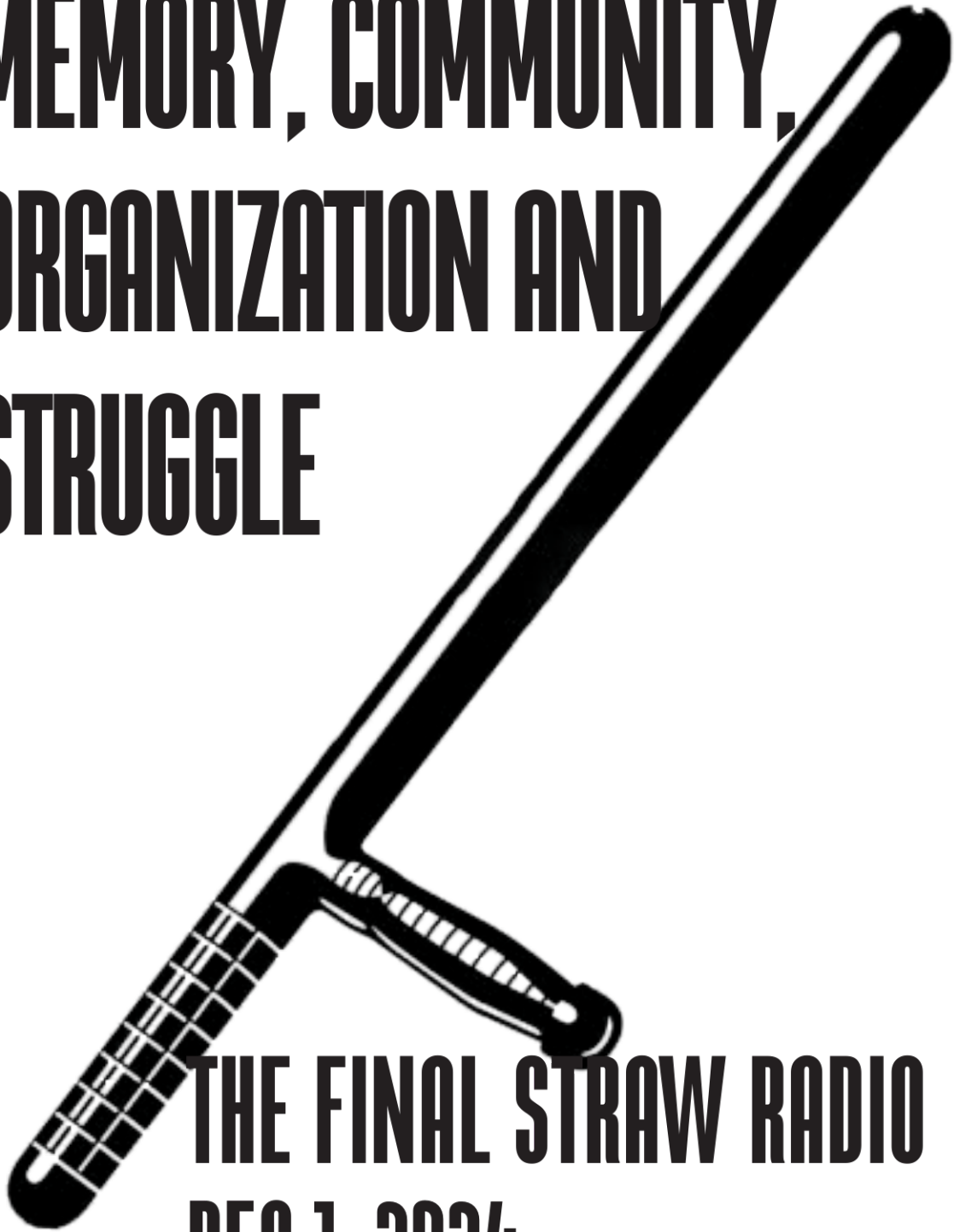


**PETER GELDERLOOS ON  
MEMORY, COMMUNITY,  
ORGANIZATION AND  
STRUGGLE**



**THE FINAL STRAW RADIO  
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This week, we're airing an interview with anarchist author, Peter Gelderloos about two of his recent books *They Will Beat the Memory Out of Us: Forcing Nonviolence on Forgetful Movements* (Pluto Books, 2024) as well as *Organization, Community, Continuity* (Detritus, 2024). For this episode, we speak on movement memory, community, care work, organization and struggle.

The *It's Revolution or Death: Part 1* video mentioned at the end of the interview can be found on the SubMedia website at <https://sub.media>

Search for this interview title at **<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/>** to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

**TFSR:** All right, so welcome back to the show Peter. Would you please introduce yourself for the audience?

**Peter Gelderloos:** Hi, thanks for having me again. My name is Peter Gelderloos. I am a lifelong anarchist. I do a lot of writing based on my experience in movements. I've lived most of my adult life in Catalonia, in and around Barcelona. I'm back in the states now in Cleveland. Happy to be on the show again.

**TFSR:** Thanks for taking the time. I really appreciate it. I'm excited to speak to you again. In the last year you had two books published, that we'll be touching on today. The titles are *They Will Beat the Memory Out of Us: Forcing Nonviolence on Forgetful Movements* which came out from Pluto Press and also *Organization, Community, Continuity*, an essay published alongside the essay *For an Anti-Authoritarian Inequality* out from Detritus Books. These two publications touch on a lot of topics, but the threads that I'm hoping we can pull on in this conversation, relate to questions of preparation, collaboration and orientation as the Trump administration returns to office and beyond that too. I know a lot of people have, while not rooting for a Harris regime, are bracing themselves for a new Trump presidency. In the year of run up to his 2016 election, there was a lot of organizing and escalation towards resistance from many on the center and the left of the population living in the US, that I don't feel there was this time around. There was definitely agitation and organizing in the street concerning Palestine but there weren't huge Trump demonstrations that caused street fighting, or that caused communities that were hosting them to really bring up their hackles and their defenses. Can you talk a bit about memory and movement, the erasure of that memory or the organizing of resistance in this situation?

**Peter Gelderloos:** To understand some of the loss of momentum, or this feeling of collective strength or collective response that we're experiencing right now after Trump's re-election and to understand strategically the kind of difficulties that we will probably face in the next couple years, immediately going forward, it's really necessary to look at what things were done effectively and what sort of mistakes were made during the first Trump presidency and in the intervening years. I think we primarily are not doing that or not remembering what we need to be remembering for two reasons. One is a lack of continuity, a lack of collective or inter-generational continuity. Whether because a lot of the people who were in the streets, who were organizing in 2016/2017 are not so active or not so much in communication anymore. Whether it's because folks who have started more recently to organize,



to struggle, are not in connection with folks who were earlier, with our memories and experiences. Or a combination of those things. I have a feeling we'll get to that later. Then another reason is that we're not referring to this wealth of knowledge, because a victory, as much as a defeat is a wealth of knowledge for a struggle. It's a really important experience that we can learn from if we actually do the work of digesting it. That, I think, is the key of this other reason, which is that there really was not a collective digestion of mistakes that were made. I really wish that that we could just have a movement culture where we were able to name mistakes, whether it was our own, or mistakes that we think other people or other currents made without the ego. Just having a baseline of solidarity, that we're there for each other, we have each other's backs. All of us will make mistakes. All of us will get it wrong sometimes, and we will be stronger if we can just talk about that in a supportive way, but a critical, honest way. Ego gets in the way of that. Which is just my own personal advice. If you see comrades who lead with ego, if ego for them is more important than these other questions, don't feed the beast. Give more support and more time and more collaboration to other comrades.

