeable and knowable ecologies over topographical space.

By identifying *Lebensraum* as a key *abstract* element of Nazi spatial and ecological thought, and by identifying Schmitt's critical engagement with it in theoretical and historical terms, we can begin to locate Schmitt as a thinker within the holistic body of "environmentalities" of the Third Reich, allowing us to appreciate the central place that questions of geography occupied in the corpus of his thought through this articulation of the concept of a *Großraum*, or greater space. This distinction opens a window into appreciating the genealogy of thought linking Schmitt to the antinomies of political-ecological thought in the contemporary conjuncture.

Concrete ecologies of the Third Reich: Carl Schmitt and concrete order thinking

Schmitt's efforts to define the political as the distinction between "friend" and "enemy" led him to search for concepts that could adequately politicize notions of space. Two interrelated aspects of his body of thought—(1) the effort to develop distinctly German legal concepts and (2) the effort to legitimize German imperialism—inform this thinking about space. Crucially, notions of race and ethnicity here begin to populate his notions of "friend" and "enemy" in more explicit fashion.

First, as Schmitt's involvement with the Nazi party deepened, particularly after 1.) the March 1933 passage of the Enabling Act (*Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich*) enabling the German chancellor (Hitler) to pass laws without approval of the *Reichstag* or President, and 2.) his joining of the Nazi Party in May of 1933, so too did his thought develop. Schmitt saw the rise of the Nazi Party as a "legal revolution" that would require a "systematic attempt to develop an entirely new political-legal language, the language of Nazism" (Suuronen 2020: 342). His contribution to this legal revolution came in the form of his writing of *State, Movement, People* (Staat, *Bewegung, Volk*) (Schmitt [1933] 2001). Written to reflect on the abolition of the Weimar constitution and to call to supplant it with a distinctly National Socialist (as opposed to liberal) form of law, Schmitt theorizes both the structure and source of legitimacy of the new National Socialist state. Crucial to understanding how the new state structure marks a departure from the 19th century liberal state is the role that political unity and uniformity play, that "The political unity of the present-day state is a three-part summation of state, movement, and people" (Schmitt [1933] 2001). The state-movement-people triad takes as its role to lead the German people in its struggle against the "enemy"[8]. As such, for Schmitt,

> The ethnic identity of the German people, united in itself, is thus the most unavoidable premise and foundation of the political leadership of the German people. […] Without the principle of ethnic identity, the German National-Socialist state cannot exist […] it would immediately be handed over to its liberal or Marxist enemies, now haughtily critical, now obsequiously assimilationist (Schmitt [1933] 2001: 48, emphasis in original).

Schmitt here abandons his decisionist concept of law in favor of concrete order thinking (*konkretes Ordungsdenken*), a theory of law that highlights race as the origin of law and thought. Concrete order thinking conceptualizes the formation of a multitude

of legal systems in racial terms, that the fact that there are a multitude of legal and political systems arises from the notion that there are a "plurality of peoples and races" (see Suuronen 2022: 26).

Connected to the effort to define strictly German legal principles was Schmitt's effort to legitimize German imperialism. If concrete order thinking took as its aim to develop German legal concepts situated within a struggle between different racialized modes of thought, then the development of Großraum as a concept can be read as an effort to think about the relationship between race, space, and struggle. The deployment of concrete order thinking in order to precipitate a Nazi legal revolution meant securing German law against

> [t]he idea that the enemy could make judgements about the friend, which, through the Nazi legal revolution, could now be "dismissed as an intervention of 'foreign judgement' (Schmitt 1933⁹, quoted in Suuronen 2022: 28).

As we shall see, the concept of Großraum was also pitched at the level of critique of liberal interventionism's judgement of German imperialism, this time at the level of the interstate system.

In *Land and Sea: A World-Historical Meditation* ([1942]2015), we can see how Schmitt's polemicization of history works in relation to his thinking regarding race, struggle, and consciousness. Schmitt here argues that "World-history is a history of sea powers against land powers and land powers against sea powers" (Schmitt [1942] 2015). This world-historical battle is not understood by Schmitt as only waged on the level of military combat—it is a battle of different races, whose very consciousness is determined by the kind of space they inhabit. On this point, mirroring the relationship he posits between race and legal thought, he writes

> The human receives a particular historical consciousness from his 'space' […] an urbanite thinks the world otherwise than does a peasant farmer, a whale-fish hunter has another living space [Lebensraum] than an opera singer, and to a pilot the world and life appear otherwise not only in other lights but also in other quantities, depths, and horizons (Schmitt [1942] 2015: 47–48).

