

**‘The poisons are already in here
with us:’ framing for ecological
revolutions from below**

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Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
The ‘climate crisis’ and green capitalism	6
The Anthropocene?	12
Embodiment against the biopolitical, gaze of the blueprint	16
Ants, bees and BeeTV	21
References	25
Acknowledgements	29
Disclosure statement	30
Notes on contributors	31

Abstract

Below is a transcribed talk by Peter Gelderloos. This talk emerges from the book tour for *The Solutions are Already Here: Strategies for an Ecological Revolution from Below*. This talk polemically recapitulates themes within the book, advocating for an anti-authoritarian ecological revolution and, consequently, chastising the terms ‘climate crisis’ and Anthropocene. The lecture extends beyond the book’s content. Confronting the audience and challenging its reader, the lecture delves into how authorities administer ecological crisis, which extends to criticizing the dominant institutions and science. This includes exploring how people are disembodied and separated from their habitats, thinking ‘like a state’ or planner, and, consequently, stifling their imaginations and working against revolutionary futures. This lecture also discusses the important qualities and directions for a decentralized ecological revolution from below, what to avoid, ideas to consider, and outlining a general direction for collective struggle.

KEYWORDS:

- Revolution
- Green Capitalism
- resistance
- climate change
- anarchism

Introduction

On 8 May 2023, Peter Gelderloos gave a talk in Helsinki, Finland, at the Museum of Impossible Forms. While the event was almost called off, due to the revelation of a brain tumour brought to the fore by a seizure at a London train station, Gelderloos managed to continue the book tour in Amsterdam and Helsinki. Below is a transcription of the Helsinki lecture, which continued the following day with a workshop facilitated by local organizers and was designed to stimulate imaginations to plot alternative ecological futures and utopias. The context that underlines this transcribed lecture, and the life altering news that accompanies it, demonstrates an impressive political commitment and practice to share, imagine, and seed the co-creation of an alternative and revolutionary future to what currently exists.

Gelderloos has been active in the anarchist movement for over two decades. This has led to countless articles, pamphlets, and numerous books, such as *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (2007), *Anarchy Works* (2010), *The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy* (2013) and *Worshipping Power: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation* (2017), among others. While the importance of Gelderloos' work is understood by anarchists, committed environmentalists and social movements pre-2017, academia¹ and the latest climate youth explosion, with Extinction Rebellion (XR), Fridays for Future (FFF) and Just Stop Oil (JTO), have been shockingly comfortable with ignoring Gelderloos' work and the already existing struggles and movements before them. While I believe this is slowly changing, this is to say Gelderloos' emerges from an immense amount of experience from living in struggles, which entails producing works as a movement participant, from *inside* struggles, as opposed to viewing themselves as separate outside observer, viewing reality from a perch or behind a window. These writings, we must remember, are without institutional affiliations or economic benefits – all proceeds from their books are donated to political causes. It is precisely because of this lived commitment that Gelderloos' work is highly recommended, and the lecture is transcribed below. Said differently, people who want, or are beginning, to take an active part in resistance should place Gelderloos' high on their reading list. The insights from Gelderloos come from the 'ground', the squats and uprisings of the last 20 years. Gelderloos is among the organic intellectual's that Gramscian scholars praise, learning from practice and writing from the dilemmas of

¹ For a detailed example, see: Dunlap (Citation2022a) Ecological Authoritarian Maneuvers: Leninist Delusions, Co-optation & Anarchist Love. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alexander-dunlap-ecological-authoritarian-maneuvers> (accessed 2 May 2023).

struggle. Gelderloos' writing transforms the unavoidable political heartbreaks into lessons for others to consider, meanwhile offering great honesty in their perspective and communication – a feature that emanates from the lecture below.

The lecture transcription below emerges from Gelderloos' speaking tour for his recent book, *The Solutions are Already Here: Strategies for an Ecological Revolution from Below* (Gelderloos, Citation2022). While I have already commented that this 'book is timely, important and necessary' in the way it 'stimulates' political thought 'and, consequently, revives marginalized events and struggles lost on popular and academic audiences' (Dunlap, Citation2022a, p. 4), this talk below extends the book's content. The motivation for transcribing this talk is twofold. First, the narrative style is accessible, displaying anti-authoritarian ideas and describing complicated processes in understandable ways. Second, there is content discussed below that is not in the book. This lecture, among other points, explores the all-to-pervasive problem of people being disconnected from themselves and their habitats, instead, engulfed in social warfare and disciplined into 'thinking' and 'seeing like a state' (Scott, Citation1998). This opens a rather challenging door for everyone, but especially for academics and administrators. This call, and proposed necessity, for connecting with and embodying political struggle – in all their various and complementary forms – remains paramount to developing a political praxis. People should hear and consider the concerns voiced below and, especially the assertion, that the green economy *is an absolute fucking lie*. Below discusses important lessons and foundational points to cultivate real socioecological transformation in the direction of repair, regeneration, and *real renewability*.

I would ask readers to receive these framings in their intended format, not as a published research paper, but as an oral intervention in a community setting; a different discursive format with its own codes and features that colonial and academic value hierarchies tend to dismiss or devalue (Smith, Citation2013/1999; Mullenite, Citation2021). This text has been lightly edited. This entails deleting repetitive words, correcting minor speaking errors, adding bracketed words to reinforce clarity, as well as adding a couple of footnotes and citations to make further academic connection. Liberty has been taken to italicize words or sentences based on the tone of Gelderloos or because I felt it was important and deserving emphasis. Depending on how the readers relate or experiences the world, this lecture might contain some exaggerations. Exaggerations, real or imagined, they are useful and retain an important point and are experienced this way. I can only hope what follows is stimulating, thought-provoking and will lead to taking an active part in resistance or, at the least, working to retrofit the institution where people work in favour of socioecological harmony.