We come up, most of us, in a very conflict avoidant culture. That's another reason. Because of this lack of memory, a lot of folks get into the struggle with unrealistic expectations about how long it takes, about the fact that it's not a geometric process. It's not a line that just angles upward, that struggles get quantitatively stronger and stronger and stronger until we win. There's always dips, there's ebbs and flows. There are moments that require very different ways of showing up. So people lose hope, or after pouring themselves into this organizing, into this struggle or facing situations of risk, situations of harm, situations that can be really traumatizing, they they give up in one way or another. They turn to these simpler solutions that can come from political parties, from single-issue NGO organizing, that can come from a more authoritarian approach to struggle. These different things are generally what I'm referring to when I talk about the left.

There's another loss of historical memory: the left originally refers to the left side of the aisle in the parliament, or in Congress, in the congressional building. It comes from one of the French Revolutions, and the anarchists in most of the world still remember that (at the very least linguistically) and understand that the left doesn't refer to anarchists or other fully anti-State approaches to struggle. A lot of indigenous movements that are still fighting against colonialism today, fighting to be able to revitalize their cultures and win back their lands and their ways of relating with the land. Which historically and traditionally means without the State. Obviously, that's not at all to say that the right and the left are the same. We're never going to make any kind of alliance of convenience with the right. We're not going to tolerate intentionally, openly and consciously oppressive behaviors and approaches and attitudes. We're going to fight that in every way. But it means having a more

complex understanding of the left. In most other languages, people remember that distinction, that the left wing is focused on transforming society either within the government or by seizing state power. By those means, every left wing movement that has ever succeeded has maintained capitalism rather than abolishing it. Lenin himself named the system that he was implementing State Capitalism. Clearly, if you look at all the stats of GDP growth, etc, and their place in the world economy, no country from China to Cuba that has a socialist government can actually claim to have abolished capitalism. However, most of the rank and file of the left (people who aren't on the payroll, people who are not highly paid union bureaucrats or party leaders or NGO directors pulling in six figures) most of that rank and file are sincere. They do actually want to make the world a better place. They're not rabid transphobes and white supremacists and xenophobes like the base of the right wing is. So we need to understand that they've given up their agency by choosing to follow these more authoritarian approaches. But they still have real desires for some kind of healthy transformation for the world.

Basically, when dealing with the left we need to understand that the leadership of the left is trying to do, ultimately, the same thing as the right wing, which is to protect state authority. They want to be the ones in control of it, but they want to refresh state authority. They want to renovate it so that it can improve its image, improve its strategies for social control. The left honestly tends to be more effective and more intelligent in going about that. Whereas the right wing tends to be so paranoid about their various forms of entitlement that they often are the ones who %\$#@ the bed and actually weaken state power. So that's another really important point of historical memory that would stretch back through centuries of examples. It's a question of continuity that's more lateral. It's not just going back to previous generations, but it's going to other continents, the way that people have always moved across continents, the way that our movements have always been as global as we've been capable of sharing experiences across borders. So that's really important. It's like naming that relationship with the left. Why? Because that was forgotten. In 2016/2017 Obama was possibly one of the most progressive presidents in most of our lifetimes. He deported more people, he continued to carry out mass murder in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation with the ecological crisis got worse, police killings got worse. We still had to respond to police killings with the riots and the uprisings in the streets in Oakland, in Ferguson, in New York City and so many other places. None of that got better, and in some cases, it got worse.

We remembered this. We realized this. Many people developed more of a critique of the left, or the idea that change was going to come through a more progressive shift in the mainstream institutions. When Trump comes in, one of his first measures (I believe it was an executive order), what he referred to as a Muslim Ban. Which was to basically ban immigration from a number of



primarily Muslim countries. Trump, wasn't hiding it, it was so clearly a prejudicial policy that goes against all the laws on the books that have to do with discrimination around religion and race. The NGOs, the Democrats, as far left as you want to go within the institutions couldn't stop it. So many people have forgotten about that or are unaware of what happened whether they were active back then or not, whether they've started more recently. Our movements blocked that by occupying and shutting down pretty much every international airport in the country. And that was an illegal thing to do. It was just a great example of direct action. People didn't jump through all the bureaucratic hoops which were proven not to work, which we know and should know don't work. We shut it down ourselves as a movement and stopped that policy.

In general, many of those occupations were organized in an in an anarchic way. They weren't controlled by by parties or NGOs. They happened very quickly, very spontaneously. Showing one of the strengths of anarchism is that people don't have to identify as anarchists. They don't have to have experience as anarchists to work in these anarchic ways or to begin organizing in these anarchic ways. Of course, there's always a learning process there but everyone can get started at any time. We also see that in the anti-police uprisings. We see that in the mutual aid responses to these worsening so-called natural disasters, which are really disasters of capitalism. They're disasters of the ecological crisis caused by capitalism and the State. The best first responses, the responses that saved the most lives, that distribute the most resources, that keep people safe, are the ones organized along the logic of mutual aid were most of the time by people who have never participated in social movements, who don't even know what anarchism is. Likewise, many of the airport shutdowns went down that way (and in a number of others), in a lot of the first ones, it was anarchists, people from our movement who initiated and organized these first shutdowns and that stopped it.

Let's contrast that with another thing that happened during those years and immediately after. The right wing was increasingly mobilizing in the streets and on the internet, and people who had been organizing against those kind of white supremacists and transphobic threats in the past were people of color. Whether they belong to political organizations or organizing on a more informal, neighborhood level.

Anti-Racist Action was an organization in the US that actually adapted Anti-Fascist Action from from Europe. In general, European movements have a lot of difficulty understanding and focusing on questions of racism and white supremacy. So Anti-Racist Action was adapted for that more anti-racist consciousness in in the US. Trans groups, sex workers, feminist groups. Those are the groups who for a long time have been organizing, have been the main line of defense against the white supremacists (the transphobes who are out there murdering people and not

wearing badges) with this general fear, this panic that spread also to the center and all throughout the left and to a lot of anarchists who had forgotten that we're not actually a part of the left. We need to be working with the rank and file, with the base, the grassroots of the left, but we need to have a strong criticism and a critical awareness of the function of the leadership of the left fell. We fell into a sort of Anti-fascist common front, right?

This would be one of the first times in the US that you have an Anti-fascist common front. That's more associated with countries like France and Spain, where it was used to control and to limit revolutionaries, to control and limit anarchists and others. But in the US, we can find similar popular fronts and united fronts in organizing against the Great Depression. The idea of a popular front was created largely as an adaptation of earlier models, like everything is. It was created largely by the Communist Party before World War Two. A lot of folks don't know, but the communists actually had a policy of allying with the Nazis early on, in order to try to fight against their rivals in the left, to fight against the Social Democrats, anarchists, etc. As soon as the Nazis took power, they realized that they made a major miscalculation. They never admitted their error. So you just shifted to a popular front, or a sort of left unity kind of strategy. Which is another way for them to try to maintain control, and another way to limit the potential of the most radical edge of these struggles; often the only part of the struggles that's actually looking at the root causes of these problems that we're dealing with.

