

Transitliberationism

A Bicycle Anarchist Manifesto

hex_m_hell

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I'm not a bike guy. I don't know what brand my seat is. I think my gears are Shamano. (That's a brand, right?) I think that's how it's spelled. I'm not going to look it up. I saw it on the window of a bike shop once. I think that's what I have. I just use my bike to get around and to get my kids around. It's just a tool for me. That's pretty normal here in the Netherlands.

I've done some hacky repairs on bikes, not because I especially care about bikes but because I especially care about autonomy. I don't like being controlled. If someone can lock me in, control my ability to fix my main mode of transportation, they can control me. I use open source software for the same reason. My instinctive hatred of cops comes from a pretty similar place.

I'm not a bike guy. I'm an anarchist. That's where I'm coming from in this text. I'm not here for the bikes. I'm here for the liberation. And it is specifically **to** anarchists that I am speaking. If you happen to be a bike person and also an anarchist, great. You're not alone. I hope this lines up with your existing critique, or helps you fill out your critique, of car culture. If you happen to be a bike person and not an anarchist, well... I'm working from a set of assumptions you may not agree with but enjoy the ride. If you are an anarchist who does not already identify motosupremacy, the enforcement of the motorcar as a form of transit at the exclusion of all others, as an oppressive system and a structural component of the interlocking systems of oppression that we oppose, well, I have some words for you to read.

Why are we not “free” to own cars?

I'm inclined to just point at The Social Ideology of the Motorcar and walk away, but I won't. I will dump the first few sentences here before moving on though:

The worst thing about cars is that they are like castles or villas by the sea: luxury goods invented for the exclusive pleasure of a very rich minority, and which in conception and nature were never intended for the people. Unlike the vacuum cleaner, the radio, or the bicycle, which retain their use value when everyone has one, the car, like a villa by the sea, is only desirable and useful insofar as the masses don't have one. That is how in both conception and original purpose the car is a luxury good. And the essence of luxury is that it cannot be democratized. If everyone can have luxury, no one gets any advantages from it.

Last time I started digitally yelling FUCK CARS into the void, in repose to some nonsense or other, someone called me a fascist for “imposing my beliefs on them.” I think that's worth talking about, because bullshit arguments like that carry way too much weight around here.

So let's change the frame for a bit.

Why not slaves? I mean, why don't I have the freedom to own other people? You fucking know why. If you don't, I do not understand why you're reading this. Anarchists oppose hierarchy. We oppose systems of oppression. We oppose coercive authority. You can't own a person without using coercion. So that's pretty much off the table. The same is true for the wage system, since it's also a system that relies on coercion. (Sorry, not sorry, capital “L” “Libertarians.”)

But that's easy. We all agree on that. (We fucking better all agree on that shit.) Of course, you can't own people. That's obviously fucked up. Let's move on to objects.

What about the means of production? Yeah, just kidding. (Anyone coming from the bikes, not the anarchy, is gonna be really confused right about now.) Let's try something else.

Why not private jets? Fuck no, because of climate change, right? Of course. But let's pretend it's possible to have non-polluting jets. There's still a geometry problem. Jets are big. Everyone having one takes up a lot of space. Even if we skip the whole "someone has to pilot it" and assume that everyone has a pilot's license, even small jets are very large. OK, so not everyone is going to want to fly their own jet, but even if a significant portion of the population wanted one that's just a lot of physical space for jets. They also take a huge amount of maintenance. Small planes crash all the time. What about cleaning those crashes up? What about flying near cities? There are a lot of people who aren't near an airport. Do they get their own runway? How do all those people land? We would have to build a lot more airports, and have a whole lot more flight controllers. How do we maintain all of that infrastructure? What about the noise? There are so many problems.

That's kind of why flying cars are always promised on and never delivered. They're a terrible idea that could never work.

When you start thinking through the logistics, even a bit, it just couldn't work. The thing is, cars don't really work either. It is economically infeasible to build a society around cars. Ignoring climate change, ignoring all the people killed, ignoring all the other problems, it's just logistically impossible to sustain. That's why it's collapsing.

Roads are expensive to maintain. They are so expensive that they simply aren't maintained for poorer communities. When they are maintained, they are often maintained at the expense of other things, like clean drinking water. Cars need parking. Parking decreases density. Decreased density decreases the tax base, but it also pushes up the cost of maintaining utilities because you need more of them. It wouldn't matter if you were using taxes or community labor, Capitalist, Communist, or Anarchist, at a certain point there's just more work than resources or time and the system collapses. This is what's happening all over the US. This is what happened in Flint, and why their water was poisoned.