– Alexander Dunlap

The ‘climate crisis’ and green capitalism

So we have been hearing for a long time that we are facing a climate crisis and that this is a defining crisis – it is a priority. And within that conversation, a lot of what we are told is that the biggest danger is those who deny the climate crisis – who deny that global warming is not happening and we need to orient ourselves to fight these people and institutions that say the ‘climate crisis is not real’. And I think that the time for that thinking – I don’t think it was ever really valid or legitimate – has long since past, and that for a long time now the most dangerous institutions, discourses, and practices on the planet are the ones who are telling us to think about the climate crisis and *how* to think about climate crisis. From progressive governments to centrist political parties; academies and universities; social movements and NGOs; green businesses. There is a huge segment of society that is telling us: ‘There is a climate crisis and that is where our focus needs to be, and we need to participate in a certain array of proposals that are designed to respond to the climate crisis’. If we are looking at the strategies of power, probably one of the biggest collective dangers to our survival, right now, is actually this intersection between the institutions of power and the more mainstream parts of the movement. There are a lot of different ways we can get into this and we can attack this question of different discourses and different understandings ... and I am just going to pick one, I am going to jump into it.

We do know, it is factual, that the composition of the Earth’s atmosphere is changing in a hugely dramatic way and it is having catastrophic consequences – that is fact. We also know that a huge part of this change is being caused by the burning of fossil fuels, this is another fact – this is well established [see Hickel, Citation2020, pp. 6–16]. And so what we are told, the logical step, is to increase our production of ‘green’ energies. This makes perfect sense ... I need some volunteers. Are folks over here [pointing to the right side of the room] alright if I ask you to stand up? I need ten volunteers ... and if anyone does not want to stand up, they do not have to. So we have ten people standing up–thank you all of you, those standing and sitting. These [ten] people represent the totality of global energy production, right? Boooooooo! Okay. [laughter]. So this is what is going on, this is all of the energy production around the entire planet, alright. You [pointing at one person] represent green energy–and actually you, could you cut off two fingers because it is actually about 11 or 12 percent, so can you give two fingers to them ... okay, you don’t have to. [more laughter]. This friend here and

a little bit more ... that is green energy, right? All the rest is 'bad' – boooo, boooo! Okay. [laughter].

So obviously, logically ... raise your hand [green energy people]. This is the 'good' energy, and all the rest is the bad energy [lower-carbon vs hydrocarbon energy production]. So it is logical, right, that what we need to do to solve this problem is we need to get more of these 'bad' fossil fuel energy resources to raise their hands and become green energy, right? And that is what we are being told [by the public and private sectors], what we are being told is that by 2030 – can you please raise your hands – we need this much [pointing at four of the fossil fuel people] of the total global energy production to become green energy ... that is what we are being told, this is what we need to do to survive. All the universities, all the institutions of power, all of the governments that are not currently denying climate change, groups like Extinction Rebellion, all of them are saying this is what needs to happen by 2030 and the media is repeating it and everyone thinks that it makes perfect sense – *and it is an absolute f#cking lie*. Why?

If you spend one minute, just one minute(!), learning about ... what is the name of that economic system we have running around the whole planet right now?

Audience: Capitalism.

Capitalism, right. That is what it is. [Laughter]. If you spend even one minute learning about capitalism, what is the fundamental feature of capitalism?

Audience: Expansion and growth.

Expansion and growth. It is based on growth, alright. So really quick, one more time if you all [ten people] can stand up again—I'm sorry. [Laughter] The whole thing [event] will not be like this, I promise. Those ten represent total energy production around the world in 1950. Let me do some quick math, I think we need 55 more people to stand up ... we are going to need to get some people to come in from outside to complete the exercise, so can someone go outside and bring in about ten or fifteen more people to complete the exercise? That is how much energy production is occurring now. If they are the energy production of the entire planet, of all of human societies, on the entire planet in 1950 it has grown so much that now it would not fit in this room. It is not just incremental growth, it is exponential and constant growth. So what does that mean? First of all, more green energy does not mean less fossil fuel energy—that is an absolute invention that is worse than wishful thinking. But, in fact, it is worse than that.

Not only does more green energy not mean less fossil fuel energy, more green energy means more burning of fossil fuel energy. Why? How many people here have a fossil fuel set up in their house, like a coal mine, a gas refinery, oil pipelines ... no one? No one? Isn't that weird, right? Fossil fuel infrastructure, we can refer to it as 'fixed capital', right? This is money that capitalists have spent that is 'fixed' – it has a fixed form and a fixed way of making more capital. Because that is what capitalists live for, they have decided their purpose on this earth is to take money, invest it, and use it to make more money – that is their purpose for existence. So when they spend millions

and billions and trillions of dollars or euros or whatever making oil refineries, making coal mines and gas pipelines and all the rest, that is fixed capital because it is not ‘liquid’ capital. Liquid capital is money in the bank account, liquid capital is often real estate—things that can be switched from one form of investment to another relatively easily. Even though there have been some plans to turn old coal mines in West Virginia [USA], where they did mountain top removal, into shopping malls, it does not really work. A coal mine is a coal mine is a coal mine. A gas pipeline is a gas pipeline is a gas pipeline, these things do not easily turn into other forms of capital, and they do not have other ways of generating profit. In order to generate profit, they need to continue producing what they produce, which are fossil fuels. Or the capitalists who invested that money into them lose their investment and they have decided that making money is more important than life itself—that is who they are and that is what a capitalist is. It is someone who decided that making money is more important than anybody’s life – and we can never forget that.