There was a lot of that in like 1930's organizing during the Great Depression, organizing against capitalism, where you had a very strong movement. So much so that people on top were afraid of revolution. That's what brought, arguably, the most progressive presidential administration in the US in the 20th century, which was FDR. This brought us a lot more social benefits, welfare, Social Security, things like that. That was the left trying to get out ahead of a revolution and to try to buy off the working classes. That was also in the interests of the Communist Party who was trying to lead the left, but also not actually as interested in a revolution as their propaganda might have led one to believe. Communist parties all around the world at that time basically bent to the interest of the USSR, which is most of all interested in having different alliances on the geopolitical stage. This kind of left wing unity helps bring about these reforms, for sure, but they prevented a revolution. They prevented us as the under classes, all oppressed and exploited in these different and intersecting and entangled ways, from actually being able to transform society ourselves, to define our own problems and define our needs and define the solutions to those needs. As we can see, again and again and again. So this brings up, once again, the question of memory. A government reform is not something that we can trust, not only because it's often dehumanizing, it often creates new problems or is horrible in some way.



A year and a half ago, I got diagnosed with a brain tumor and I'm not being flippant or hyperbolic when I say getting Medicare and Medicaid and dealing with the government bureaucracy has been much, much, much more difficult than dealing with a potentially lethal brain tumor. It's designed to be that way. Once you go through it, you can see it has to be intentional for it to be so torturous and dehumanizing of a process. Also we can't trust these governmental reforms because they're temporary. They will take them away from us as soon as we are no longer a threat to them, as soon as it's in their interests to take them away from us. So abortion...that was great that *Roe v. Wade* was on the books for a few decades. That's in large part due to feminist organizing, a movement that was a combination of direct action, more revolutionary approaches, more illegal approaches and also NGOs.

Feminists like Gloria Steinem (who worked for the CIA to rat out more revolutionary feminists) or people working in NGOs, who are making the big bucks to advocate for a good cause and working with the government and helping spread the lie, helping pass on this fiction that the government is a neutral institution. If it's in the right hand, that it can be a friendly instrument, it can be a tool that protects us, that keeps us safe. It's there for our own good. With a Trump victory, I have no idea if Medicaid might get slashed. I might lose my health care, might lose those benefits. Abortion, with just a different Supreme Court, that's out. All of these different progressive changes that protects people, that might, in some way, actually make life better. If it's the government that's ensuring it, then it's not in our hands. It's temporary. So this was largely forgotten in a lot of ways as the years of the first Trump term went on. From a really promising, more radical start, to more collaboration with the left.

The switch from anti-racism to anti-fascism also kind of required people to dramatize and pretend, invent or actually believe that some kind of fascist coup was imminent. You can go back to a lot of texts in 2018-2020 predicting that there would be a fascist takeover of government. As far as I've seen, none of the people who were publishing those very alarmist predictions ever made any kind of correction or ever acknowledged that they were wrong about that. I'd love to talk a little bit about what's damaging about that. So much of history constantly gets rewritten. Trump's attempt at electoral obstructionism and preventing the certification of the votes in the 2020 election is very different from a coup. Ironically, John Bolton, this arch-paleoconservative, put it pretty well. [He's] one of the architects of earlier Republican administrations, the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, and someone who himself orchestrated many coups around the world in the Global South. He put it very well that a coup takes a lot more organization than what happened in January 2021. What happened in January 2021 was very half assed. It was poorly organized. There was no military leadership on board, not enough media on board, no coordination. It was Trump throwing a dangerous temper tantrum that

had had a body count, albeit a small one. It is certainly problematic for any kind of democracy. Absolutely. But it is a long shot from a coup.

It's important to recognize that for also the reason that Trumps tendency towards being hyperbolic. Everything is always the worst thing and the most unjust thing that's ever happened. An actual military coup is a lot more dangerous and would require a different response. The people who are predicting "Oh, there's gonna be a right wing takeover of power, and there's gonna be a military dictatorship." We're not actually carrying out the kinds of preparation that we need to be carrying out when that is more possible. It is more possible now at this point, and also it really minimizes the harm caused by democracy.

Democracy is from its origins, a white supremacist system based in enslavement and in colonialism. A lot of the alarmism around Fascism is middle class people or white people, or people who are not exposed normally to the everyday violence that democracies use against its most marginalized subjects. They're worrying about getting the same treatment. That was really worrying to me. There was more alarmism around a type of government that would bring the kinds of violence that have always been there for a lot of people, to a larger group of people. That seemed to be happening, not only in an unrealistic way, not only in an ahistorical way, but in a way that was not very solid, realistic and just not very well thought out.

**TFSR: I think on that point you can point to the protests in Israel concerning the Netanyahu administration, concerning the changes in the judiciary there and executive power, and concerns about Netanyahu being able to continue holding power, even though he's been kicked out once. These "pro-democracy demonstrations" are not saying anything about the existence of an ethno-religious state sitting on occupied land, terrorizing and murdering and ethnic cleansing Palestinian people, Arab people, other people that are not Israeli subjects.**

**The lack of preparation and the lack of terrain that Trump was working from- his footing was unsure when he was doing this. It was very much like him, where it's not really prepared for, it's just kind of a last minute, last ditch effort. So that was very ham-fisted, what happened in 2021. But the fact that the intention was there, and that there were some people that were willing to follow through with it, to some degree, was concerning. The fact that there has been a large amount of the voting population that voted for him- about the same numbers last time as I understand the popular vote- voted for him again, with the knowledge that (even if they're drinking their own Kool Aid, about the stolen election or whatever) he has the intention, he's done this before, he denies that it was a bad thing.**



**What's to keep him from doing it again? Obviously, power is continuing to stand behind him in a lot of ways.**

**A lot of capitalist institutions, and dark reaction people like Peter Thiel are backing him. So even if he's not going to be the one that would hold power after that, they're not against the idea of somebody holding power. Having attempted this thing, and who might very well try to do the same thing again. I don't think the people that backed him in this last election necessarily believe that he did a great job in the first round, but that he was willing to do the kind of stuff that they want. That's explains something like Project 2025, as idealistic or imperfect as it might be in action. That's why that stuff is scary to me.**

**Peter Gelderloos:** I think that is definitely accurate. That leads into some of the more evolved or advanced dangers that we're facing in 2024 and 2025 that we weren't actually facing in 2016 or 2020. We can look at that in one way, as Trump kind of changed the rules of politics by never admitting to being wrong, never admitting to have lost anything, and never admitting to any kind of embarrassment. That really, really worked. The present media landscape can help with that.

One critical moment from the perspective of democracy (which is not my perspective, but it's helpful to be aware of): a huge part of the Republican Party establishment actually doesn't do well under Trump, has been largely replaced since Trump. They saw that but they also saw that they would have more chances to be closer to power in any kind of Republican administration than in a Democratic administration. There was that moment when the house had impeached him, and the vast majority of Republicans in the Senate decided to not go ahead and turn that impeachment into actual penal consequences for Trump. They could have had Trump locked up and barred from future office at that moment but they were worried about empowering the Democrats. They made a short term decision. These kind of political structures are designed to favor short term decisions over long term decisions.

So even though a good part of the Republican establishment actually wants some kind of functioning democracy because it's also in their interest, they don't want the US to totally mess up its position on the world stage. For example, they certainly don't want tariffs to like tank the US economy. But they made a short term decision to try to avoid giving the Democrats momentum. If something had happened to Trump that was beyond his control to brush off or deny like going to prison then I think the whole movement behind him would have collapsed. He finally would have become (in his own words) a loser. He's been able to cast himself as both a victim and a hero by shrugging off or fighting off, or smirking in the face of everything that he's been caught doing. That's a little bit about how this kind of



trajectory is tied to a built in weakness of the democratic system itself. It's good to bring that up. Large parts of the right wing of the Republican establishment that are critical of Trump are still helping enable it.

Can I mention another thing that more involves the left, from the end of Trump's first presidency, that I think is showing up now?

