

# STRATEGIES FOR ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION FROM BELOW WITH PETER GELDERLOOS



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This week on The Final Straw, we're featuring a recent conversation with anarchist author and activist, Peter Gelderloos about his latest book, *The Solutions Are Already Here: Strategies For Ecological Revolution From Below*, published by Pluto Press in 2022. For the hour we speak about critiques of science and Western Civilization that Peter levels, as well as the centrality of struggling on the ground we stand on, creating autonomous infrastructure, resisting colonial extractivism and the need for imagination and care as we tear down this ecocidal system.

Peter has prior authored such books as *Anarchy Works*, *How Non-Violence Protects The State*, and *Worshipping Power*, and you can find a number of his essays up on **TheAnarchistLibrary.Org**.

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**TFSR:** So I'm very happy to be speaking with anarchist author Peter Gelderloos. Peter's latest book, *The Solutions are Already Here: Strategies for Ecological Revolution from Below* is just out from Pluto Press, I just got my copy in the mail. Super stoked to get it. But welcome back to the show, Peter.

**Peter Gelderloos:** Thanks for inviting me, again.

**TFSR:** Facing the challenges of increasing climate chaos and its impact on life on Earth, feels really, really fucking daunting. Without thinking through the idea of like some centralized grand and technocratic response - which is kind of how I feel like I've been trained to think about big problems as big solutions - and not that that seems likely when countries at the industrial core aren't even able to hold themselves to, you know, self imposed limits of cutting back on producing greenhouse gases, or even coordinating and distributing free vaccines to stop a pandemic.

So I'm sure I'm not the only one that's head is kind of spinning when I try to think about the looming and existent climate disaster. How does this book kind of help to challenge that framework and mindset of expecting big centralized solutions to the problems that we face?

**PG:** Well, when you look at the history of how states have been dealing with ecological crisis, first of all, they're very reductionist. They reduce a complex, multifaceted ecological crisis, which ties into so many problems - social and environmental - they tend to reduce it to emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, only to climate change. And they do that in large part not only because they don't want to recognize many of these other problems, but also because technocrats need to simplify problems in order to reduce it to data that can be plugged into their machine, right?

So even though they're they're reducing it just to climate and they've been aware of the danger of climate change - like the US government recognized it as a national security problem already back in the 1960's - their responses have been militarizing borders and increasing the deployment of militaries for, you know, so called disasters, natural disasters, and things of that nature. And then also making big agreements that have done exactly nothing to slow down greenhouse gas emissions.

So even within their reductionism, they don't do a good job of

dealing with the one part of the problem. And the other part of the problem that they recognize is actually bad for us: increasing militaries, militarizing borders and all that. So they are viewing the problem with interests that are diametrically opposed to the interests of living beings like ourselves. The larger part of it they have to ignore, and then of the part that they look at, half of it they don't get right, and the other half they deal with in a way that that actively harms us.

We've also seen in a lot of these so called "natural disasters", that the most effective responses for saving lives are responses that happen on the ground. It's not the militaries, its neighbors, its regular people organizing themselves spontaneously with the logic of mutual aid. That's what saves the most lives, we've seen that time and time and time again.

And absolutely, we are totally conditioned to rely on on the government to solve things for us, or, you know, major corporations, techno wizards like Elon Musk, or whatever. And that's in large part because we're forced into a situation of dependency and passivity and immobilization. Which is a very depressing position to be in normally, and it's an even more depressing position to be in when we see the world dying around us. And so it's completely coherent and consistent with that forced dependency and forced immobility to just either look the other way, or cross your fingers and hope and pray that, you know, some big godlike figure will come along and solve it for us. But it's this big godlike figure that caused the problem and that is continuing to aggravate the problem.

So, actually, you get more intelligent solutions to problems from people who have on the ground knowledge, from people who are familiar with their territory, know that the resources they have. And it's equally global, it's just coming from the territory, it's coming from below, rather than coming from either you know, boardrooms or situation rooms, where they're not looking at the territory, they're looking at maps. And they're above all looking at their own interests of maintaining control. Because their ability to do anything in response to the problem is, in fact, predicated on our immobility, on our dependence, and our enforced passivity.

**TFSR: So there's almost like a sort of Stockholm syndrome that a lot of us - through the socialization from the state - have where we identify the the methods and the impulses of government in scary situations as being somehow salvatory, as opposed to sort of counterinsurgency constantly being operated for the continued extraction of resources.**

**PG:** Absolutely. And I'm glad that you brought up counterinsurgency because that is one of the most important theoretical lenses to use to understand both ecological crisis and government, corporate and NGO responses to that crisis.

**TFSR:** **A thing that kind of refreshing about this book is the radical critique of Western civilization as the vehicle for many of the woes that we experienced today. I appreciate that you attempted to undercut the misconception, right off the bat, that human nature is the cause for the destruction that we're experiencing around us, or that there are too many of us or too many of certain kinds of us on the planet. Can you talk about the ideas of the Anthropocene or arguments around overpopulation, and why they present kind of a misdirection when seeking causes of anthropogenic climate change and resolutions of finding balance with the world?**

**PG:** Yeah. Human beings have been around for a really long time, depending on you know, when exactly you identify the beginning of anatomically-modern human beings, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of years. Hominids with similar capabilities for longer. And the problems of destroying the ecological basis for life on this planet, for a great many species is a recent problem. And even the problem of causing ecological collapse in just one bio region is, in the broader timeline, a recent problem with maybe like four thousand years old, some of the earliest examples. And, again, some people - because we're taught to view human history in this way that ends up being very white supremacist but focusing on the history of States - some people take that to mean "Oh, well, for the last four thousand years human beings have been destroying the environment. So you know, that's what's relevant." No, for the last four thousand years humans have not been destroying the environment. A very small number of human beings have been doing that in a very small part of our overall territory until much more recently. And all across the world people fought against getting forcibly included in this new western model of being human. We do have examples of non-western cultures also destroying their soil or destroying their forests, destroying their ecosystem, but they weren't nearly as good at it as Western civilization is, and that's the dominant model, that's the most relevant one to talk about.