In a footnote written in relation to Schmitt's usage of the language of *Lebensraum*, editors Berman and Zeitlin refer to Schmitt's explanation of his use of the term offered in his 1947 interrogation at the Nuremberg trials. He claimed "that the term *Lebensraum* was inapt to describe his thought in the period 1933–1945" (Schmitt [1942] 2015: 48, footnote 76).

Scholars of Schmitt's thought have demonstrated that he instead favored and employed alternative spatial concepts in relation to *Lebensraum,* most notably those of *Großraum* and *Nomos* (see Derman 2011; Elden 2010; Minca & Rowan 2016). If *Lebensraum* does indeed represent a "real abstraction" laden with biological and ecological meaning, and if Schmitt rejected *Lebensraum* as a useful spatial category in favor of others, one might agree with Minca and Rowan and be "highly skeptical that Schmitt had ever taken the Earth into account, if by Earth we mean anything like ecology"(Giaccaria & Minca, cited in Latour 2015). It would be perfectly reasonable to argue, using a reformulation of Giaccaria and Minca's language, that Schmitt was *not* a Third Reich ecologist, that is to say, his work was not geared towards developing abstract categories and bodies of knowledge about ecologies. This is, however, not to say that Schmitt's work can be dissociated from broadly conceived "Environmentalities

of the Third Reich". Schmitt's rejection of *Lebensraum* as an abstract concept should be read in relation to what Ojakangas calls the "metaphysical core" of his work, "what [Schmitt] calls the concrete" (Ojakangas 2006: 14).

Concrete order thinking—the deduction, discovery, and transcription of norms from existing orders (Chapoutot 2013: 51), employed a "sociology of concepts" (Ojakangas 2013: 14) which would serve as a method by which to deconstruct concepts by situating them within the "conceptually articulated social structure" of a given historical epoch. These deconstructions would illuminate the historically embedded nature of the concepts in question, which for Schmitt were always political and bound to a concrete situation.

Minca and Rowan and Balakrishnan both contextualize the meaning of "concrete" in Schmitt's thought, which appeared in his 1934 (2004) "On the Three Types of Juristic Thought". Schmitt sought to critique both an abstract positivist conception of law (in line with an abstract Roman civil law) and of decisionist law (summarized in Balakrishnan 2000: 194–196), in which either a "scientific application" or "sovereign will" legitimates a legal system. This critique led him to search for a new normative basis for the legitimacy of legality, which he found in "concrete order thinking," which "framed law in relation to deeper forms of legitimacy, rooted in culture, geography, and history" (Minca & Rowan 2016: 135). Law, for Schmitt, could never be legitimate if it was based on abstract idealist codes. Rather, Law for Schmitt could only ever be "legitimate" if it were based on the "concrete" history of a particular place; that German law should be based on German history, German culture, and German norms. By 1933, when Schmitt writes *State, Movement, People*, it is clear that Schmitt refers here to the absolute ethnic identity of the German people as the sole legitimate basis of law (see Suuronen 2022: 29–30).

This critique of a "state-based, positive legal order […] coincided with a valorization of the pre-state, 'Germanic' traditions of feudal law" (Minca & Rowan 2016: 195). Minca and Rowan have highlighted the significance of this development in Schmitt's thinking regarding "concrete order thinking" claiming that it laid the foundation for his understanding of "the spatial foundations of law" (Minca & Rowan 2016: 135).