**TFSR: Please.**

**Peter Gelderloos:** The left was able to regenerate itself, to spare itself from some criticism, through these ideas of left wing unity that are built into anti-fascism. It's important to recognize that there are a lot of elements out there that three years out of every four, are very critical of the Democrats. They will talk about the abolition of the prison system, or the abolition of police. They will talk about how horrible the border regime is, and all those things. But when an election year comes around, they dramatically change their discourse. They might maintain some semblance of criticism of the Democratic Party, but they will begin to phrase it as "the necessary choice" or "the better of two options", things like that. If they're able to build up strength, if they're able to build up credibility between elections, we should have been able to see over this last year the ways that they will use it and the ways that they won't use it when an election is on the line. An election means if the Democrats are in power, a lot in terms of funding for NGOs. That means a lot in terms of who has their hand on the money faucet. It makes a big difference to the people in the left who are on the payroll of the leaders of the left.

Another important thing that was happening was on the internet, in social media. Anarchists were not only important in the streets combating these actual neo-Nazis, or the KKK or the proud boys, and these other white supremacist, far-right organizations- some of which were democratic, and some of which were definitely pro-fascist alliance of convenience- but also on the internet. Social media, undoubtedly, has become one of the most important tools, not just for the right, but for the far-right. It's a tool of propaganda, it's a tool of recruitment, it's a tool of organizing. It's a tool of pushing the entire political framework farther right, of normalizing things that after World War Two, after the Holocaust, so much of the world was saying "never again" to. Now we're seeing it all over again.

There were a number of anarchist platforms which we're doing the best that they could to confront these discourses, to create this sense of inspiration that we could fight back against these Nazis. Though the largest platforms were banned, on Facebook and then on Twitter or X at the end of the Trump administration and at the beginning of the Biden administration.

**TFSR: And also Patreon and PayPal and payment platforms in addition.**

**Peter Gelderloos:** Yes. Thank you for naming those as well. Yeah, this was what could be called a movement amongst the tech world. Which is a very important, vital part of the newer sectors in the capitalist economy. Because they're newer, the more traditional institutions of democratic power don't already have structures in place or strategies in place for how to deal with them. At the instigation of right-wing figures within those companies- whether it's PayPal's founding figures, or other folks rising the ranks, who were connected the Republican Party, far-right people- they pushed for these anarchist platforms to be banned. This was not based on any kind of criteria that were being used against other groups. It was very clearly to silence anarchist voices that were organizing against racism, against transphobia, against the borders. After that, it was really free range for the far-right.

Not only did that allow them to increase their recruiting and increase their organizing, it allowed them to increasingly push the entire discourse farther right and normalize these really horrible, dangerous and harmful positions. It's not just a matter of opinion. These are some of the same people attacking trans folks, shooting Black Lives Matter protesters or signing up as cops or soldiers and carrying out the killing themselves. These are some of the same people. Not only are they pushing things farther right, but also this was a really key area that allowed the dominance of the far-right over the entire right.

Normally, after a big electoral upset, when a political party loses the way that Trump and the Republican Party lost in the 2020 elections, you would have a change of guard. You would reconsider the strategies and switch who's in charge. There was some attempt by the Republicans to do that, it held short of getting Trump sent to prison or barred from holding future office. I think a lot of them had the expectation that he would fade away. These social media spaces, these internet spaces, are insulated from the turbulence of electoral politics in a way that the rest of the party structure was not. They are basically immune. Just like how they're immune to fact, they're also immune to consequence. It's one of the existential features of social media and of these online spaces.

So Trump's base in social media (and really the base of the far-right in social media) was not just preserved, it was expanded in a critical moment. That prevented any kind of course correction for the right-wing. Not just in the US, but in a lot of other countries as well, in a way that's really relevant to this emerging (at times, very strategically important) coalition building with the far-right in Israel. Which is, of course, allied with the rabidly antisemitic, far-right in Europe, with Hungary, with Orban, with Bolsonaro (who is someone even more organized, more together and more coherently in favor of of a dictatorship than Trump, in Brazil.)

**Bursts:** Though their attempted coup was also pretty comedic, too.

**Peter Gelderloos:** Yeah, the final thing that ties that together is, what did the left-wing do in response to what was very openly censorship? With very few exceptions they did nothing. They don't talk about it. Most news analysis nowadays is looking to "oh my gosh. Let's analyze the role that the far-right social media played in all of this and Trump's new victory." They won't mention that these major platforms, mostly anarchist platforms, were censored in the social media world.

So they've made it easier for the far right to co-op this whole free speech discourse as though they're the champions of free speech and Democrats are just punishing everyone for using politically incorrect language. They're helping hide the fact that the far right got a huge boost from the censorship of the people and political currents that were actually going against and organizing against them and getting to the roots of the problem. The left stayed silent on that. In part because of these mistaken strategies from a lot of anarchists (that helped the left revitalize itself), and in part because the left favored its own short term interests and stabbed us in the back all over again, which was not surprising at all. They helped participate in our censorship, silencing, loss of resources and platforms and all of that. Now you have a much weaker situation in social movements. That's the long story of how I wanted to tie that in, and the way that loss of memory, lack of self-criticism and refusal to learn lessons ties into that.

Part of the reason that we're seeing such a weaker response right now is because the last few years have been really demoralizing. The right wing and how it's gone farther and farther right has a part in that and the left wing also has a role in that. Not just with this tacit support for the censorship. I'm living in Ohio now and for the vast majority of the electoral cycle every Republican ad had only two focuses. The Democrats were talking about the economy and them failing to talk about the economy certainly was a dumb strategy on their part. The Republican campaign was based on almost exclusively transphobia and criminalization and demonization of immigrants, in a very obviously racially coded way. So white supremacy and transphobia were the foundations of the Republican campaign, and at least in Ohio. None of the Democratic ads, none of the Democratic propaganda, none of the discourse, pushed back on those things. So a large part of the left, a large part of the Democrats, being more at the center-left, participated in this shift to the right by not pushing back on the xenophobia, not pushing back on the transphobia.

**TFSR:** One thing that I'd like to just briefly talk about, if that's okay. I'm open to critiques of the left, but it's such a vague term that sometimes it sends up little alarms for me, because I've definitely heard people who have shifted through post-left to far-right perspectives, who are critical of the left. But then it's not about the institutions. It's often about the expressed values. Where I at least put the values that are innate to a right wing per-



spective, or a far right perspective, is that there are innate, natural hierarchies in the world, and there's a natural order that humans can understand and define. I think that the left tends to have an ideological tendency that challenges that and says that structures are socially constructed. They can look the ways that we want them to, that undermine essentialism (as understood within one culture or another) as defining features for human beings, or animals, or natural life. That's just more complex, it's more of a web. I'd love if you could say a few things about that, like holding criticism of the capital I Left, while at the same time holding the potential for solidarity with people that identify as being on the left. Because of those, I won't say egalitarian, but at least values that don't posit more worth to one person than another.

**Peter Gelderloos:** I think that's really important. The way that you summed up the right is really succinct, really accurate and lays bare how important it is not to fall into the kind of bull#\$% about how "Oh, they're using some kind of rebellious discourse about not trusting the government." - that there would be any possibility of some kind of relationship of convenience with with the right wing. I mean, I tried to get at this earlier.