So you know, that other question is relevant for the theoretical exercise of like, "okay, what exactly are the more destructive, or the health-

ier, forms of social organization?” but in the current media environment most people will bring up this kind of somewhat trivial fact at this point that maybe two thousand years ago, or one thousand years ago on another continent, a completely non-western society also caused major erosion. And that’s just an instance of deflection away from the fact that the problem that’s currently killing us is Western civilization.

So, you know, there are works that, for example: Fredy Perlman’s *Against Leviathan* that try to define what the problem is more broadly, but in the situation where we’re in right now, where species are going extinct at an accelerating rate, where millions of humans are already dying every year because of the effects of this ecological crisis, and so many people are losing their homes, losing their land, losing their access to healthy food. The problem is the civilization, the modern state, the capitalist system that arose - centered in Europe - but also simultaneous to this process of mass enslavement in Africa and mass invasion, colonization and genocide in the Americas, in Africa and in Asia and Australia. That’s the problem.

If you take any criteria beyond just greenhouse gas emissions, it becomes very clear what’s the social model that is putting us all at danger. And even if you reduce it just to greenhouse gas emissions, you kind of avoid looking at the historical roots of the social machine that’s causing so much death and destruction. But it’s still very clear that Western civilization and the economic model that it forcibly imposed on the rest of the globe is the problem.

**TFSR:** So, one thing in the book you also say is that it’s necessary for us to critique science because it’s so shaped by those institutions who wield it, fund it and command it. Can you talk about this and how it differs from an anti-rational rejections of science for the sake of faith structures, or antimodernist frames of some anti-civ perspectives? And maybe speak about how you’ve observed our movements, or movements that you find inspiring in this framework, how they’ve been making and imagining their own science?

**PG:** Yeah, I mean, first off, maybe this is more semantical but like, I do think a critique of rationalism as a worldview is important. But then again, different people would mean very different things with that.

So just to focus on your question: in practice, in the real world, the scientific method cannot be divorced from the scientific institutions

that currently control or manage the vast majority of knowledge production via the scientific method in this world that we inhabit. You know, I love science fiction, we can imagine other worlds but that's the case in the one that we inhabit.

One thing that I think is important to recognize is that the scientific method is a very valid method for knowledge production, for falsifiable objective data. I think it's also important to recognize that that's not the only kind of knowledge. That there are many other kinds of knowledge that cannot be produced by the scientific method and that we run into... First of all there's been no social system in the history of the world that I'm aware of that has ever relied only on that kind of knowledge. And our current "rationalist" society - speaking about rationalism as a sort of mythical worldview - uses a great deal of like non-falsifiable and subjective information, but they pretend that they don't as part of this mythology. Which is very, very important to certain people, academics and whatnot.

So it's important recognize, I think, that that's not the only form of knowledge. And like, so a brief example of this: we can even see this when we get beyond the importance of, for example, emotional knowledge. How to deal with people, with other people in groups, how to take care of people, you know, this is something that's actually incredibly important. And it's amazing how easily it can be dropped by the wayside because it's not reduced to numbers.

But for example we can look at health care. So there are forms of healthcare that are much easier to evaluate using the scientific method. And there are forms of healthcare that are much harder to evaluate using the scientific method. Finding out what happens when you dump some drug in a human body is much easier to evaluate, because the person who's administering the drug doesn't need to know anything about it. And they don't need to know anything, or barely anything, about the person that they're administering it's to. And that's sort of like the point of that whole methodology of treatment. Whereas other forms of treatment require much more subjective approach, a much more modeled approach, to the specifics of the person who's being treated and they require a much more developed skill set to be able to deliver the therapy in an effective way.

So that's not the fault of the therapy, that it can't be evaluated as well by the scientific method. That's a limitation or fault in scientific method. But we live in a society that's so mechanized and that loves to

be able to have - it's in fact built up on - knowledge forums that can be plugged into the machine, and spit out the numbers. So it's a society very much based on mechanical reproduction. That kind of society is going to favor the treatments that can be evaluated by the scientific method, and it's going to disfavor or discourage or hide the treatments that can't. And a year does not go by without us finding out about how damaging some form of medication was, or how damaging this blindness towards certain forms of therapy and care were.

And that doesn't that doesn't invalidate scientific knowledge production, but it does certainly speak to the question of social machinery. That it goes beyond just the question of, like, "Can we test this? Is it valid or not?" It's that in fact, in practice, we can't separate it from the question of social machinery.

What does that have to do with the ecological crisis? I already mentioned the reductionism of a multifaceted, very broad, very complex ecological crisis to climate change. That's symptomatic of what I'm talking about. Climate change is something that's more easy to quantify. We can measure it in temperature, we can measure it in parts per million carbon dioxide, we can measure it in emissions. Whereas things like what I know about the place where I live, what I know about the health of the soil in the place where I've lived for the past seven or eight years, is not something that I can quantify. But I know it, I think much better than someone who might come by and take a sample from a laboratory and test it but then not have any further relationship with the land. Someone who's not out there taking care of these olive trees or planting a garden, year after year, and wondering when the rain is going to come and feeling it in their bones how this territory is desiccating. And how we actually need to start doing things now and fast as this climate becomes more of a desert. Because there are dead deserts, and they're living deserts. And this land right here, where I live is going to become one or the other depending on what we do.