When they [capitalists] have all this fixed capital, which is really good at making them an extreme amount of money through the burning of fossil fuels, then all of a sudden fossil fuels get a bad reputation and then you have new sources of energy that are appearing: industrial-scale solar, wind, hydrological ... They require very different forms of fixed capital that are often not transferable, although that is complicated and there is an awful lot of integration [Brock, Citation2020; Le Billon, Citation2021; Dunlap, Citation2022b, Citation2023a; Tornel, Citation2023], then that [lower-carbon energy generation] is a potential threat to all of this money, to all of this capital that these [hydrocarbon] capitalists have spent. So, what they need to do in order to keep making money is to produce more. The profit margins might go down but if they just produce more then they will continue making just as much profit or maybe more profit. And that is a basic feature of how capitalism works that anyone who cares to can find out with a half-hour study group, right? ***That the predictable result of encouraging green energy production on an industrial scale is the burning of more fossil fuels and the accelerated destruction of life on this planet.¹ And this was a predictable result, from the beginning. If you look at the stats [see Our World in Data (OWD, Citation2021a, Citation2021b)], that has been the result – that is what has been happening. And, it is not in the mainstream media, it is not in the progressive media and it is not in more mainstream groups like Extinction Rebellion and stuff like that. And, for the most part, certainly not in all the universities and academies, with very few exceptions have they been honest with us – at any level. Honestly, if you look at this plan for half-an-hour it falls apart and, it turns out, that this plan is actually good for the capitalists and it is not good for the planet, it is not good for our chances of collective survival. This [environmental and climate] plan is going to make things worse, and that is exactly what has been happening for decades –***

¹ In support of this claims, consider Sovacool et al. (Citation2020), Dunlap (Citation2022a, Citation2023b) and Dunlap and Marin (Citation2022).

and they [governments and companies] have not been honest with us about that. And this is extremely problematic when we think about what institutions we trust; what type of social movements and strategies do we trust going forward when people have been lying to us for decades on the question of everybody's survival. That is a line ... that is a line that should not be crossed. Once we see that there are institutions, individuals, or movement figureheads or academics who cross that line, then there should be serious doubts about ever dialoguing with those institutions or those people again. Because it would have taken a half-an-hour, half-an-hour in 1968 when some of these first studies came out to say: 'Obviously, industrial-scale green energy is just going to make the problem worse.' Eventually, we will get to the point – the 'tipping point' – where green energy is growing faster than fossil fuels and where new green energy projects actually start replacing fossil fuel projects, but it is the slowest possible way in existence to make that happen. It would be impossible for the most creative bureaucrats in the world to think of a slower way to get us on a path towards survival. That is green energy, that is the whole 2030 carbon reduction plan and that is what we are all being convinced is our big hope for survival while [the movements that work with these powerful governments and companies try to convince us] that some weird f#%king right-wing freaks who cannot even look outside and notice that the weather is changing are the bigger danger. They are not the bigger danger, the bigger danger is the people in charge of the dominant 'solution' right now.

And additionally, I will not go into the details, but – in fact – green energy projects on an industrial-scale are fully integrated with currently existing fossil fuel and other extractivist projects – they are responsible for a huge amount of environmental devastation around the world. And, fortunately, we have a lot of people here who have been putting a lot of energy into doing that research all the while getting silenced or maligned by the respectable parts of the movement who say: 'Well, no, you are not being a team player. We all have to convince everyone that climate change is real and get everyone on board for this plan of more wind parks, more industrial-scale solar energy and hydro power' and all the rest – maybe nuclear too. Green energy on an industrial-scale is extremely devastating, it is completely tied into some of the biggest colonial land grabs in the twenty-first century: Lithium mining, wind parks, solar farms ... One quick example, huge wind energy parks in Oaxaca, Mexico, [with over 2000 wind turbines], where the electricity is used to power sweatshops that are a part of the whole NAFTA. [North American Free Trade Agreement; Dunlap, Citation2019; Dunlap & Correa-Arce, Citation2022] free-trade system, it is all about production, it is all about profit and it is not actually about survival and it does not actually do anything to decrease the burning of fossil fuels.

I do not think it even really helps to talk about a climate crisis. I have seen that talking about a 'climate crisis' is not really useful at teaching people – at least mentally colonized people, white people – to stick their heads out the window and notice the weather, notice the world that we are actually a part of – to actually feel the changes. Because you do not actually need to see the studies, you just need to feel, you just

need to remember what it was like last year or the year before that [e.g. where are all the butterflies?] and you know that it is changing – and then you do not need any scientific institution to tell you whether or not the weather is actually changing. If this emphasis on climate was actually an emphasis on climate in an embodied way, which taught us to be here in our bodies, in the territory that we inhabit and to notice what is going on, then [the research] would be a useful thing – that would be a valuable thing – but that is not really what is happening. When they [media, governments, and companies] talk about climate they are talking about parts per million carbon dioxide; they are talking about gradations of Celsius that are changing every year, just more technocratic measurements *that are bringing us out of our bodies and out of our territories that we actually need to survive in*. How many of you have the means at home to measure parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere? [silence]. No one, and there are even academics here and nobody has that. How many of you are capable of remembering ... what is a migratory bird that you have here in Finland that comes up in the spring? Anyone?

Audience: Swans, Geese, and all kinds of birds.

How many of you are capable of remembering when they arrive and when they leave from year to year? [silence] That is a depressing show of hands, but it's a few – it is better than the other one. How many of you are capable of noticing the weather and noticing when it is snowing, when it is warm, when it's hot, when it's raining? [silence, raised hands] All of us. Isn't it weird that when they talk about the climate, they do not talk about those things; they do not talk about migratory species, they do not talk about the weather that we actually experience, they talk about ppm carbon dioxide – isn't that strange, I wonder why that would be?