**TFSR: No Boogaloo.**

**Peter Gelderloos:** [laughs] It is really vital to work with folks who identify with the left and who consider themselves leftist. We grow up in a society (especially in the Anglophone world, in the English speaking world) that it's either the right or the left. The right are the racists, the sexist and the transphobes and all that. They believe in these so-called natural hierarchies like you named. People think that the only way to oppose that is by joining the left and supporting the left. They're not given that historical context that actually, in practice today (and certainly in its origins historically) the left was just another part of government, the left of the aisle, another strategy for holding and wielding State power. They're taught that the State is a neutral instrument, that it can be used for good or for bad, depending on who's at the wheel.

Sincerity is highly important. That support for some idea of freedom and dignity for everyone and not believing in these supposedly natural hierarchies of race or gender or any of that. That's all super important. It just needs to be done in a critical way, to show that those who are in charge the left, their first priority (we can look at the historical record) has always been to to maintain, often renovate, reform but to maintain these institutions of power. Which are the originators of mass enslavement, of the ecological crisis, of borders and all those things.

**TFSR:** I think that's really well put. The methodologies shape the structures that come out of them, or the reverse. If you're wondering "Well, these groups say this stuff that resonates with me," there's also the question of "How are they organizing? What sort of part do you have in this in the meantime, and how, how does this reflect the vision of the world that that group is creating?"

Similarly, I think, just to put a pin in the discussion about democracy, the far right will also speak negatively against democracy. I think that there's a little bit of linguistic overlap that shows some honesty in the critique from the anarchist or the autonomous position, of democratic institutions: saying that these are formulated off of the Greek city-states like Athens, or property holding, gendered hierarchies, citizenship and slave owning, are all very central parts to it. That was reproduced in the US system. People like neo-feudalists will say, "Yes, exactly. That's what we need to go back to. Thomas Jefferson would have loved this."

The system has recuperated the idea of people making decisions about the things that directly impact their lives. The word democracy has become the ideal, and the thing that they can say, "This is us. This is this in application." However, being critical of that doesn't mean being pro-elitism and a centralized, decision making model. It's just saying that you're pointing to something without actually understanding the word. Maybe it's time for us to reformulate what we mean when we're pointing to this, what values we're extracting and how we move forward organizationally.

**Peter Gelderloos:** Absolutely. If I may put one more pin in democracy: currently the far right (or at the very least, the most relevant, dangerous part of the far right) criticizes democracy and say the US actually isn't a democracy. The US is a republic. Part of what they're saying is that they want to limit the formal rights of participation and the voice that you are supposedly constitutionally given within the government of the United States. Whether it's a democracy or republic. They want to champion a more authoritarian system which is still electoral. It's not an outright dictatorship. That's folks like Peter Hegseth who is the current Defense Department nominee. He was on Fox News, was a major television presenter, Army vet, and also a strong representative of Christian Nationalism. I want to name that when anarchists are criticizing democracy it's because the promises that democracy makes around participation and freedom have always been false promises. Those promises can actually be much better served through decentralized, networked, collective, self-organization, of a variety of models that each group of people would choose and develop for themselves on the basis of solidarity and mutual aid and all that without the State.

We're going for more of that, where we actually get to be free with full empowerment and access to all the resources for happiness. Not just survival but the happiness that everyone needs. Opposed to the far right criticizing democracy. Some of them want a dictatorship and the more relevant, more dangerous parts are the Christian Nationalists who want to reduce the rights that people expect and are championing a Republic rather than the democracy.

**TFSR:** Pivoting a little bit, but talking more about how we envision the world, how we move forward as anarchists, how we organize within the communities that we exist in, as well as our chosen communities. Within anarchist movements, at least in the last few decades and earlier, there have been recurring debates between positions that could be generally referred to as organizationalism versus informalism, which you discuss in the organization portion of the *Detritus* release.

Since that was published in Catalan in 2022, I'm guessing it was directed at different audiences than the new release was, but I think that you're framing and approach towards different coordinating tools is really useful in this time, where people in our audience may be looking to get organized, and because we have this limited memory, this lack of intergenerational communication, we're mostly working with what we've been handed or have been able to excavate ourselves. So can you talk a little bit about the question of coordination, formality and what methods we might approach the tasks at hands with?

**Peter Gelderloos:** Like you mentioned, I wrote *Organization, Continuity and Community* in 2022 in Catalan. Probably the most important thing to be aware of: The context is that in Catalonia and across the Spanish State, there is more density in the anarchist movement. With more density, there's more organization of a variety of kinds across the spectrum, from informal to more formal. There are elements to that writing that I believe to be valid anywhere outside of that context (which is different from the States). In the States, anarchist organization tends to be very project oriented. In part that's a function of less density, a smaller proportion of anarchists in the population and a much broader territory. Also, more geographical space between different anarchists, nuclei, groups, or collectives of anarchists. So in the States, organization tends to manifest as project, collective projects, whether that is some kind of publishing or media project, whether it's a social center...

**TFSR:** Food Not Bombs?

**Peter Gelderloos:** Food Not Bombs, exactly. So there's less relationship between



projects. That might even make it harder to conceive of the importance of the organizational question, in regards to relationships between different groups, different projects, different structures. Like you mentioned, it largely comes down to what often plays out as a dogmatic contest between formalism and informalism, affinity groups versus Federation and their organizational structures. I don't think that's very helpful. I don't think it's it is actually really paying attention to how organization works.

There's actually a quote from an anti-capitalist, armed group during the Franco years, that some of my older friends in Catalonia participated in, which bypassed an unhelpful way of looking at the problem. They said, organization is the organization of the tasks of the struggle. A cliched English way of rendering that would be: Organization is a verb. Which I kind of have to shudder a little bit after that because, technically, it's not. It's a noun. But grammar woes aside, it means that the whole purpose is finding the tools to focus and to amplify the sorts of actions and activities that you're carrying out. This helps us take the organizational question out of a dogmatic terrain but not into a terrain of false relativism, where everything's the same, where one form of organization is just as good as valid as the next, because it's not.

But we entirely miss the point when we start to build up our identities or get more dogmatic about whether we prefer a more informal or formal structure. There are many, many different organizational modes or structures in the toolbox that are valid. They have different advantages and disadvantages. The most helpful thing is to be able to look at these without having our sense of identity tied into them, and comparing the advantages and the disadvantages that they each have. Every tool has things that it's good at and things that it's really not made for. We should be comparing those to the situation that we're facing, to the things that we're trying to accomplish. Then, even better, is getting out of that, going beyond that to look at the relationship between the different methods of organizing and the different organizational structures that are in play. So not being dogmatic about it.

How do we know we're not being dogmatic about it, but then also not falling into like a false relativism? There are organizational modes that can never, ever be compatible with anarchic ends, like the State. The State is a type of machine that destroys freedom, that is extractivist, that disempowers people, that violently organizes people, coercively organizes people in order to steal all of our power away and our resources, and concentrate those resources and that power within the centralizing framework. That is the nature of a State every bit as much as it is the nature of an automobile (as currently designed) to burn gasoline. Making it electric powered changes some things. That requires a completely different motor. The previous motor is not going to be able to run. You're not going to plug it into the wall. Even if you do change that motor it still is stuck to driving. If you get a



brain tumor you're not going to go to a car to fix that for you, even if a surgeon is driving the car. So that's kind of the way that... when people look at organizations like this completely neutral thing, or the State as like a neutral thing, that metaphor can help to see how naive or unrealistic that expectation is.