And the people in the laboratories are way behind the game and they have a lot less to offer. They do have things to offer, like there are certainly moments in which my gardening and other people's gardening can be complemented by having access to that chemical test from the laboratory. And you know, that would be great to have that kind of complementarity, to have even solidarity at that level. But usually you don't have that because our systems of knowledge are gaslit, we're excluded from the resources that we would need to be able to access that and the people in



laboratories generally have no idea what they're talking about and think that they have access to some absolute, an all encompassing truth. And that's problematic.

So yeah, there's absolutely a possibility - I mean there should be a great deal of dialogue between different kinds of knowledge, including knowledge that's produced through the scientific method - but we don't have a lot of that now. And when you we look at how history has actually unfolding, the data produced by powerful scientific institutions regarding climate change has not been wrong, per se - the broad strokes of it have been correct, like for a while now they've been predicting what's going to be happening, and it's been happening - but it's been quite conservative. Time and time again they've been way too optimistic in their predictions, and the kind of red lines or warning marks or benchmarks or whatever that they set are getting exceeded, they're getting past years and decades in advance of their particular predictions.

So in terms of the precision of their predictions, they have high precision predictions. Like, me looking at the soil and the rain clouds or you know, someone who's actually lived there their whole life and has access a lot more ancestral knowledge that I don't have access to, they're not going to be able to come up with like a high precise prediction of like "Okay in 20 years this is going to happen" but I think they will get a much more accurate prediction. Whereas the scientific institutions have had high precision and low accuracy. So they've actually been wrong in a dangerous way again and again and again. And I don't think it's a coincidence, given their proximity to and affinity with the institutions that are most directly responsible for the destruction of the current global ecosystem.

**TFSR: So yeah, I guess that's a good clarification is like systems of knowledge rather than sciences. And as you say that seems like the need from the Western civilization, or the organizations that are working within it, to have crunch-able numbers and quantities that they can put into their figures. Seems like it would also not only would it limit the output information but it probably blinds the people that are making the measurements, even if they're trying to make the right measurements to see the actual outcomes.**

**The approach of looking systemically and trying to say that, in fact, all of these systems and how they correlate to each other can fall under one umbrella that we call "Civilization" and its colonial im-**

pulse, or “Western Civilization” and its colonial impulse, when people see a critique that is that large, oftentimes people will say, “Ah, but there are things that we have gotten from this system”, they will say that. They will say that capitalism has driven innovation and the creation of certain kinds of knowledge or certain kinds of technology that have benefited human life in a lot of ways. For instance one thing that they can point to is around medical science. And as you said, there are some treatments that have proven to be not so much treatments as poisons. It’s not a like an assured thing that medical science will resolve issues, but there are a lot of technologies that have been developed and applied over the centuries that are positive. And I could see someone saying, “well do I choose between the current structure and like small reforms within it, or supporting a sort of revolutionary alteration in the productive models, the distribution of resources and capacity to produce these technologies that are saving my life, or making it so that I can be mobile, or extending life” for folks that have very serious medical issues for instance?

There has been critique, for instance, of criticisms of modern civilization that came out of Earth First at its beginnings, or other pro-ecological movements that look at not human beings as the problem necessarily, but technological development as being - and the sciences and the knowledges that come out of that, not to say that they’re just produced from that, but that are applied there. Saying “if the government fails, for instance, or if the economy scales back, I’m not going to be able to get my medication and I may die”. Can you talk a little bit about the sort of reticence that someone would have of trying to approach a degrowth of the economy and the government, because they’re afraid that what safety nets exist for them currently would no longer be there, and they wouldn’t survive it?

PG: Yeah, that’s definitely a very legitimate way to address questions of social change. And I think it’s actually super important when we inhabit our own bodies, our own experiences and needs when we’re talking about proposals of widespread social transformation, and struggle, generally.

I think it helps to primarily consider two different things. One is that if we break out of an individual’s framework - which, like I said, that concern that you’re posing is very important, there’s also an iteration of that concern which is very dangerous. Because if we make a critique of Western Civilization on the basis of how many people it’s killing, how

many millions of people are starving to death because of this model, all of the forests and ecosystems that are getting destroyed, it can be dangerous. You definitely don't want to go into a framework of "it's us or them, someone has to die in this situation".

So first off, I think we need to break out of any kind of individualist or competitive conception of this problem. And if we look more systemically, or if we look at health as a collective good, the healthiest possibilities for human society are ones in which people have a healthy reciprocal relationship with their environment. They have access to the commons, they have access to a very diverse and healthy diet that is locally adapted. And that is, in fact, based on brilliant technologies that were thousands of years in the making, that existed in every territory before colonialism, which is a technology without whirring gadgets and lights and bells and whistles but it's the technology of how we build up our survival mutually with the other organisms around us, with the other living beings around us. Many of those technologies still exist. And so without colonialism, with access to that commons, with access to that kind of rooted, territorial, popular and ecological technology, that is the best hope that a human community has for health. For the healthiest lives possible for all their members. So that's one thing that I think is really necessary to acknowledge. That we live in a system that produces a disease, that produces death and that's a huge problem that we can't sweep under the carpet.