By articulating *Großraum* as an alternative normative spatial praxis to *Lebensraum*, Schmitt's use of "concrete order thinking" enabled him to critique liberalism's abstract universalism more directly. While *State, Movement, People* was concerned with preventing foreign judgement from making itself felt in German law on the domestic level, Schmitt saw a need to articulate this same need—to prevent foreign intervention—on the level of the interstate system. *Großraum*, as a spatial concept, was Schmitt's solution to the problem of a de-territorialized international politics. Universalizations that disregard space, such as humanity, had, in Schmitt's view, been weaponized post-Versailles by the Allied powers, subverting the "non-discriminating concept of war," which "did not distinguish between morally right and wrong parties." The turn to a "discriminating concept of war" thus threatened to undermine the basis for international law, framing war as a moral crime against humanity rather than as a conflict between two sovereign nations (Derman 2011: 182).

Henceforth, wars would no longer be waged between legal equals but between just parties and criminals who had violated the laws of mankind (Derman 2011: 183).

The manifold political stakes of the liberal deployment of abstract humanitarian universalizations were clear: foreign powers, claiming defense of the "laws of mankind"

would have justification to intervene in the territorial affairs of other states, amounting to a negation of their territorial sovereignty. The French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 served as an important historical example of a deployment of interventionism; failure of Germany to deliver coal to France as reparations for the "crime" (as framed by the liberal victors) of Germany's engagement in the First World War led to France's "justified" seizure of the territory. Schmitt, having come from Plettenburg in the Rhineland, was deeply impacted by its occupation, provoking a deeply nationalist and outraged response from him (see Balakrishnan 2000: 80–81).

Schmitt's identification of abstract law with Maritime Britain and of a concrete law with the European continent is significant—not only in that it represented a deployment of the logic already developed through the concept of concrete order thinking, with its emphasis on the racial and ethnic bases of law. *Großraum* entailed a new spatial division of powers, premised on

> *a vision of a new German Reich, whose form and function stood in opposition to British imperialism: unlike the maritime British empire, which espoused a creed of abstract universalism through its globally dispersed territories, the German Reich would seek a limited sphere of influence for its concrete völkisch ideology through a continental great space [Großraum] (Balakrishnan 2020: 182).*

Writing in 1939 to articulate a legitimate basis for German imperialism, Schmitt pitches the concept of Großraum (and *not Lebensraum)* against liberal universalism as a normative principle able to politicize space. He writes

> *The true, original Monroe Doctrine […] contains three simple thoughts: independence of states in the Americas; non-colonization in this space; non-interference of extra-American powers in this space, coupled with non-interference of America in non-American space. […] What is essential is that the Monroe Doctrine remains true and un-falsified as long as the idea of a concrete, specific Großraum is accepted, [a space] on which extra-regional powers may not interfere. The opposite of such a principle grounded in concrete space is a universalistic world-principle encompassing the entire Earth […] this leads naturally to the interference of everyone in everything (Schmitt [1939] 2011: 46).*

Just as "foreign judgement" was a problem for German law, so too is foreign intervention a problem for German imperialism.

The solution, for Schmitt, would come in the form of acceptance of Großraum as an organizing spatial concept.

> *[This question concerns] the opposition between a clear spatial order based on the non-intervention of extra-regional powers and a universalistic ideology that transforms the Earth into a battlefield for its interventions and [which] stands in the way of the natural growth of living peoples. We are thus not simply imitating an American model if we make reference to the Monroe Doctrine; we are merely excavating the healthy core of an international legal Großraum-principle, and developing it appropriately for our European Großraum (Schmitt [1939] 2011: 52).*

Schmitt's articulation of a critique of *Lebensraum* through the development of the concept of *Großraum* should be read, as Elden (2010) does, as a thoroughly geopolitical argument. The abstract biopolitical logic of "Third Reich geographies", captured in the conception of *Lebensraum,* is supplanted by the concrete geopolitical logic as a "Geography

of the Third Reich." Here, Schmitt's concrete order thinking as method should thus be read as an act of reflection on Germany's concrete geopolitical positionality. His critique of abstract-centric thinking in the development of Großraum-as-concept deploys a depiction of abstract thought as a rhetorical and ideological position employed by the British to intervene in the affairs of rival states, to be contested by a conscious move, by the *Reich*, to re-territorialize global politics. To engage in the deployment of abstract thought is, for Schmitt, a political move to de-legitimize a state's territorial sovereignty and imperial ambitions.