A climate crisis would already be a huge problem. Just the change in atmospheric carbon would already be a huge catastrophe – that in itself would be a question of survival. But it is a completely different question of survival when ecosystems are dying or going through massive change and the living things that make up those ecosystems are able to move. When they do not encounter highways, when they do not encounter borders, when they don't encounter 'dead zones' and militarized police and identification checks and industrial parks and cities that are urbanized in a way that are not thought of as habitats, they are thought of as real estate markets. That would be an entirely different crisis. I would love to inhabit that crisis, we could think about it and experience it like this:

Someone f#%ked up, this is horrible, millions of humans are already dying every year because of lack of water and lack of access to food; so many species around the world are already at risk of extinction. Most of the habitats on earth are in some type of risk and are going to have to adapt and change, but let's change together, let's move, let's take care of each other – if we have enough let's welcome people who have to leave their homes, which is a traumatic f#%king experience to have to leave your

home for survival, but let's do that together. Let's welcome the swans, let's welcome all the living things – human and nonhuman – the forests that have to migrate and shift.

That would be f#%king amazing and that would be so easy [compared to the actual crisis]. But that is not the crisis, the crisis is the borders; the crisis is our industrial infrastructure that despoils the landscape and makes it so the earth is not connected and that all of these living systems cannot do what they have been doing for the entire history of life on this planet – moving, shifting, adapting, and surviving. That is the real crisis. So calling it a 'climate crisis' ... when I hear people call it a climate crisis I feel like we might as well give up, we might as well just commit mass suicide and at least we can have the dream that when all the f#%king rich people do not have anyone to work for them they are going to starve to death because they are absolutely useless. They will have their golf courses and their giant mansions and they will not be able to grow their food because they will not have anyone working for them, so at the very least we can have the last laugh. But maybe – maybe – we can recognize the crisis we face and inhabit it and give it everything we have and actually address the real crisis, which is *so* much more than a climate crisis. It is a crisis of survival on every level.

I usually refer to it as an ecological crisis, but I am often afraid of doing that around other white people because they will often think you know: 'ecological, environmentalism, nature vs. humans', no, no, no, please no. On an etymological note, *eco-logical*, *oikos*: home. It is the word for home, so the ecological crisis is a crisis of our home, which is necessarily a crisis of ourselves and our possibilities for our survival. So I think it is absolutely vital to recognize that the crisis that we are facing is intersectional [Lasky, Citation2011; Puar, Citation2014; Bey, Citation2021], it is global and it touches every single aspect of life and survival.

The Anthropocene?

Geologists. Geologists lately have been patting themselves on the back for taking this [crisis] really seriously and launching this new proposal: The current geological epoch should be referred to as the Anthropocene. This is a big deal, because we have only been in the Holocene for like 12,000 years. So a geological epoch is like a nomenclature for naming periods of the planet's history and the planet is a pretty old thing and an epoch typically lasts from 2-to-50 million years. So if one epoch, the Holocene, started just 12,000 years ago, if I am remembering this correctly, it would be pretty unusual to start a new epoch already. Because, like I said, they last several million years. What an epoch is if you imagine, some alien civilization could come from another planet a billion years from now and they could do a test on the layers of rock that are being formed right now and they could say at this scale what is happening in the planet, what is the composition of the atmosphere, what are the life forms like, what is going on volcanically throughout the planet. A geological epoch is a big deal and is inscribed in the rock of the planet for as long as the planet exists, which is why these things last millions of years. So the geologists are like: 'We are taking this seriously by proposing a new name, a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, because until the sun expands and consumes this planet Earth, until it is no more, anyone with the instruments will be able to do a test on the layers of sediment that are being formed by living beings, by volcanic activity and by erosion right now and being formed into the new layers of stone.' And they will be able to find new radioactive isotopes from nuclear weapons and energy; they will be able to find a sudden an unprecedented spike in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, they will be able to find evidence of mass die-offs. What they [geologists] are trying to say is: 'take this seriously because this is a big deal'. But what have the bastards gone and called it: the Anthropocene; which means the geological epoch defined by human beings. [Pause] How long have humans been around? Shout it out, any guess.

Person 1: 2–3 Million years.

There is debate, what is the limit and where to define the line of being human. The different proposals are usually in that range, but – in fact – you are all wrong. Human beings have been around for about 200 years according to our geologist friends, just 200 years right? Because if this is the geological epoch defined by human beings, we cannot see any evidence of this if we go back more than 500 years and the slightest little precedents on a much smaller scale in just a few small corners of the globe going back 1000, 2000; 3000 years [Gelderloos, Citation2017; see also Frank & Gills, Citation1992; Scott, Citation2017; Graeber & Wengrow, Citation2021]. But in general, this kind of

ecological and planetary wide transformation, there is no evidence of that going back a few hundred years. So obviously, what the geologists are saying is that they just discovered that humans have only been around a few hundred years and whatever there was before, well, that must not be human – it must have been something else, right?

Since the category of humanity really started getting used in European philosophies there has always been a huge amount of policing in terms of who qualifies as human, who can legally be enslaved and who can legally own property, including other living beings. Who can steal someone's land and write up a piece of paper and say: 'This is my land now'. And who can get their land stolen and who can be sent off to death camps if they do not agree with that process. Who has the right to have some type of state speak in their name and make their language official, set boundaries, create a national history that supposedly tells the story of one group of people and not the other group of people [or at least from their perspective]. Since this category of humanity has been universalized, it has been an act of police activity in terms of defining those boundaries, who is human and who is not. And then, finally, finally, after various liberal revolutions started saying: 'Okay, maybe we need to be a little more universal with this category of human', there has only been an increase in resources of education, of culture, of policing, of death squads and teaching everyone – who is not white, everyone who does not come from the colonial centre of what has become a world civilization – what it actually means to be human: how to be properly human so that you can get your rights, so that you can participate in the political structures that were made global by colonialism, so that you can participate in the economic structures made global by colonialism, so you do not get sent to prison, or are less likely to be sent to prison; so you do not get sent to death camps; so you can have politicians that speak your language and will refer to a national history that glorifies your sense of self and all the rest [see Allen, Citation2014; Walia, Citation2021; Linebaugh, Citation2021; W.C. Anderson, Citation2021, pp. 167–172].