The other good thing is that when we destroy governments and capitalism, everything that they own, everything that they think is theirs, everything that they blackmail us with - because they control access to it and we have to spend our lives working to try to get a small piece of it - it'll be ours. And so once all the rich people are gone, and once all the cops and all the politicians are gone, all of that will be ours. And we can decide to get rid of it, we can decide to keep it, we can decide to make it ourselves in under much better circumstances. So things like medicine we'll obviously keep making and we'll find ways to make it that are healthier, we'll find productive processes that are less damaging for the environment. And we'll also be changing our living conditions so as few people as possible need access to those technologies, but those who do need that access will get it.

And then we're also forced to deal with other other technologies, like nuclear reactors and nuclear bombs that the state has saddled us sadly with the necessity to mediate those in the best way possible, because they're not going away for, you know, forever. Some of those radioactive

substances will be around for billions of years, so “thank you, government!” But we will do a better job of handling that than they do. Because we care about us. And because we’re actually good at organization when we get the chance. In the US every single nuclear waste storage facility has leaked at one time or another. So they’re crap at it and they’re also to blame for it. On my worst days, I definitely fantasize about, you know, locking them all in the nuclear storage facility, there’d be certain poetic justice to that.

But thinking about it more realistically, and in the question of our needs, all of it will belong to us for better and for worse, and we’ll figure out how to take care of us. And we’ll do a much better. Even though lately in our movements, it’s pretty depressing, because we’re I think learning a bit too much from the system we live in, and we’re doing, frankly, often a pretty terrible job of taking care of us. But we can do much better than the state or capitalism ever could.

**TFSR: Yeah, and they’ve had the opportunity to prove that already. And there’s tons of people that, you know, in as far as distribution of treatment methods for things, or COVID vaccines, or whatever, like, they have proven that it is not in their interest, it is actually in their interest to deny large swaths of the population any number of these things so that they can mark up the price and make more money off of less.**

**PG: Yes.**

**TFSR: So some of the most inspiring parts of the book, for me, were the examples of resistance to mega projects, to the expansion of colonial extractivism as well as to some of the alternative movement experiments and infrastructures that you highlight and that you get voices from, which is great. Were there any that you wanted to include but you just didn’t have time to fit that you might share with the audience?**

**PG: Um, there are definitely some. There are some cases where I was looking for interviews and I wasn’t able to get in touch with the comrades who would be able to speak from personal experience about those struggles, or I was able to get in touch but they were in the end too busy to do interviews, because things are pretty difficult. And so I can name some of those, maybe for people to look at the more, but I won’t go into them**

precisely because I wasn't able to learn enough about them.

So, for example, in the movement in Kurdistan, an ecological focus is a large part of the analysis. And it's a territory that's been very damaged by war, by desertification, by forced impoverishment coming from the various countries, the various states, that control Kurdistan. And so I know, in fact yeah some friends helped put out a book about some of the experiences in trying to help make that desert bloom. But yeah, the comrades, it's been, of course, a rough time over there so the comrades weren't able to give an interview about that. So that didn't make it into the book.

Let's see...There are many, many very interesting struggles in India. I mentioned some of them on the basis of already published research, but I wasn't able to arrange any interviews with comrades there. India's interesting because there are very, very different experiences of reforestation, that demonstrates, again, just how we can't really trust the media, how we can't trust governments when they talk about this. Because reforestation means completely different things depending on who's saying it, and a lot of forms of reforestation are very, very bad for the environment. They're basically things that, say, like a government like Chile will do to be able to get counted as like a negative carbon emission country, so then they can make money with carbon trading. When, like, in Chile the reforestation is very much an industrial activity which is which is bad for the environment, very bad for the soil, bad for the water table. And it's very much a colonial activity, because it's taking place on the lands of Indigenous peoples who are in the process of trying to recover their lands. And a huge part of that process is trying to win back their food autonomy.

So forests are important. And forests can also be edible forests. These pine plantations, these mono-crop pine and eucalyptus plantations that are being planted by the official institutions, are definitely not food forests. No one can feed themselves off of them. But also agricultural fields are important for a lot of people's to feed themselves. And the official reforestation happening in Chile is often used as a weapon against Indigenous struggle, against the struggle, for example, of the Mapuche for food autonomy, for getting their land back and being able to feed themselves off of their land using traditional technologies and whatever modern or Western technologies that they feel like adapting. That's up to them. And to the extent that they can do that, to the extent that they have food autonomy, they have a vastly increased ability to fight back against the colonizing state because they're no longer dependent on global capitalism. And

they're no longer dependent on the state that they colonizes them.

And so in India there's some really great examples that really contrast how ineffective and also how damaging state-led efforts for mass reforestation are, how they just respond to this technocratic impulse to produce numbers on paper - when on the ground it's a completely different story - versus communities, many of them Indigenous communities, that have been undergoing very, very effective, large scale forms of reforestation that improve soil health, that increase the possibilities for food autonomy, the increased quality of living, and that, you know, helped create more robust ecosystems with habitat for other species and in addition to just humans. So I would love to one day meet comrades who are participating in that because there's some really powerful struggles happening there.

**TFSR: Well, you do put the invite in the book for a longer extended, like, sequel if folks had more stuff inspired along those lines. So if any listeners are out there and want to write that book, I would love to read it.**

Over the years, we conducted a couple of interviews with Anne Peterman from a group called "No GE Trees", who was talking about that struggle in Wallmapu and - because they were similarly trying to build solidarity with resistance to that sort of mono crop forestation that damages the soil, that depletes the water tables, that denudes the landscape of the vitality and the variation that's required for native species to exist in it throughout actually the US South - so people were protesting in the Asheville area in solidarity with not only resisting GE Tree plantations in the southeast, but also in Chile.