**TFSR: They're technologies, right? They're techniques and technologies that are best applied towards what they've been developed for.**

**Peter Gelderloos:** Yeah, and are incapable of doing certain other things.

**TFSR: Did say something about eating pasta with a hammer?**

**Peter Gelderloos:** I think so. Yeah. You can tell I was in a Mediterranean country when I wrote that. I'm fighting back my impulse to do a stereotypical Italian accent. But hey, I'm actually not politically correct. It's fun to insult white people. So anyways, I'll leave that up to you with the final cut. But whatever. I said it. Come at me. [laughs]

That brings us to the importance of what I refer to sometimes as the ecosystem of revolt, or an ecosystemic approach to understanding organization. Pay attention out there. We will never fit all of the movement into a single organization, and doing that actually hurts our resistance, hurts our struggle. I'm pretty sure it was in this text, I looked at different, broader modes that the movement might be in when it segmented or compartmentalized, fragmented or fractured and unified. A unified movement is a very weak movement. All of our eggs are in one basket. There's going to be a lot more political interests, more possibility for informal or formal hierarchies developing. It's just more vulnerable because we don't have all of the benefits of a complex, diverse array of advantages and disadvantages in different organizations. It's the One Big Union thing. It doesn't work. When we've gotten close to that, it has self-defeated. It has self-destructed. I can't remember exactly how I translated it. Either segmented or compartmentalized. That's when you have a lot of different organizational structures or initiatives, and they don't really communicate. Either because there's bad blood, because it's after some kind of movement breakup, or just because there's not a lot of movement density, or not good movement practices of solidarity and communication. That means these different organizational experiences aren't learning from one another. They're not in active solidarity. They're not helping each other out. They're not bringing their array of advantages and disadvantages to the table in a strategic way.

Time and again, if you look at like the times when we're strongest in our revolutionary movements it's when it's a more fragmented, fractured or splintered organizational landscape. It's a lot easier to understand from on the inside, but

every understanding is going to be different based on where you are in this broader anarchist space. It's going to be extremely difficult for to understand from above, which is the perspective of of policing. Whether that's from the NGOs that are trying to tame and civilize the whole thing, or from the perspective of the actual police who are trying to figure out who's doing what, how to turn them against each other, how to repress and control them.

It also enables us, in situ, from an embodied place within our specific context, our specific struggles, our specific organizational methods, to strategically craft our relationships and solidarity. To find out in what circumstances does it make sense to work really closely with other projects and initiatives? How do we use meta levels of organization to structure or to amplify or to channel that collaboration, that cooperation? In what circumstances is it better to just leave some space, have some air. We'll do things our way. They'll do things their way. There might be some conflict. We'll do our best to not violate solidarity, in how we handle that conflict. We'll have disagreements sometimes. We might hate each other a little bit, but as long as we can recognize that the other side aren't cops and they're doing the best they can, we might learn something from them. Even if we're strongly in disagreement.

It's an ecosystem. The reason that should not lead us towards a false relativism of "everything's equal". It's like the old diversity of tactics approach: everything is equally valid, and we just shouldn't criticize anything. An ecosystem is helped by having a diversity of members, a lot of different organisms, different approaches to life that are creating different things within this habitat that we all create together. We're creating one another's niches. We're creating one another's spaces to exist, and nutrients and so on and so forth. The way that a healthy ecosystem does. We eat one another, and that's a good thing. It's sometimes an uncomfortable experience, dying and being eaten, but that gets to the heart of life and how it's able to keep going and be resilient.

Not everything fits in an ecosystem. A petrochemical plant doesn't fit in an ecosystem. A parking lot is a dead zone. So there are organizational modes that create dead zones, like the State, like these NGOs, things like that. White supremacist organizations or organizing methods, those create dead zones. They make the ecosystem weaker. They don't fall within that generosity of extending solidarity to a wide form of organizational approaches. Rather than saying "the affinity group is the correct model. Everyone needs to be in affinity groups and networks of affinity groups" or "the Federation is the correct model. Everyone needs to form a local chapter of our federation and join it." Monopolizing is an ecosystem destroyer. Monopolizing kills life, whether that's out in the economy and the relationship between the economy and the ecology, or whether that's in our movements.

**TFSR:** Thank you for that. So I appreciate how both books really speak about the existing rhizomal networks of relationships that we carry, foster and we are carried by, throughout our lifetimes. As we change through our lives, in body and imagination and desire and in need, the importance of sustaining movements and communities- where many ways of being and ways of engaging politically can exist- moves to the fore. Whether it's because our bodies change, we're no longer able to physically do certain things, our brains change, we have children, we have care relationships with elders, our interests or desires change as I said. Can you talk a bit about the role of care, the idea of burnout and the scope of cultures of resistance?

**Peter Gelderloos:** That's one of the most important questions. It's definitely one of the focuses of both books. Let's contrast the idea of care and the idea of burnout. Burnout: that's the mechanical technology, and that shows a certain view of treating ourselves like machines, understanding ourselves as machines. We're not machines. I'm not criticizing you for using that term, because I used it well into the process of writing the book, until I realized, "Crap. I gotta stop. I gotta stop talking about it in this way and thinking about it in this way." It's not just a word choice that actually doesn't matter that much. It really does reflect how we're treating ourselves and how we're treating one another in the course of the struggle. And I think we can see that when we look at the range of things that are referred to as burnout, right?

People who are exhausted, because we were running a bail fund for a few weeks after protests. That was after months of meeting after meeting after meeting, preparing these big protests. Now there's some people facing trial, and we're shifting into trial support and all that. And we're, we're just exhausted. We're pushing ourselves beyond what we can actually handle. There's some interviews in the book with some comrades who really focus on the support work and how there's an endless need for support. But we can't decide how much of this work we do, based on the need out there. We have to decide based on our own capacity.

That's a very mechanical approach. It shows no care for the instrument. It's like if this power washer can only wash 1000 trash bins a day before it breaks down, then we're going to use it till it breaks and we're going to get a better one. That's how we've been treating ourselves a lot of the time rather than treating one another and treating ourselves as people, as living beings that only so much capacity, that also need to be taken care of.

Going back years, I've heard folks in the movement who are really the militants, the more charismatic figures (militant more, not in an English sense, so more charismatic figures) the ones who have more informal power, the ones who are doing capital "O" Organizing, more in the spotlight. Someone is dealing with



trauma. Someone is raising kids, someone is dealing with a chronic health problem. Someone has shifted to a different project, and that person is referred to as having dropped out, or having burnt out. Which is just absolutely not true. A lot of the times, the things that they're doing might actually be more strategic or more helpful, more useful. In any case, they don't need to be put on this linear ranking, like "what is the more valid form of struggle?" It's important to be able to make criticisms, and making criticisms of some of these more charismatic modes of showing up in the struggle.

Actually, I will make a ranking there: If there's care work that's collective, informed by an awareness of how capitalism works, of how white supremacy works, of how patriarchy works, and if it's also informed by an awareness of how to combat those systems of oppression...that kind of collective, solidaristic, revolutionary, transformative care work, I will say, is more important than most of the capital "O" Organizing or this more charismatic, "who's the most popular activist" way of participating in struggle.

In general, I think we need to shift away from any kind of linear ranking. Not just reversing the existing ranking system, but naming it, being aware that these kind of more heroic activities and these more charismatic activities are valued so much more than all of these other forms of struggle and organizing. On the one hand we need to recognize the necessary mutuality between different ways of showing up, identifying ways of showing up that are not helpful and poison the soil for everybody. But then find ways that allow us, as as we age, as different things happen in our lives, to shift between one way of showing up and another. Care work is very undervalued. I'm someone who's spent my life arguing against pacifism and non-violence but there is a downside, which pacifism does not at all provide the answer for. There are these modes of struggle that are very heroic where more attention and more reward is given to people who, at the very least, give off the appearance that they're into the hardcore %\$#@: The sabotage, the fighting with cops, fighting with Nazis and stuff like that. That's not a great security culture to reward people who very clearly give off the impression that "Oh yeah, I do that illegal \$#@!"