And finally, for the first time, when [dominant institutions] finally considered the possibility of saying, 'okay, okay, okay – fine. No holds barred, everyone is human', is right at the moment when it comes time for everyone to 'share the bill'. That is the first time [with the Anthropocene] that the institutions of power, the mainstream media and the universities, the governments and all the rest have been capable of conceiving of the possibility of an actual universal humanity is when they say: 'Humans just destroy the environment, that is just what humans do and so the crisis we are facing is the Anthropocene. It is the geological epoch defined by humans activity.' *This is not human activity*, enslaving and carrying out genocide, cutting down forests and treating life as a commodity and letting people die if they cannot pay for their means of survival or if they cannot find someone to work for – those are not human activities. Those are monstrous activities that are at the centre of institutions that are trying to preserve themselves and that are facing a crisis of survival and are doing everything possible to convince us to 'have their backs', to protect them. When what we need to

be doing is setting fire to them as fast as possible and getting rid of them as a question of survival and a question of decency, of solidarity and what we owe to our ghosts – to what we owe to all the people and all the living beings that we have lost and are losing. Because this is not a future crisis, this is not a crisis of 2023. Tens of millions of people are already dying every single year because of a lack of water, because of a lack of access to food, dying on the borders, dying from warfare caused by states that are fighting over diminishing resources and trying to preserve their institutional legitimacy; getting shot by cops because that is what cops do [enforcing racial and class boundaries]. All of the media, cultural, and academic resources of global society are being geared towards convincing us to save *them*. There is no life possible with those institutions, there is no life possible with the state. There is no life possible with the police. There is no life possible with capitalism. There is no life possible with colonialism. All of these are institutions and frameworks that are founded on ... I do not even want to say death – because death is a part of life and, I don't know, when you get a brain tumour Death is going to happen, it will be fine but only when we come back to the living. When we use our lives to give back in whatever way we can – they [governments and companies] do not even respect death. They are machines that all they can do is consume life and turn it into something that is not life and we will never be safe as long as they are around.

I think we need to make distinctions around solidarity and we need to be compassionate, we need to be patient. I do not think it makes sense to understand police or other mercenaries like that as human beings. I do not think it makes sense to understand states as living things that can be dialogued with and, then, it gets more complicated in the social movements, when you have naïve people brought up in [industrial] society taught certain cultural values to preserve; who gear all of their activity to dialogue with the institutions that need to be destroyed. But we do need to find ways to engage with those people, to engage with those perspectives and let them know that is not acceptable – that a line has been crossed. It is already far too late for a lot of us, but there is still hope for survival. Life will continue in one way or another and we really have a scale of urgencies before us. For a lot of people and a lot of forms of life, it was too late 500 years ago – the apocalypse began 500 years ago. In other corners of the world 2,000 years ago [referring to ancient states (see Gelderloos, Citation2017)].

In other places, life is still holding on. For the last 16 years of my life, I have been living in Catalunya and for a part of that, outside of the city. And every year, just paying attention to the birds, among the migratory birds there is this one species like a swallow, actually it is a migratory bird related to the Swift with big long wings, called a *falciot* in Catalan. It is a beautiful name, because the *falciforme* is like the sickle that you harvest wheat with and it is a reference to the shape of the wings, so if you think of that wing shape you could probably think of the bird I am thinking of. The *ballester* [Alpine Swift] is like a bigger *falciot* [Common Swift] with a brown back and a white belly. It is one of five similar-looking species of birds that you never see them land, they are always swooping around eating insects – five different species I

was really lucky to share that land with that would come every spring and leave every fall. Last year, there were just one or two *ballesters* that came up, compared to big family groups in the past. Then they just got completely absorbed into the community of *falciots*. So a similar bird and they just kind of adopted them, as living things do – solidarity being a principle of life. And, this year, I was back there this spring and for the first time there were not any. It was the first year I had to say goodbye to some neighbours I had spent the last few years getting to know. It was beautiful the year before, that there were not enough to be their own community and they could be invited in – and that is what we [humans] need to be doing. Every year some of us are going to be disappearing. I am sure more and more of us are losing people to suicide in our communities, it is happening more and more for various reasons. Where I am living in the [United] States, we recently lost someone who just got killed in Ukraine, lots of these last years we have been losing people and it keeps getting harder and harder, but what we have to do is keep coming back to one another, we have to keep coming back to this common space because that is where survival is possible. So yeah, I do not like to talk about a climate crisis and definitely not the Anthropocene, but we do need to talk about survival.

Embodiment against the biopolitical, gaze of the blueprint

So there are very big questions wrapped up in all of this – obviously. We need to be thinking from a global perspective, obviously. That [thinking] in itself though often leads us towards certain assumptions that sabotage the work that we need to be doing. Let's take the question of food, right? Obviously food is treated like a commodity in our society that makes it harder for people to get access to it and when you have big climatic shifts and you have an entire industrial agricultural system that is designed a certain way and then the rain stops falling or you have flooding and other things like that – the temperate range shifts – you are often going to have big problems with productivity in food, right? It makes a lot of sense to think about food supply. What are some of the basic food sources in Finland?

Person 1: Potatoes.

Person 2: Oats.

Person 3: Rye.

Person 4: Grains.

Think a little bit about land use in Finland, you know. What percentage is field agriculture? What are the most effective crops? Because how many million people are here in Finland?

Person 5: Five million, I think more than five million.

Okay, so producing food for five million people, land-use, potatoes, rye, and stuff like that. Imagine the process of thinking about survival, because that is what we have on the table. Making sure that our potatoes and rye are ready to go, how should the land be used, questions like that. Just sit a moment and think about some kind of process of what that would look like, making sure the best decisions are made for survival – for growing food.