And a lot of those trees, they're not good for a lot of things, they're not good for making lumber out of, especially eucalyptus. Growing up on the West Coast...they're not good for windbreaks, they got planted for windbreaks, they're not good for railroad ties, that's what they got planted for at one point, but they get chopped up after a couple of years of growing, so not even creating a mature forest, and processed down into wood pellets, and then sent to Europe so that European governments can claim that they're using a renewable source of energy production. It's just this game of shells with carbon and basically pollution and degradation. It's a continuation of the extractivism of neocolonialism.

**PG:** Absolutely.

**TFSR:** We've already seen a measurable connection between climate change, the disruption of food production, exacerbating conflicts, and being used as a weapon against Indigenous communities as you've noted, and resulting in increased refugee movements and displacement. As a result, right wing tendencies have welcomed an escalation of conflict and inequality, the building and buttressing of physical and metaphorical walls, and the acceleration of fossil fuel extraction to suck out every drop of profit that can be withdrawn before it's too late. And to be fair, I say, "right wing", this also goes for centrist neoliberal regimes as well but the rhetoric looks more actively genocidal oftentimes, and facilitates extraparliamentary violence when it comes from the far right, usually.

Would you talk a bit about the importance of the increasingly, in some ways, difficult project of fostering internationalism and inner communalism against this, nationalist tendency as the climate heats up?

**PG:** Yeah, obviously the far right, and neoliberal centrist more so, have a lot of advantages because they have access to resources, they get a lot more attention. They're taken seriously. So even a lot of centrist media that pay attention to the far right in a disapproving way still help them out more than the way that they treat like truly radical transformative revolutionary movements by just ignoring them. Because we're kept in this in this permanent place of either not existing or being infantilized and we have, as you pointed out, we have a lot of work to do on this front.

And we can also talk about forms of internationalism that are very damaging. This is a kind of internationalism, which is completely under the thumb of, you know, colonial or neocolonial institutions. It's this worldwide recruitment that takes place, largely through universities of - sometimes in a limited fashion it's been analyzed as a Brain Drain, but I think it goes beyond that. Basically training and recruiting people from all over the world to participate in this system - whether it's under the auspices of the United Nations, or under the auspices of some prestigious university in the Global North - to create an internationalism which is a completely monistic, technocratic, simplified worldview that builds consensus about what the world looks like, what the problems look like, and what the solutions are, within elite institutions that are completely

cut off from all of the various territories of the world, even as those institutions increase their recruitment to a global scale. So that they have representatives or spokespeople from all the different continents from all over the world but they're brought together in a sort of epistemological, technocratic space, which is completely a reproduction of colonialism, and makes it flexible but furthers the dominance of Western civilization, of white supremacist civilization.

And so that's the kind of internationalism, which is very, very present, and it has access to a great deal of resources. And on the other hand, in the Global North, we're not doing a nearly good enough job to create a very, very different and subversive kind of internationalism. And the comrades who are doing the best job of that tends to be migrant comrades, comrades who have who have migrated, who have crossed borders. I think a lot of folks who grow up with the privilege of citizenship in the Global North, if they do travel, if they do try to get like a more global perspective, it's often still done in this individualist way that has a lot more to do with tourist vacations than with the needs of revolutionary struggle. And so we don't have - I mean we don't really have communities in the Global North, because the triumph of capitalism is so complete - but we don't have radical groups that are attempting to be communities that pool resources in order to intentionally create global relationships of solidarity with communities and with struggles in the Global South that they could actually be supporting, and that they could actually be creating dialogue with to develop the rich, detailed, global perspectives that we actually need, as well as the possibility for global solidarity.

So, yeah, in the book, towards the end, I do this exercise of imagining what if we're actually able to do what I'm talking about. Or what I'm trying to argue in the book is like a real model for a revolutionary transformative response to the ecological crisis. And so since I'm talking about the need to root ourselves in our territory, I imagine "Okay, here we are in Catalunya, what does this look like over the next few decades?" And one of the first things is in Barcelona and Tarragona we have these big ports with these big old ships that are currently moving merchandise all around the world. And that's something that on the one hand it needs to stop because of how much that's based on fossil fuels and on unnecessary consumption and all the rest. And the later timeline, in that chapter of the book is, you know, maybe much more beautiful and romantic, imagining there's no more borders and people can traverse the world in sailboats, which are sailboats that have been expropriated from from the wealthy,



who of course no longer exist. And and I think that's a beautiful thing to imagine.

It's really nice to think about a world that we're actually allowed to live in, and that people all over the world can travel and go where they want. But right now we have the ugliness to deal with. And so in those ports, there are fuel reserves that have already been dredged up from the earth and there are these big ocean-going cargo ships. So there's a part that talks about expropriating those cargo ships, getting in touch with revolutionary comrades in the Global South that we already have a relationship with and finding out what they need.

There's the example of early on in the pandemic, both in Catalunya and another territories, workers taking the initiative to re-purpose their factories to make parts for respirators in a way that was faster and more agile than the capitalist were able to do. So kind of taking a cue from that I imagine this process of, okay, instead of sending merchandise, which is just furthering a relationship of dependency - I was speaking with this one comrade from Venezuela, other comrades from from Brazil, like a major thing is their economies and their material environments have been intentionally structured in a way so they don't have a lot of very basic things that they need, that in Europe or North America would be easier to find. So for example, like basic machine parts for the machines that would be needed to process food. Not even talking about some hyper industrial and unnecessary endeavor, but basic things like harvesting, threshing, and milling grains, for example. So instead of, you know, a relationship of dependence, where this really fertile territory, like Venezuela, gets grain imports of European grains that Indigenous and Afro Indigenous populations have not been traditionally consuming and that are certainly less healthy - so, basically supermarket food. Instead of importing supermarket food, this short term process of exporting those cargo ships, re-purposing factories from the automotive industry to make some of these simple machine parts, and then using the existing fuel reserves to send off these cargo expropriated cargo ships, so that in these other territories that are colonized, neocolonized territories, that we have a relationship and solidarity with, they can create their own material autonomy and break that dependence once and for all. And then we're also not just navel gazing and thinking "how are we going to survive the climate apocalypse and making sure that our bunkers are well stocked?" But we're actually thinking about collective survival in a way that is solidaristic, in a way that is realistic, in a way that is global, and in a way that recognizes

our responsibilities, given the past and present of colonialism and white supremacy.