Moreover, Schmitt saw the introduction of abstract "space-disregarding" categories, and the resulting necrosis of the state as a territorial power, as an historical fact. As a result, the development of the concept of *Großraum* was a "search for alternative political forms capable of spatializing the political under changing geopolitical conditions" (Minca & Rowan 2016: 275).

Here, it is essential to unpack what Schmitt means by "the political," articulated in one of his most influential works, *The Concept of the Political* ([1932] 2007). There, Schmitt attempts to identify what constitutes "politics", separate from all other fields of social-scientific inquiry. He writes:

> *The political must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced. Let us assume that in the realm of morality the final distinctions are between good and evil, in aesthetics beautiful and ugly, in economics profitable and unprofitable. The question then is whether there is also a specific distinction which can serve as a simple criterion of the political and of what it consists. […] The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy (Schmitt [1932] 2007: 26).*

For Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*, the aim of politics is thus to annihilate "the enemy" to achieve political unity *within* the polity—which, as we have seen, by 1933 entailed the construction of absolute ethnic identity within the state (Schmitt [1933] 2001: 20). Axtmann (2007: 535) reminds us that, for Schmitt, "the political receives its real meaning precisely because it refers to the real possibility of physical killing". Remembering that his historical metamethodology involves the (re)narration of history to articulate a polemic (Lievens 2016: 401), Schmitt in *Land and Sea* ([1941] 2015] narrates a world-historical arc in which land powers engage in struggle against sea powers. Here, on the global level, the political struggle takes place on the level of ideas—ideas that organize space, and thus, for Schmitt, life.

Land powers (and here, Schmitt is thinking of Germany) fighting land wars fight *political* wars, political in the sense that states make war against the military forces of enemy states, rather than against civilian populations (Berman 2015: xxiv). Sea powers (here, Schmitt means England) fighting sea wars, on the other hand, fight wars on the sea indiscriminately, where sea war takes as its aim the evisceration of the enemy's economies. Here, the political military interferes in the private, civilian sphere of the economy, which "pulls the social world […] into warfare" (Berman 2015: xxiv).

Echoing Schmitt's critique of liberal interventionism through the deployment of *Großraum*, the political on the global level in *Land and Sea* takes the form of a struggle between the organizing ideas of abstract universalism versus concrete particularism.

Schmitt found the category of "nation" an appropriate form with which to re-territorialize the political. The elements required for *Großraum* as a political order to be realized include 1.) a *Reich*, which guarantees internal social order and conducts foreign policy with other great powers, 2.) an ideological apparatus that legitimates and

consolidates the *Reich* and organizes the *Großraum*, and 3.) a space from which foreign powers would be banned from intervening in (Minca & Rowan 2016: 276). Central to the composition of the *Großraum* was a "politically awakened nation [*Volk,*] possessed of a guiding 'political idea' or ideology" (Derman 2011: 185).

Since abstraction, for Schmitt, was a rhetorical and ideological weapon to be used towards the erosion of non-interventionist principles enshrined in the failing interstate system, it was incommensurable with an emergent concrete *völkisch* political form. The *Reich* would need to seek alternative concrete categories to articulate the conditions and stakes of geopolitical conflict, freeing itself from the "rules of the game" articulated by British universalist doctrine.

This deployment of the sociological category of "nation" represents a key development that Schmitt makes in his critique of abstraction generally, and of *Lebensraum* as real abstraction in particular. The move from an abstract, liberal-universal principle of "population" (animating *Lebensraum*) to a concrete conception of a particular, geographically and politically discreet "nation" (animating *Großraum,*) as a significant socio-political vector, opens a window into the structural position occupied by Schmitt in our broadly conceived "Environmentalities of the Third Reich". An interrogation of Schmitt's employment on the category of "nation" vis-á-vis "population" demands critical reflection of which aspects of a Ratzelian conception of ecological geography Schmitt rejects, and which he retains. The claim that Schmitt was influenced by Ratzel is a popular move, usually without reference to the biological element in Ratzel's writing (see, for example Elden 2010: 24).