[silence takes over the room as people take a moment]

Alright. Another question: Transportation. People need to get around, how does that happen these days?

Person 6: By car.

Person 7: Plane.

Person 8: Public transport.

Person 9: Ships.

There are couple bikes outside, not as much as in the Netherlands but a few. So we can rate these different forms of transportation in terms of their ecological costs,

their emissions, and all of that. So think about that process a little bit, think about the land use in Finland with these different means of transportation and their different ecological costs, what would it look like to change that?

[Silence engulfs the room]

How many of you in these last two little moments could see like a map or a like a blueprint? How many of you were seeing a kind of birds' eye view, fields from above? Rail networks, cars, roads, all of that? Probably most of you, I am guessing. Yeah?

[Most people nod or raise their hands]

How many of you were seeing this room right here and what is outside the door? And thinking about what you would encounter when you go out into the street, when you were thinking about questions of food and transportation – just to name those two examples? Anyone?

[Counting]

Nice ... Okay, so just a couple people – *almost everyone was having a disembodied experience* when we were talking about how to make the changes we need for survival in the territory that we currently all share. That is extremely significant, that is extremely significant that a room of largely anarchists, feminists, and anti-colonial revolutionaries still have disembodied experiences when it comes to strategy and when it comes to thinking about survival – our survival. It is not a coincidence and it is not a surprise because we are trained every day of our lives to have out-of-body experiences in the least healthy way. (Because I am not going to knock it, there are some pretty healthy and useful ways to have disembodied experiences if you come back to your body and if you know how to use what you learn ... anyways, too many tangents).

This kind of disassociation is a fundamental aspect of patriarchal sociality and it is a fundamental aspect of the colonial white cosmovision or worldview. To be fully human, in the colonial sense of 'white', a good citizen, a responsible agent of one of these institutions of power we are supposed to protect, you need to be able to disembody. You need to be able to leave your body behind and fall into this age-old hierarchization of the rational over the corporal, because that is how states rule society, that is how capitalism carries out acts of alienation. That is how patriarchal relations turn us into weapons of destruction against ourselves, against our own communities, against the people we're supposed to care about. That kind of dissociation and disembodiedness is a fundamental feature of colonialism and these institutions that are maintaining control.¹ And at the very least, in majority white movement spaces. I never really hear talk about that, even though it is fundamental ... that if you have to find like – you

¹ Further affirming this point and connecting it to the state, Esteva (Citation2023/2009, p. 171) writes: 'We lose or abandon our perspective not only by looking to the top (*mirar hacia arriba*) but by thinking that we are seeing from the top (*ver desde arriba*). In our eagerness to hold state power we begin to think lie a state (Scott, Citation1998). A long tradition political theory and practice has accustomed us to adopting this view from above – as if we were already up there – and to attributing almost magical powers to abstract entities like the state. The political imagination thus become carried away with grand theory and imperial visions, and we lose any sense of reality.'

shouldn't simplify usually, but *if* you had to find like one string – one common feature – going from Extinction Rebellion to Shell Oil, passing through the death squads and the universities and Tesla and Elon Musk and all those bastards *it is this refusal to question that level of dissociation that we are all trained in.*

And it's also interesting for folks who do work like around a mental health perspective, questions of dissociation, questions of embodiment become very, very relevant in our lives when we're not able to show up as normal in society, when we're bipolar, when we're crazy, when we have a meltdown. Sometimes our bodies step up and they insist that we pay them attention in a way that's not polite, that's not normal – that's frowned on. And that's something that I think we need to be paying a lot more attention to. Not just because it gets to the heart of an intersectional analysis, and not intersectional like what Twitter means by intersectional, like the list of like: make sure you got your checklist of all the different oppressions, *but actually understanding how it's all the same system and how everyone has a unique experience of the same thing.* So it's simultaneously the same thing and different and it's always already present. Moving towards an embodied focus on our struggles and our questions of survival. And with what we're facing it's necessary to actually move into an intersectional practice and it is also necessary to tap into our greatest strategic strengths in revolutionary struggles. Right?

So the pacifists will say like:

you know, well, violence is the government's strong suit, which is why we got to be peaceful because, you know, you don't go you don't beat your enemy fighting them at what they're strongest at. You got to find like what you're good at and what your strongest advantage is,

right? ... Part of the problem with that is that the category of violence is such a vague category. And actually, we are really good at violence sometimes and, I mean, in the past few years we have burnt cities, we set cities on fire and the police have not been able to stop us. Again and again in countries that the governments thought they had pacified, people with very little experience were able to rise up and to show that we can actually [temporarily] beat the state. So we do have a great capacity for combat. It's not easy. We lose people. We go to prison; we die. There's trauma afterwards. There are all of these questions that don't get answered in the space of the riot, but certain questions do get answered. Certain capacities do come out, and we find that, in fact, we can do beautiful things when we can take over a city. The day after setting all the police cars on fire. We can plant gardens. We can change the power relationships in a neighbourhood for the next ten years. And that is a wonderful thing and that's a necessary thing. So I'm not here to talk about pacifism, but there are things that are unique strengths to us that the state can never reproduce, that mainstream movements teach us to ignore [see also Gelderloos, Citation2007, Citation2013; Schwarz et al., Citation2010; Osterweil, Citation2019]. And to see those [actions manifest], I think it requires a decentralized and an embodied approach to our own lives. Right?