**TFSR:** Yeah and I would say that the one group that I'm familiar with that really has continued doing a good job on the subject of building or continuing solidarity across the borders is Zapatista structures. In the US there is still, despite the fact that the Zapatista revolution happened 30 years ago, and there are still active, six declaration Otra Compañía groups or whatever that are around all sorts of parts of Anglo dominated North America, Turtle Island. Like, it's just astounding, and I wish - but people did it really well during that period of time. And I think that that's something that's been lost is these clear lines of communication, and the building of inspiration, the sharing of knowledge, of experience across that border to the south of the nation state that I live within the borders of. There's so many overlaps, and labor struggles that happen. There's so much cross border transit of goods and I have so much more in common with people across that border than I do who fucking run those corporations here.

**PG:** Yup.

**TFSR:** Another point that I really liked in the book - and you approach this in a number of different ways, or I read this in a number of different places - talking about the importance of territorialization. And maybe that's the wrong term, but being rooted in the land base that you're in, listening to it, trying to understand what it teaches and how to live with it. Recognize how other people have done that, and like rooting your struggle in a sense of place. And this is one of the reasons that some of these anticolonial and anticapitalist resistance movements in different places around the world look so different is because they're rooted in different legacies and practices, religions, languages, and experiences of colonization. And I really appreciate the fact that you point this out and you say, "Look, don't expect everyone around the world to circle their A's, or to use the term 'autonomy' necessarily for what they're doing. But just recognize similar traits among people that you can have solidarity with in the struggle against global capitalism and colonization". Can you talk a little bit about some of these similar traits, how you kind of identify these like versatile strategies?

PG: Yeah. So yeah, I think I do use the word “territorialization” or “territorialized” and that’s largely coming from Catalan and Spanish. In English “territorial” tends to be an ugly word because it’s associated with possessiveness, with drawing borders. I find it a very useful concept that’s used here so I just started using it in English. I would just encourage people to look at the roots of that word, “terra” or “tierra”, like the earth. A relationship with the earth not as like this big, abstract blue planet floating in the void but the earth under our feet.

It’s interesting because you’re asking about similarities - oh god this is gonna sound like some cliched bumper sticker or something like that - but my first response is to say that the similarity is in the difference. Because in an act of war against this world of supermarkets and Amazon and smartphone screens which impose this secretly white supremacist homogeneity, when you territorialize you are becoming part of a long historical tradition that is so specific to the exact place where you live and nowhere else. That means eating different food, cooking it in a different way, pruning different trees, it means speaking a different dialect of a different language. It means things that at first glance are maybe more defined or marked by their difference, but when you when you see like gatherings of peasants from different countries around the world, or gatherings of gardeners, gatherings of revolutionaries who very much believe in being territorial in this sense that I’m trying to talk about it, who believe in having their roots in the ground beneath their feet, and fighting from that relationship and understanding themselves within that relationship...

One thing that strikes me is how much pleasure there is in sharing “This is how you do it? This is how we do it. Oh, this is what you eat? This is what we eat.” And so even on the face of it, the color of that, the texture of that seems to be bringing out differences but I think that really what’s the conversation that happens there - and it feels this way to me like insofar as I’m this alienated exurbanite who is engaging in relatively later in my life, to a limited extent has felt this way - that like, beneath the words, there’s the sort of language of love which is completely an exercise in sameness. Not the sameness of homogeneity, but the sameness of “We’re living beings in this earth and we love the Earth, it gives us our lives, we love the other living beings around us.” And so really people all across the world who are living in autonomy and calling it different things and using very, very different technologies and eating very different foods, and all the rest, are on a deeper level doing the same thing, and I think can often recognize ourselves in one another.

**TFSR:** I guess jumping back to a reference that you made a little bit ago, I was very moved by your chapter, 'A Very Different Future,' where you were describing - this isn't the primary part of it, the first part of it at least you were describing - an alternative view of where we might be if we go down this path and sort of a best case scenario of how re-framing and healing the world could look. I feel like though there is a lot, lot of doing needed to change the course that we as a species are on - or that we who live under the civilization, are forced to live another civilization live in... One of the primary challenges that we face is one of imagination. Because imagination feeds the soul, it's a playful creativity, it's a necessary part of, I think, what it is to be alive. Can you speak about this, and sort of point to any projects or movements or people that you think listeners might appreciate in terms of having a radical imagination, and being brave enough to share that out with other people?

**PG:** Huh. Yeah, I'd start off underscoring how important I think imagination is, like you said. I think it's, I don't know, maybe I think it's more important than hope. Sometimes it's just really not possible to access hope. But it's nice, even in those moments, to be able to look out your window or look at the street and see a completely different world filling up that space, even if you don't think you'll ever live to see it. So that I think is extremely important. And I don't think that we can, I mean, obviously the world that we create is going to surprise us. It'll be born and dialogue with us and it will also insist on certain things and impose itself in certain ways. But at the same time, I don't think we can create a society that we're unable to imagine. Even though the caveat that I was trying to trying to communicate is that it will still be different from how we imagine in, but the imagining it is a hugely important part of creating it.