**TFSR: That Brandon Darby energy?**

**Peter Gelderloos:** Yeah, absolutely. Look up Brandon Darby, folks who don't know that name. Speaking of memory. It's also just so, so harmful to us and to our movements. We need fighting with the cops. We need to know how to carry out sabotage, to sabotage different kinds of machinery that's destructive to life. We need to know how to defend ourselves from white supremacist militias and all of those things. Those are extremely valuable. It shouldn't be done with bravado.

That can be traumatizing. It's a huge risk and those roles need support.

But Jesus, long term care work, taking care of people with chronic health problems, having chronic health problems and still showing up because of course, disproportionately the people who are doing care work, are folks with health problems or who are differently abled. Folks who are often not cis-men are disproportionately doing that work. So it's no coincidence that work is often invisibilized. Movements can't survive without that. We can't have intergenerational movements where we're actually learning from the experiences of previous generations without that care work, without people who focus on education, without people who focus on growing food, on medical care. There are so many things that need to happen and that are happening. It's sad when only some of those things happen. It's even sadder when all of these different activities necessary for revolutionary struggle are actually occurring and then when someone shifts from a more rewarded form, to a more invisibilized form, they're referred to as having dropped out or burnt out, or it's not even recognized as a form of struggle.

**TFSR:** Yeah, I think that those points and the points that you make in the book beyond that, really flesh out that in a way that I appreciate hearing. Probably in the early 2000s, I first came across some zine, from probably Quiver Distro, which was a Santa Cruz based insurrectional anarchist zine distro, or maybe it was from Green Anarchy. They republished something, I think, from *Do or Die* number nine, which was an insurrectionary anarchist magazine coming out of the Earth First! movement and the anti-road movement in the UK in the late 90s. It was talking about the importance of creating cultures of resistance that can expand and extend across generations, because the fight that we're in is so long.

This is shifting from how should we be engaging around care and around folks whose needs, or abilities, or desires change... I think that there's a point in the book where you talk about how do we think about this struggle with a longer scope? Obviously we're on a timeline. Temperatures are changing, storms are getting more intense, bio-regions are getting poisoned, water systems are getting poisoned. Simultaneously, this is a fight that not only do we have to sustain for a long period of time, but has been sustained for long periods of time. So learning about that intergenerationality and fostering an ecosystem where all of the stages of a life cycle have space, have importance and relevance and are appreciated, feels really important. Our enemies are looking at the movements for ecological justice, for gender justice, for black liberation, as insurgencies. Industries, policing, military, governance, are all looking at it in terms of those things. I know it's pulling in militaristic language but I think that it's important to think



**about how we foster these relationships. How do we expand our communities of care and resistance, and how do we start talking about both of those things in the same breath, as elements of the same thing?**

**Peter Gelderloos:** That's a great way of putting it. The only militaristic language that you pulled in, was the fact that States view our movements through the lens of counterinsurgency. The works that have been published like David Galula and Kilcullen. They analyzed their wars of oppression and colonialism in Algeria, in Vietnam, in Kenya, in Detroit, in Iraq and Los Angeles. They do develop a science of control. That's gone through a major shift over the last, especially half century. Counterinsurgency is one of the preeminent lenses that they use. It makes sense that their framework is a militaristic framework, because that's kind of one of the bases of their power.

**TFSR:** So humans tell stories, to inspire, to transmit historical knowledge and experience and to consider our desires and next steps. States and other authoritarian structures recognize this and attempt to supplant that process as an ongoing counterinsurgency attempting to flatten the world and the possibility of our living. Like that oft quoted, Ursula Le Guin statement about imagining a world beyond the divine right of kings.

Just to throw in an anecdote right now and this may seem a little a little random: We're about to come up on the 25th anniversary of the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, which I participated in as a young anarchist. There's a narrative that's often spun by progressive and leftist organizations and publishers around this event, as this moment of the coming together of labor, environmental issues and anti-colonial movements and going into the streets, getting mass arrested, shutting down the delegates from getting into the spaces and shutting down the organizing of the event, in the face of massive police violence, by putting our bodies on the line, by telling the truth and by forcing the State to basically release everyone from the jail a couple days before the end of the conference. We just overwhelmed them with our mass civil disobedience. I think that homogenizes and flattens the experience of what I saw up there.

I was not especially radical. I was coming into my own and learning about the world. *Breaking the Spell* is, like an interesting documentary that points to and it shows the breaking of the like the civility of disobedience through the bringing of tactics that the city was not prepared for, the destruction of property, the breaking of windows, the conflict with the police. Some of it brought the spirit of Eugene at the time, with a burgeoning insurrectionary and green anarchist movement there, or from other parts

of the Pacific Northwest, like Portland. Obviously the black bloc was not invented there, but that was one of the first times that it made a major part of conversation around the country. People had seen it during the first Gulf War, brought into some cities as a resistance method but that tool, in and of itself, is just one in a toolbox.

I would just want to comment on the flattening of that image and how, for me, one of the most important things was those different voices and different approaches, looking at how capitalism is imposed, and how the Bretton Woods model of globalization, is terrible. But also that these different methods of resistance that are uncivil- just looking at the reactions of people On the left to it and the institutions of power- but how disruptive it actually was, how much attention it brought to this demonstration and to the issues at hand. It gave agency to the people that were in the streets. Just to keep going for a second, about seven months later, because I used to work for Project Censored (this media critique organization out of the west coast), a few of us were sent down to Los Angeles for the Democratic National Convention in 2000. We were tasked with watching the media coverage throughout the week to see what narratives were being posited about the demonstrations, what was being talked about on the inside, and about the issues that people were trying to bring to this mass protest, to the Democratic National Convention at the Staples Center.

To me, just to see that process of the shifting of stories and the flattening of things into a different power-positive narrative, was on the first day. On the Monday- I think that's when Rage Against the Machine and some other bands had a concert outside of the Staples Center- and the police (it wasn't because of Rage), but the police decided "this is getting too raucous. We want to shut this down." They closed off one of the exits to this giant caged-in area where people were listening to speakers and bands and such, and then started making announcements that people had to leave, otherwise they would be detained or beaten or whatever. So the media coverage, the local news channels on that night, when they were reporting on what was happening, reported on the massive violence by police, the escalation of violence by police, the use of cops on horseback with giant batons swatting people in the crowd, just willy nilly, just creating terror, just injuring people. Because the journalists were there, the TV was live. This is the experience that they had. Within a day or two, the narratives about the violence of that night on the local news, had all switched and they were talking about how terrible it was that people had thrown marbles underneath the police horses to make them ineffective, or the police horses had gotten injured because cops riding on their backs were batoning people,



and people were reacting to them.

So for me, that sort of quick shift in narrative that disguises the violence that was laid bare at that moment by the State and the possibility of resistance among the crowd, and then sort of eschews everything, turns it into a circus. Like, 'There's something there to the story, about how memory is important. We need to dig a little deeper when we're handed narratives. Digression aside, I wonder if you could talk about the options that were told around the table in resistance, and the weaving of generations and learning lessons from this long struggle. That was a lot. I apologize.

**Peter Gelderloos:** No, not at all. I think that example about the DNC and that change and how the media approached it is really important. It helps us see that these are institutions that will always work within a range of ways and not outside of that range. Ultimately, their effect and their purpose is to maintain power within the present system, which obviously is very oppressive and exploitative. Also, these are institutions that are staffed by people. They don't work without people, but they're not in themselves people. They are institutions.