Bureaucracies passed themselves off as being very complex things. But in fact, bureaucracies, they're not very good at complexity at all. Bureaucracies need to reduce complex reality to a limited number of factors and then plug in the numbers, change the numbers in order to intervene on society. It's state bureaucracies that have this permanent, disembodied view looking at society from above to impose a blueprint on society, on life, on the territory.² (If we had to simplify and again, a word of caution before simplifying, because it is better to dance with the complexity, but, you know, for the purposes of communication every now and then we do have to simplify.) If we had to talk about a fundamental state activity, it is the imposition of a blueprint on a territory. And a blueprint is always much more simple than the territory. Someone who is going off the blueprint never understands the territory, and in fact it is an existential priority for the state not to understand the territory and to make sure that no one actually ends up inhabiting the territory, that no one understands the territory. Because if people understand the territory, then they understand the things that the state doesn't. They tap into a strength that the state can never access. They tap into this guerrilla force that is really at the heart of many of the most effective and long-lasting revolutionary movements and anticolonial movements around the world [see Gelderloos, Citation2013, Citation2022). This insistence on inhabiting the territory, honouring the territory, knowing the territory, and not joining the side of those who make the blueprint and impose the blueprint on the territory.

Blueprint. ***A blueprint is always an act of violence on the territory.*** Whether it's for planning, putting in a coal mine or organizing a neighbourhood that is easier to police or making some decision from some government bureaucracy that [says:], 'well, we should be planting more potatoes this year because if you plug in the numbers, it's more efficient.' And that's why we also get tricked into going along with those [planning] discourses and those [governmental] proposals. Instead of realizing we inhabit the territory, we have the possibility of knowing this territory better than they ever could. And so when we need to think about our food, our transportation, our survival, we are right here. We are seeing through our own eyes, hearing with our ears, feeling with our own bodies. We are in this room. We are sharing this collective space that would not exist if we had not all come here together. And after this, we choose what to do and it involves going out that door. It involves having conversations. It involves looking at the land outside of your apartment, seeing what could be squatted. It involves looking at rail lines that could be blocked, highways that could be blocked. It involves conversations that could be had with people that you actually share a lot with, if you take it from the perspective of survival rather than from a perspective of more superficial political identities. It involves recognizing that that's hard f#%king

² This disembodied view of the world, in Foucauldian terms (Citation1998/1978, Citation2007/1978, Citation2008/1979), is known as biopolitics or biopolitical gaze. Scott (Citation1998), moreover, outlined this perspective and vision more direct terms in *Seeing Like a State*. This also relates to 'linear perspective vision' that originates in art history and is a perspective that has come to predominate see Dunlap (Citation2019).

work and it's not going to be easy, but all of our survival is on the line and I mean, you know, video games aren't that fun anyways, so we might as well [redirect our energies]. What else are we going to do?

Tapping into that territorialized embodied perspective gives us guerrilla strength and that ability to move with complexity that takes away all of the advantages of the state. It makes us ungovernable, and that taps us into an intelligence in which entirely new solutions can come forth, which no university, no NGO, no politician could ever conceive of, because they always have to reduce things to the blueprint [see Bonanno, Citation1998 [1996]]. They have to cut things down to a few factors that they can just plug in the numbers, play with the numbers so that they maintain the control. *That is the fundamental feature of all their strategies, is simplifying things so that they have the monopoly on the proposals.*³ And that's why we need to be vociferously and enthusiastically rejecting that colonial and white and patriarchal way of engaging with the world, because it is an act of violence against life and because it is absolute complicity in our own domination and in our own daily diminishing prospects of survival.

³ The concern expressed above deeply resonates with Ivan Illich's (Citation1977, Citation1978) discussion on 'radical monopolies' and 'disabling professionals.'

Ants, bees and BeeTV

Yeah, I'm just going to talk about bees for a little second, bees and ants. There is this idea that, like, bees have queens, which is silly – very few people have ever been stupid enough to have kings and queens. Um, you know, the English, the Dutch, a couple others I am forgetting. Anyways.

Bees do not have queens,¹ they wouldn't put up with that. They have different types of bees with different roles that carry out different activities. And there is this kind of prejudice within mainstream science towards hierarchical forms of knowledge and, in fact, there's a great deal of intelligence in a bee colony, in a bee home or in also an ant colony. Very intelligent decisions are made. Hundreds or thousands of individuals are constantly making decisions, making tunnels, repairing tunnels, collecting food, making medicines, taking care of eggs, taking care of babies, keeping it all going. And not a single individual is in charge. Not a single individual has what we can refer to thinking about blueprints as the bird's eye view. In fact, bees and ants, if they are smart, they like to stay out of the bird's eye view because they know that the bird is there to eat them. They know what you know: Stay out of the camera. Do not let yourself be surveilled.

What they do and when certain humans scientists – I'm sure many people who just watched bees and ants and just asked what they were doing and knew this a long time ago – but we have the scientists to back us up now too when they started studying how does intelligence, how does collective intelligence, and decision making work in bee families and ant families? What they noticed is really cute, every time two ants or two bees cross paths, they give a little kiss and they are exchanging information, pheromones, and like how they are doing: if they're hungry, what they've been up to, if they're stressed. And from that information, every single individual gets a complex view of the whole. Not a single one of these individuals has an objective view. None of them have an objective view. Every single one is going to have a slightly different picture of the whole.² Not a single one of these individuals has something that could be used to make the blueprint, to make the official report. Okay: 'Bee NGO is saying, all right, the numbers are in ... this last year, honey production was up! But the tunnel repair

¹ One participant in the audience said: 'It's not a queen. She's a mother.'