And I think it's extremely, extremely important to make a very, very clear analytical and strategic distinction between imaginings and blueprints. Creating blueprints is just a furtherance of the war against the planet. It is an extremely colonial act to impose a blueprint on the world. And actually, this reticence towards imagination is probably the biggest criticism I've ever had of insurrectionary anarchism. Like this general refusal to imagine. Which isn't even really well supported by the theoretical bases of insurrectionary anarchism. I think it's just more often manifests as a fear, like an insistence of focusing on the present, which has some important strategic elements to that insistence. Like we're gonna focus on

the present. But then there's also I think this fear of actually going beyond that.

Who is doing a good job of sharing these imaginings, these imaginations? So okay, there's this one group that I interviewed in the US for the book. I keep their location anonymous, but basically they get funds and divert theirs, or they take advantage of some financing that's intended for other purposes. Basically it's intended to help large scale industrial farmers buy trees for windbreaks and whatnot. And this is a radical anticapitalist group that buys massive amounts of trees, like tens of thousands of trees in order to help neighborhoods move towards food autonomy. And I haven't seen them do anything that's explicitly propagandistic works of imagination. Like "we can imagine this area that we live in being an abundant orchard, where you can grow our own healthy food and not rely on wage labor to get low quality food". But I think on the material level, there's a great deal of imagination in what they do.

And I think also a lot of it refers back to peasant and Indigenous imagination from Latin America, because a lot of the neighborhoods where what they do is most effective are neighborhoods with with a large number of Central American migrants who have a lot of experience with growing their own food and with combining residential and agricultural spaces in a way that is generally not done in the Global North. And so if not on the level of like written propaganda, at the very least on the material level, there is a thriving imaginary in that project of neighborhoods, poor neighborhoods, working class neighborhoods that increase their quality of life by growing healthy food. And this is one small group that's doing this, if this were done across the US, then you'd be creating like an atmospherically significant amount of carbon reduction, of carbon being brought down from the air by reforestation. It's done in a complex healthy way and not in like a mono cropping, genetically engineered way, and it also gives working class neighborhoods access to healthy food.

Also, most of the trees that they're planning are autochthonous, how do you say that in English? They're native, they're native species, most of which have been neglected by industrial agriculture because industrial agriculture imposes a lot of needs, that are divorced from the needs of human and environmental health. Like transportability: apples are great because they can be they can be hard, they can be harvested early, and then they can be shipped around the world. Pawpaws, for example, are a very, very important native tree food from North America they're kind of too mushy, they don't work so well being transported so they don't

work so well as a supermarket food. And so it's a very healthy food, which is a part of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous histories, Indigenous technology, which is just removed from the equation by how it's done. And so it's it's really awesome to see a group that's bringing back a lot of those native species and increasing biodiversity and increasing human health in working class neighborhoods.

Aside from more material projects, there's something very, very important that anarchists have actually been doing for a long time, and that is experiencing a very, very exciting rebirth, which is anarchists speculative fiction. Whether science fiction or fantasy, there is increasing attention being being paid to some of the greats from the recent past, like Octavia Butler who's a radical, not an anarchist but someone I've learned a lot from, someone that, it doesn't matter that she's not an anarchist, she's a really great writer and really great thinker. So yeah, Octavia Butler, Ursula K Le Guin, over here [in Spain and Catalunya], for example, they've even been republishing and reprinting some of the anarchists who are engaging in some speculative fiction from out of the workers movement in the late 19th century. And then you also have a lot of current writers who are putting out anarchist speculative fiction, and that's something that we really need to support and we need to try to spread beyond just the movement. Get it into our libraries, get it into our local bookstores, because that's generally more effective in spreading anarchist ideas and anarchist imaginaries then, you know, then a lot of our nonfiction writing.

**TFSR: Yeah, plus, it's fun.**

**PG:** Oh, yeah.

**TFSR: [giggles] I've seen warnings on social media and in some recently published books such as Climate Leviathan - which honestly, I have not finished yet, just haven't had time - but of ideas of eco-Leninism, or eco-Maoism, an ostensibly leftist authoritarian state response to climate destabilization, then I've got a feeling that it's not just about Derek Jensen anymore. Can you talk a little bit about this tendency, and if you see this as an actual threat with actual adherence, like an actual threat to liberty?**

**PG:** Yeah. Probably most significantly Andreas Malm took it into a new territory, well beyond, for example, like Derek Jensen, with that group.

And so this is something that is getting us lot of attention in anticapitalist academic circles. I've never seen anywhere where it has any implantation on the ground, like directly in real struggles or in social movements. So from that perspective, it would seem just like a very out of touch, elite, making kind of wild arguments that are fairly ridiculous and irrelevant. Except I think we've seen dynamics before, where when the official centrist practices and ideologies flounder, and are unable to produce solutions that the system needs in order to correct and survive - and that's definitely, we are entering that that period of history right now- where authoritarian elements in social movements that seem to be very, very tiny and not very relevant, all of a sudden go really big, really fast.

That happened in a huge way in the Spanish Civil War, where the authoritarian Communists were completely irrelevant and tiny, and the anarchists had so much influence in the revolutionary movement. And then in less than a year, because of outside funding and because of elite power structures making alliances of convenience, all of a sudden authoritarian revolution - supposedly revolutionary methodology because in fact the Stalinist were quite explicit in saying that they weren't trying to fight the revolution in Spain - where those authoritarian currents gain ground really, really, really rapidly. And so we need to learn from history, we need to prepare ourselves for that eventuality or inevitability, and we need to be making the arguments now about how these authoritarian ways of looking at the problem are completely detached from people's needs and the needs of actual ecosystems, and how they are completely unrealistic given the nature of the problem.