As explored above, the sociological category of "population" as employed in the Ratzelian conception of *Lebensraum* constituted a central "general abstraction" for "Nazi Ecology as Project," which was framed as an abstract biopolitical, spatial, and ecological expression of "Third Reich Ecologies". Foucault argues that the modern art of government, and the study of politics as a field, takes population as its central problematic, where government's knowledge (*savoir*) takes as its object the processes pertaining to the development of the population and its relationship to the economy (Foucault 2007: 106). Governmentality thus takes as its end not only the act of governing, but also the improvement of the "the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health" (Foucault 2007: 105).

Foucault here articulated a key co-productive link between the production of abstract ideas and the concrete prosperity of a nation. He sees the development of bodies of knowledge concerning population, born out of "demographic expansion […] linked in turn to the expansion of agricultural production through circular processes" (Foucault 2007: 103). This echoes the enfolding-unfolding dialectic expressed above as operative material forces in the world: "these three movements—government, population, political economy—form a solid series that has certainly not been dismantled even today" (Foucault 2007: 108).

Schmitt's substitution of "nation" for "population" is a crucial shift. As Abrahamsson (2013: 38) notes

> *the reception of Darwinian thought into the German sphere was widely divergent. Often, though not always, the battle lines were drawn along ideological lines, Darwinism, being associated mainly with a liberal-universalist ideology, being associated British civilization [was] distinct and different from Germanic Kultur.*

"Population" spoke to the relationship between a species and its environment and was thus an abstract "space disregarding universalization". For Schmitt, his lack of employment of the abstract category of "population" turns on a view of abstraction as a method to de-politicize and de-territorialize what is a fundamentally political and territorial issue.

The geopolitical formulation of *Großraum* "was concerned above all with a certain 'political idea' rather than racial categories," yet it "remained entirely compatible with racist conceptualizations of the relationship between a given space and a given people" (Minca & Rowan 2015: 278). For Schmitt, what was irreducibly political and territorial, was the "higher good" of Nazism, a thriving concrete German nation freed from foreign intervention, interventions that were enabled by abstract universalism. The growth and prosperity of the German people were, for Schmitt, antithetical to the universalistic ideologies promoted by liberal powers to justify their interventions into the internal affairs of rival states (Minca & Rowan 2015: 278).

Schmitt's relationship to "Environmentalities of the Third Reich" thus represents a peculiar and implicit engagement with ecology, with the "natural growth of living peoples". Schmitt rejected the abstract, universalizing category employed by the Ratzelian *Lebensraum*-centered ecological imagination, with its mobilization of conceptions of population, on the grounds that "population" abstracted from a concrete, situational, *political* conception of geography. As such, it would be inadequate to conceive and contextualize the geopolitical "stakes of the game," that "populations" struggling over resources are not merely "populations." Rather, for Schmitt, historical "nations" engage in a life and death struggle over the course of European geo-history, over the contours of *Großraum*.

Schmitt thus does not reject the Darwinian-Malthusian ecological imaginary, that space is limited and that struggle over it will ensue. He rather seeks to *politicize it sufficiently*. Schmitt's political history thus provides an account of his own political-historical conjuncture. *The way an historical narrative is periodized fundamentally shapes that narrative.* The historical moment under Schmitt's analysis, the end of the First World War, is conceptualized by him as a moment of crisis for the old liberal international order. The introduction, after the First World War, of abstract liberal "space-disregarding universalizations" offered the Anglo-American geopolitical powers a legal justification for the infringement of German sovereignty, emerged from their de-territorialization of the political. Liberalism thus provides a geopolitical justification for interventionism. By re-territorializing politics, a return to a conception of the political as fundamentally place-based, would allow for a new politics (that of sovereign territorial *Großräume*) to emerge.

While the political, rather than the ecological, is the object of Schmitt's analysis, affinities with ecological thinking (especially contemporary ecological thinking) can be drawn. Indeed, to think through the politics of crisis is an imperative that animates much of social-ecological thinking today. As noted above, Minca and Rowan (in Latour 2015) argue that while Schmitt's articulation of *Großraum* did not explicitly endorse Nazi racialized thinking, it remained compatible with it. Schmitt, articulating the geopolitical maxim of *Großraum* in order to win favor from Nazi elites (see Balakrishnan 2000: 176–189), shared their perceived "higher goods," expressing support for Nazism as concrete historical project.