² This description matches Gustavo Esteva's (Citation2023, pp. 137–138) call for a radical rejection of universalisms: 'It means courageously and intrepidly embracing cultural relativity [as opposed to cultural relativism]: the fact that no one person or culture can summarize or present the totality of human experience; that there is no one or several truths (truth is incommensurable): that the only legitimate, coherent, sensible attitude in the face of the real plurality of the world is radical pluralism.'

needs some improvements and we calculated that if we increase our wax production by 5% objectively ... ', no one has that information, that information does not exist. Every single individual has a subjective picture. Now, if they did not have a lot of relations, if there were not high connectivity, if there were not a lot of solidarity and communication, they would all be pretty dumb. They would be like: 'I talked to Bob and Joe yesterday and they both had food, so I guess we are all fine. So I'm just going to watch BeeTV.' They talk as much as possible, they share as much as possible. And it's only because of that high connectivity that they are able to create this collective intelligence that is far superior to any kind of centralized possibility of intelligence. But in order to access that, they need to give up on the myth, on this obsession, for the objective picture, for the blueprint. The blueprint and the objective picture do not give us the most intelligent possibilities for decision making. What gives us the most intelligent possibilities for decision making are *solidarity, connectivity, communication, mutual aid, breaking our alienation, sharing*, and also accepting that the inevitable conflict of the differences is a part of life. It is, in fact, sometimes the best stuff of life, sometimes the worst stuff of life.

In any kind of collective movement, we suffer a whole lot. Without a doubt, yeah, I've been shot at by cops and in prison a couple times and stuff like that. Without any doubt, I have been hurt much more by comrades than by cops and all those f#%kers. We are very bad at that – a lot of the time. That is real. We need to be real about that. Nonetheless, conflict is a part of life. We need to accept that we're never all going to have consensus. We're never all going to agree. And all the same, we need to keep coming back to one another. We need to keep coming back to these collective spaces to learn how to do it better again. Again, like in particular majority white spaces, I would say that we need to learn a lot more about transformative justice and we need to accept that what gets talked about as transformative justice on social media is the opposite of what it actually is. And if you have not read, for example, the black feminists coming from the Black Liberation struggle and anti-colonial struggles and, as a result of that, anti-prison struggles [e.g. Churchill, Citation2002; Burton-Rose, Citation2010; Hartman, Citation2019; Shakur, Citation2020; Ervin, Citation2021; W.C. Anderson, Citation2021], then we are just going to be getting into comfort politics, and just a reproduction of the prison logic. Speaking personally, as just one little ant with just the information that I have and not everybody's information, in my circles, I see that there is a huge, huge need to put a lot of emphasis into learning what transformative justice actually means. And that is impossible if we continue to act with disrespect towards these historical black revolutionary feminist struggles who really develop the concept [e.g. Brown, Citation2021] – also from other historical trajectories: a lot of Indigenous movements are relying on their own traditions of different practices of transformative justice. Generally, white people suck at it and we think we're great at it and we think that we're going to learn enough about it by reading other white people on Twitter and like, F#%k that – no!

We need to get better at transformative justice, at conflict: embracing it, being compassionate. We are going to f#%k up. We're not going to be perfect, but if we can take criticism, if we can keep trying, if we can try to do better and show up with love, take distance when we have to and accept that until we die we are still here, so we have to find some way forward. We will be in a much better place if we can do that. Personally, I think we need to do a lot better with mental health stuff. It's been hard these last years. You know, so much of the time just wanting to commit suicide and not really being able to talk about that and knowing that a lot of other people have that [feeling] too. And it is actually a pretty healthy, normal response. But we live in a society in which it's very rewarded to be able to have no emotional complexity and just adapt to monstrosity. And I don't think that that's a value that we should really celebrate.

There is so much we need to be doing, so much that we are doing, and I have been just blown away by all the people who have kept me alive all these years and decades in struggle. All the people that I have met briefly, or at more length. And yeah, I tricked you all here with a talk about the ecological crisis. But like when I said that certain definition of ecological, that it's about *oikos*, it's about home. That is what I'm talking about. It's about the possibility of survival. It's about the home that we create together. Because if we don't create that and protect it and defend it, we are all in a really bad place and so I think in the end, it becomes impossible to talk about questions of pollution and questions of climate if we are not also talking about our health, if we are not also talking about our movements, if we're not talking about the kinds of conversations we need to be having. And that doesn't mean navel gazing, it doesn't mean creating perfected groups where we just take care of each other, [this work] it needs to be expansive, it needs to be solidaristic and, it needs to always go outward ... You can't be healthy in a bubble, right? Like the poisons are going to get into any bubble, the poisons are already in here with us. So we need to always be going back to the streets and fighting and then always coming home again and healing, licking our wounds, learning and then going out and coming back in again. In the organizing we have been doing in Catalunya these last few years, I've found it really useful to break with a kind of rationalist expectation that movements need to grow geometrically³ and shift into kind of more seasonal work and recognize, like this is a moment of coming together and digesting lessons. This is a moment for going to the streets and attacking and fighting and setting things on fire. This is a moment for meeting our neighbours and talking with our neighbours. There's a season for everything and it's about finding the seasons.

It will be different in every territory. Do not trust someone from somewhere else to say how you should be doing it here. Instead, trust your intuition, trust each other, but look for those rhythms and just don't trust the institutions and their colonial

³ See Bonanno (Citation1998 [1996]) on the relationship of quality versus quantity in movements and struggle.

worldviews that teach us a successful movement is one that grows geometrically. Don't trust books too much, we have too many books. I mean, thank you for being here, and if it's a resource – great. But there are so many activities in the movement that are so much more valuable than writing or giving talks. I just want to name the comrades who have put so much energy into questions of healing, into questions of conflict resolution, into questions of being supportive. That's what keeps us alive. And so there is this continued patriarchal value hierarchy in terms of what kinds of movement activity get valued more than others. And it is bullshit. It doesn't work. It doesn't keep us alive. It doesn't make us effective. If there is any use for like an inspiring motivational, happy talk, you know, I hope that some of what I have shared has been useful. But it will only be useful if it contributes to what you all are doing here, in your bodies, in your territory, in this situation that we are all facing of collective survival, because that's the real work – that is what's important. Thank you so much for sharing this space with me. [Applause].

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A critique of his ideas & actions.



Peter Gelderloos & Alexander Dunlap

‘The poisons are already in here with us:’ framing for ecological revolutions from
below

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