We might get a simplistic analysis, which is simplistic but true. The media is a part of these horrible power structures. They're not going to really inform us. The reality is more complex than that, because sometimes the people who make the institution run, are also getting beaten up by cops, like you named. They're upset about that, and they report on that. So people will misunderstand the meaning of that when you have these moments that are a little bit more exceptional, that are a little bit less standard. So they they misinterpret that by thinking "Oh, well, the media is capable of reporting the truth about how the police actually function." You can never construct a whole picture from a single data point. The one exceptional data point, for every thousand standard ones, of the media actually reporting in a fairly honest way, on police brutality. It is a reflection of part of the facts, part of the truth, which is that, up until now anyways, like these institutions need people to run. They need people working for them. That doesn't erase the fact that these institutions only exist and they only continue through time, because they are overwhelmingly effective at getting people to put aside their personhood and function as machines. Which is why a thousand days to one, the media are going to have a manipulative and dishonest portrayal of what the police are there for. That's a really important story for multiple reasons, but among them that one.

I want to add more to what you shared about the protests in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization. You shared about how you were there. You saw how the narrative that is being spread now is- you call that, I think, homogenizing or flattening. I'd go even further and say that there was a level of erasure. We can just really call it a fully dishonest portrayal, that it was these big labor unions

and environmental activists dressed up as turtles, and other folks like that, who carried out civil disobedience and shifted the narrative. The perspective that I want to share is as someone who wasn't there. I grew up in Virginia. At that point in time, 1999, I knew that our society was a very unhealthy and unjust place. I knew that for a variety of reasons, my survival and well being were threatened by this dominant society. I had no idea that any social movements still existed that wanted to change this, that really, truly wanted to get to the roots of this and change it. I had no idea that there were still anarchists. I thought they'd all died in the 19th century, and I didn't know that there were any revolutionary movements anywhere in the world, since the 60's or 70's. The internet then was not where it's at now.

I identified with anarchism in some way. I fought back against some of the manifestations of power and this kind of threat that was before me, using the tools that that I could find. Often alone, sometimes with a friend or two, without any perspective that there's a possibility of revolutionary change. Until I saw those riots on on the television. They would not have been on the television all the way across the country, in Virginia (more than some really brief, five second segment that made it look like some meeting of bureaucrats) if it hadn't been for the black bloc, if it hadn't been for the rioting. So it was not the people dressed up as turtles. It was not people carrying out civil disobedience. In my experience, which was transformative, the most important thing happening there, the most transformative thing, was the rights carried out by the black bloc. That was the moment in which I realized, I had people out there, that I wasn't alone in this. From that moment forward I proactively found other anarchists. There weren't many in my time, for sure, but I traveled, I found them and connected to the movement.

It's that kind of erasure of the actual history even though, yes, there were also people carrying out civil disobedience dressed as turtles, big union showing and all of that, all that is relevant, all that is like necessary to name, but really the transformative element there was this return to a combative and revolutionary approach to these problems. That erasure is systematic nowadays. People who hear a little bit about the civil rights movement or the movement against white supremacy back in the 50's and 60's, they think Birmingham was a civil disobedience campaign. The reason that Birmingham gets recorded in the history books and that it was actually directly connected to most of the progressive reforms won by that movement, is because it turned into a riot, because people gave up on the non-violence, and they burned down all the white businesses in the center of Birmingham, which we know was the capital of segregation in the South. That erasure is systematic.

That can point us to this really interesting connection between memory and imagination. Sometimes there's similar areas of the brain that get used when we're remembering things and when we're imagining things. There's this idea that has some validity, that we might be incapable of carrying out social transformations



that we're incapable of imagining. I think it's very true that social movements these days are less imaginative than in the past. A century ago, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements would frequently share imaginings of a world without capitalism, of a world without colonialism. This is vital. Those movements had a lot of overlap, dialogue with and continuity from anti-colonial movements and earlier pre-industrial, anti-capitalist movements. These imaginings of a radical, revolutionary social transformation were also drawing heavily on the memory of indigenous societies that were traditionally Stateless and that remembered that they didn't need a State. They remembered how colonialism actually came about, how capitalism actually came to be spread globally, that it was through violence, through invasion. They remembered their societies from before that, how they were much healthier societies. In many, many, many cases, these were not patriarchal societies. These were not status societies. These were more cooperative, more solidaristic societies.

In Europe, where whiteness and colonialism were born, a lot of these anti-capitalist factory workers' imaginary was actually guided by some surviving memory of the generations before them, who lived in the countryside in relationship with the commons as the commons were being enclosed. In fact, absolutely contrary to the predictions of Marx and Engels, who also treated people like machines in a lot of ways, the places where anti-capitalist movements in Europe were the strongest were not where capitalism's productive forces were most advanced. They were precisely in those locations where the new urban industrial class was the most recent and had maintained the most continuity of memory from their peasant grandparents and great grandparents who were struggling against the enclosure of the commons, who remembered the word communism. It's sad that it's been so corrupted and so twisted by this wretched party which has destroyed revolutionary possibilities around the world for over a century. Because it should beckon us to remember the commons, to remember when (even in Europe) survival was achieved collectively. It was achieved through some kind of mutual solidaristic relationship, not just with other human beings but with our ecosystem, the land, the forests, with rivers, the wells, the seas, and all these other commons that were taken away so that capitalism could thrive. Because they remembered that, they were also more able to imagine other ways of living than we're currently able to.

**TFSR: Well, Peter, thank you so much for this conversation. I really appreciate it. I know that you've been on book tour recently. This is going to come out pretty soon after we have this conversation. Are there any upcoming tour dates that you want to mention, and can you name your Substack, or any other ways that people can follow your work and engage with you?**

**Peter Gelderloos:** I am hoping to do some more talks, primarily in the Midwest,

because I just don't have the health and the financial resources right now to go much, much farther afield. That will be early next year. People can subscribe for free. All the articles are free on my Substack: **[petergelderloos.substack.com](https://petergelderloos.substack.com)**, or also **@survivingleviathan** on Substack. I'm not gonna direct people to Twitter. For the moment Bluesky is a little bit less wretched. It's just my name at Bluesky. I have an account there. I generally don't waste a lot of time with the bull%\$#@# thing and usually just link to writings or listenings of mine, or other people that I think are worthy. I have also been working with the great folks at subMedia, one of the more long, lasting and really, really valuable media sites that that we anarchists have. We're working on a three part video series for those who prefer to watch and listen and to read, called *It's Revolution or Death. Part 1: Short Term Investments* is already out. The other parts, two and three will come out in the next month or two. It starts out looking at the official responses to the ecological crisis, and then goes from there. I've been lucky to work with those folks because they're very much pros. They're really good at the whole video format.

**TFSR:** The first one is a beautiful and disturbing film, and a good thing to watch with a group of people to spark a conversation, much like some of the past series that subMedia has done.

**Peter Gelderloos:** Yeah, also really good to share if you have friends or relatives who are not flat-earthers. Like, they recognize that climate change exists, but they have some faith in the existing framework, they think that the UN and green energy is going to solve the problem, part one is designed to show how it's actually making the situation work. So I think we'll have something of interest for just about anyone who is willing to recognize that we live on a planet.

**TFSR:** Well, thanks a lot Peter, take care, and hope to get to talk to you soon.

**Peter Gelderloos:** Thanks so much for having me. It's always a pleasure to talk. Take care.





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