That also means being more vociferous about talking about our methodologies, our solutions, and the victories or partial victories that we have. In the case of Andreas Malm, he made it a little bit easier to beginning with some pretty obviously racist, anti-Indigenous statements that he made. I mean he's very much... he has trouble seeing past the needs of the reproduction of Global North white supremacist society. But I think later iterations of that kind of authoritarian, Eco-Leninist thinking are going to be more sophisticated and they're going to do a better job at hiding their colonial and white supremacist dynamics. And so I think we need to, yeah, we need to be conscious of that danger while it's still small.

**TFSR: Does it seems strange to you that AK Press just published a book by him last year? *How to Blow up a Pipeline*.**

**PG:** Um I mean, yeah. There are anarchist publishers that take the approach of only publishing books that they feel affinity with, and I think some really, really important literature that is not commercially viable has gotten circulated that way and that's really important. And then there are other other radical publishers, like AK that take the approach of being a very broad platform. And there's some things that AK publishes that I wouldn't have found out about or gotten access to that both have a broader appeal or like a less radical appeal, and that are also exactly the things that anarchist, especially in North America, need to be thinking about that address things that we historically ignore and do a terrible job of. And then there are things that AK or similar publishers have published that I wouldn't touch with a 10 foot pole, or that I would touch to burn maybe?

**TFSR:** [chuckles] Yeah, and I'm not meaning to put AK Press on the spot specifically, but like, that book, and then like, Nick Estes-

**PG:** The same thing applies, like PM, like all these larger platform publishers. I think I as a person would tend more - just because of I don't know, my personality, or whatever - would tend more to the sort of small affinity kind of oriented model. But I'm also able to recognize that the way a broader publisher does things has advantages, and it puts us in contact with texts and ideas that we really need to be in dialogue with, and that if we're just focusing on affinity we'll never get out of our little echo chamber.

So, yeah, and then some of the Marxists who I respect who are closer to anarchism, say that Andreas Malm's earlier, big seminal book was important and useful. Like about climate capitalism, about looking at the intersections between climate change and capitalism's earlier development. So, you know, evidently he's put out things that are theoretically useful, but I think he's kind of a clown when it comes to direct action. Like he's coming from this highly privileged, Scandinavian social democratic vantage point where he can talk about his flirtation with direct action from a few years ago without the risk of going into prison, which is [laughing] another planet for the rest of us. And then he, with *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, it just seems so like vapid and fatuous. Like this highly privileged academic talking really tough about "yeah, we're gonna take this thing down" when he really has no idea what he's talking about and he tends to talk about it in very irresponsible and unrealistic ways.



**TFSR: Available at a bookstore near you...**

**PG:** [laughs]

**TFSR:** [laughing] So, one of my favorite answers to the question of “How can listeners offer solidarity from where they’re at?” that I’ve asked guests in the past, one of the best answers that I’ve gotten consistently from people that are doing anti-megaproject work, or blocking pipelines - megaproject I guess - anticolonial struggles, is to do that work where we’re at, against the oppressive dynamics here to destabilize the capitalist core, so that autonomy can flourish here, as well as at the peripheries. And I feel like that was really echoed in the conclusion of your book. What would you tell people a good next step is after reading the book? [laughs] Leading question?

**PG:** I mean, in tandem with developing a global perspective, that’s real, that’s based in actual relationships of solidarity with the people and with struggles in other parts of the world, I would say that taking steps, at least baby steps towards food autonomy, is something that can be done anywhere, needs to be done anywhere. And that it’s also an interesting exercise or an interesting line of attack, because it can kind of give us new perspectives on what are the structures that get in the way of our survival? You know, what are the structures that really need to be identified as enemies? And sharing food is a really powerful activity on every level. And so moving beyond more superficial practices of affinity, towards practices of solidarity with people who are, you know, don’t think the same way as us, as a step towards actually creating like a community worthy of the name, food is extremely important. Being able to share food, being able to decrease dependence on capitalism, that aspect. If I had to give a shorter answer I would highlight that for special attention.

**TFSR: So start a garden. You heard it here first.**

[both crack up together]

**PG:** Housing! Housing is really important.

**TFSR: Totally.**

**PG:** Taking over housing, anyways, yeah. To answer properly you'd have to talk about so many different things.

**TFSR:** I guess intervene where you can and have some imagination. I really liked the fact that a couple times in the book that you challenged the the readership to “no, really, stop reading. Please take a moment, close your eyes or look out the window and just do some thinking”. Yeah, that's good.

**Peter,** are you working on anything else right now or just kind of like, taking care of business between between books?

**PG:** Uhhhhh, right now just trying to stay alive and yeah. I think we're doing a very bad job generally in our movements of taking care of ourselves and taking care of each other. And so I'm trying to look at that more. Yeah, trying to get off my ass to actually plant my garden once it's spring. And yeah, we're still working on the infrastructures gatherings, anarchists infrastructures gatherings here in Catalunya. Whenever I find the motivation to start working on the next book, the next one will probably be a critique of democracy, both representative and direct. And then I'd also love to get to this research project about the invention of whiteness in the Spanish colonial experience, since it's been mostly studied in the English experience of the invention of whiteness through through colonialism.

**TFSR:** Cool. Well, thanks for this lovely book. I really enjoyed the read and thank you for taking the time to talk.

**PG:** Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to talk and thanks for, thanks for reading, thanks for the conversation and, yeah. Thanks for being in touch.

**TFSR:** Of course.

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