Schmitt's critique of *Lebensraum* should not be read of a critique of Nazism as project, nor should it be read as a critique of, or as a fundamental break with, Nazi ecological thinking as such. It is a critique of liberalism as a political position, imbued

with the logic of crisis-thinking, periodized in relation to Schmitt's present moment. Turning to the present day, an analysis of contemporary deployment of Schmittian political thought in relation to ecology will demonstrate how Schmitt's thinking is in fact compatible with ecological concerns, and how it generates a particular (and problematic) conceptualization of planetary crisis.

Conclusion

What are we to make of Schmitt's concept of *Großraum* vis-à-vis the contemporary planetary crisis? What are the implications of deploying it in an effort to articulate a political ecology? We can conclude by reflecting on Schmitt's argument on its own grounds. Schmitt's project, which centered on the identification of the political, aimed to polemicize and re-territorializing politics. This project needs to be understood in relation to its object of critique—liberalism; tending to disregard space and rendering impossible the identification of the enemy. Cropsey (1995: x) contextualizes succinctly, writing

> *Schmitt's own mortal enemy is liberalism, which he demonizes as the pacifistic, all-tolerating, rationalist-atheist antithesis of 'the political.' Liberalism is thus complicitous with communism in standing for the withering away of the political and replacing it with the technological—the reduction of humanity to the last man.*

This abstract liberalism, post-Versailles, had become for Schmitt a dominating and organizing principle of life, on both the level of the polity and beyond it. What was needed was a return to concrete politics, a recognition that the political is always bound to a particular situation. Only by returning to these concrete situations could friends and enemies be identified, and political action taken based on these identifications.

Did Schmitt's critique of liberalism succeed, in that he found concepts that would allow political life to be reorganized on its own terms, as he argues is needed in *The Concept of the Political* ([1932] 2007: 26)? For Leo Strauss, a contemporary critic of Schmitt, he did not (Meier 1995).

> *Strauss saw that if Schmitt applauded strife itself as humanizing simply because it preserves mankind from the moral torpor of the technological terrarium, then Schmitt was no better than the value-free liberals he condemned, for both he and they admitted any end as equally choice worthy with any other. Schmitt might stipulate for a higher, i.e., a more violent, commitment to the adopted value [...] but Strauss made it clear that that would be a distinction without a significant difference (Cropsey 1999: x).*

The political, for Schmitt, rests on the distinction between friend and enemy, but the criteria by which to judge either friend or enemy remain relative. What appears as concrete remains abstract.

Schmitt's is a relativist argument—the distinction between friend and enemy can be articulated in any terms, so long as they are deemed "sufficient" to politicize a political problem. This relativism is what makes Schmitt's political ecology so dangerous. Wark (2017) diagnoses the problem convincingly, articulating the ambiguity of Schmitt's concept of the political, in that politics is often asserted as a catch-all solution, where

war between friend and enemy—but never class war—makes it possible to transcend crisis.

Wark's observation makes clear the relative lack of substance behind the concept of the political. Schmitt's decision, in 1933, partly responding to Strauss' critique (see Meier 1995) and partly in response to the Enabling Act and his joining of the Nazi party, was to turn to conceptualizing the enemy as the Jew (see Suuronen 2020: 349–356, 2022: 21–29.)

A decade ago, Christian Parenti (2012) articulated a link between global climate change and the emergence of what he calls "the new geography of violence". In his rendering, the manifold and multiple bio- and geo-physical changes produced by a changing climate pose direct danger to capitalist civilization. How states and societies respond to these challenges—politically—will shape the future of planetary life. As such, he argues that

There is a real risk that strong states with developed economies will succumb to a politics of xenophobia, racism, police repression, surveillance, and militarism and thus transform themselves into fortress societies while the rest of the world slips into collapse. By that course, developed economies would turn into neofascist islands of relative stability in a sea of chaos (Parenti 2012: 20).

He terms this political response to the climate crisis "the politics of the armed lifeboat."

Green politics are not inherently immune to the kinds of reactionary xenophobia described by Parenti (2012). Schmitt's concept of the political leaves open the possibility of articulating political ecologies that mobilize xenophobia as a rallying cry for green politics and policies—it is not hard to imagine the Malthusian, anti-population imaginary being deployed by green parties in an effort to "protect" environments against "overpopulation" by migrants, refugees, etc. The tendency of increasing migration due to global environmental change is a growing one. Here, when we observe the Austrian, German, and New Zealand green parties' turn to anti-immigrant politics, we get a sense of what Schmitt's politics of enmity entails at the contemporary conjuncture. The Malthusian imaginary rears its head in Germany, where German cities are framed as "hopelessly overwhelmed" by growing numbers of refugees feeling war and climate-related disaster (Von Der Burchard 2023). Austria's green party, in coalition with the conservative "Peoples Party", has been described as among one of the most rightwing in Europe, where cuts to immigration, coupled with the vilification of Muslim migrants, has been labelled an exercise in "climate apartheid" by UN special rapporteur Philip Alston (Opratko 2020).

Bearing in mind that the effort to define the political takes as its end the elimination of the enemy, the prospect of politicizing ecology with an amorphous and contingent friend-enemy distinction appears dangerous. Green politics ought to take as their end the liberation of life on earth—and not at the expense of a convenient and contingent enemy. To frame Carl Schmitt as appropriate thinker to address global environmental change, and to formulate a basis for a political response to planetary crisis that articulates a return to 20th century *Großraum* opens up the danger of a return to a state of war based on ethnonationalist division. How we decide to—or not to—think *Großraum* will play a central role in how we address the central crisis of the contemporary conjuncture.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Bruno Latour's *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017) and *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018). For a critique of Latour's deployment of Schmitt, see Tooze (2020).

2. I employ the term "reflexive" in line with Bourdieu and Wacquant's formulation of the concept: sociological reflexivity involves the interrogation of our "received concepts," to uncover and take as our object of analysis "the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytic tools and operations" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 36).

3. De-territorialization is here understood to represent a process by which modern geopolitics, as a way of organizing interstate relations, with its focus on the exclusive territorial sovereignty of states, becomes eroded. When de-territorialization occurs, states no longer have exclusive sovereignty over their territories; other powers can interfere in the internal workings of rival states. De-territorialization is thus, for Schmitt, a force of de-politicization.

4. The "state of exception" was a legal-political position taken by Schmitt in the 1920's. It argues that the foundation of modern state sovereignty is the ability for "the sovereign" to decide when, where, and how the law can be broken. This concept was employed by both advocates and critics of US foreign policy in the wake of 9/11. The question was: is the US justified in its breaking of international law in its efforts to combat "global terror." This concept is receiving new attention, where scholars question whether climate crises will engender a new "state of exception," if states will be able to disregard international law to deal with climate emergencies.

5. The "concept of the political," developed by Schmitt in 1932, aims to articulate that "politics" have their own logic, unrelated to economics, sociology, æstetics, etc. It has been used by political scientists to argue that their framework of analysis, "political science," is a distinct discipline. In this sense, it is similar to Durkheim's ([1895] 2014) "What is a Social Fact" for sociology, aiming to establish the boundaries for an analytical field.

6. Schmitt's idea of "*Großraum,*" or a "greater imperial space," has been used primarily by scholars of the Third Reich, who investigate the concept vis-a-vis the more well-know "*Lebensraum*" to demonstrate the inconsistencies of Nazi policies. It has also been used by scholars to investigate "informal" imperialism.

7. I use the term "cheap," rather than terms like "inexpensive", deliberately. For "inexpensive" has an almost exclusively economic connotation. Cheapness, as used by Patel and Moore (2017) captures two interrelated moments of the relation of appropriation: raw inputs (including food, labor, energy, and raw materials) are made cheap in an economic sense, but they are simultaneously de-valued in an ethical and political sense- they are under-valued. This cheapening, especially of the work and lives of racially/ ethnically/ gendered laboring populations, is, in Patel and Moore's view, central to capitalism's movements in and through ecologies.

8. Both Marxists and non-Germans are constituted as the enemy of the German people in *State, Movement, People* (Schmitt [1933] 2011: 3, 35, 48–50).

9. In 1933, Schmitt revised *The Concept of the Political* to more explicitly engage with Nazi Party doctrine. These revisions will be returned to in the conclusion.

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