Cars, as the social ideology of the motorcar points out, are a luxury good. Their value comes from the fact that other people don't have them. If a few people have them, it's possible to get places really quickly. It's convenient to park. It's relatively safe (for the people inside). But as soon as enough people have them, the roads become clogged, and the solution is always "just one more lane."

But it's not just that it doesn't work. It's not just that it's a luxury. It's that this freedom comes **at the expense of others**. Every car on the road makes it less safe for pedestrians and cyclists. All the resources spent on maintaining fragile car infrastructure are not spent on pedestrian areas, bikes, trains, trams, and metros. The "freedom" to use a car is massively subsidized by society, including by those who don't use cars, either because they don't want to or because they can't afford them.

Cars are one of the most heavily subsidized things there are. Parking places, roads and highways, bridges and overpasses, even fuel, are all paid for by national and local governments, out of the pockets of everyone (including non-drivers) to benefit drivers. Drivers whose existence on the road makes other forms of transportation unsafe. Any freedom that comes at the expense of someone else's freedom is just a form of oppression.

But there are also specific intersections between motosupremacy and other forms of oppression. Aside from that, there are other reasons to oppose cars, beyond what I've already outlined. Let's walk through them, in no particular order.

Cars are Ableist

Every damn time anyone says anything about cars, some motherfucking sea lion charges in and starts barking, “but what about disabled people!” Meanwhile, a bunch of people DM me and say, “yeah, I’m disabled, and I feel isolated/oppressed/generally bad about myself because I can’t use a car.” By “disabled” these people invariably mean “people with limited mobility” and completely forget the entire rest of the range of people with visual limitations or cognitive differences that make it either illegal or inadvisable to drive. I, in fact, am one of them.

Like about 10% of the population, I have ADHD. Driving is both extremely dangerous and extremely boring. This is the **worst possible type of activity** for a person with ADHD. The only way I got through my years of driving was by blasting loud music constantly whenever I got in the car. I’m so glad everyone survived. Not everyone is as lucky as me. I’m also so glad I live in a country where I’m not forced to climb into a giant, people crushing, mobile surveillance units that require legal documentation to operate every time I get my partner oat milk.

But let’s go back to those folks with mobility challenges.

When I lived in the rural US, I never really saw folks in wheelchairs. It was almost as though they didn’t exist. But one day I was over at a guy’s house, and he was in a wheelchair. The house wasn’t really accessible. He talked about how he didn’t really go out much. It wasn’t until much later that I realized he couldn’t afford one of the expensive specialized cars that people with his type of mobility limitations need to be able to drive. Instead, he had to rely on other people to get him around.

People with physical disabilities that make them unable to drive can be trapped in their homes in car dominated places like the US. Meanwhile, places that are less car dominated, like the Netherlands, have bike lanes. Mobility devices like electric wheelchairs and scooters can use those bike lanes.

Motonormativity invisibilizes people with limited mobility, especially if they’re poor and rural. It robs them of their independence by forcing them to use cars. Even if there are cars available for people with some disabilities, there are a lot of disabilities that just make driving too dangerous. In the US, people tend to not know that these people exist or how many are in their neighborhood. They do not know about these people, because car culture keeps them prisoners in their homes.

Cars are Ageist

It can be nice to think of “disability” as a thing that happens one day to other people, or as a thing other people are born with. But the thing about ability is that it comes and goes with age.

I remember my grandmother swerving all over the road, before her cataract surgery, before she lost her license for good and needed my mom to move in with her. Before she had to sell her house and move in with my aunt. She could have had so much more independence. At 95, she was still able to walk around and do most things for herself pretty well. She just couldn’t drive safely.

They both could have had so much more independence.

Old people in the US often don’t interact with society. They’re hidden in homes. They’re shuffled off to care facilities, where they can be safely isolated from the working population, the population who must not be reminded of their own mortality.

Here, in the Netherlands, where mobility devices can run in the bike lanes, elderly people can stay part of society for much longer. They aren't trapped waiting for someone to take them somewhere. Old people can just exist in the world. They can get older. They can look frail and still get around. There are still community living places for elderly people, sure, but they can remain independent for far longer than can be done in the US.

If you're lucky, perhaps, you will get old one day too. What will this be like for you? How will your society treat you? Will you be free to live and safe to move, or will you have to balance your autonomy against the danger that autonomy poses to others? Take a moment to imagine it. Go ahead. I'll wait.

Cars are Adultist

Of course, that ageism is on both sides. Children were some of the first victims of cars, many killed in the streets, as cars took the places they used to play. Americans who grew up in the 50s and 60s tell stories about running around their neighborhoods, freely, outside. But the cars they and their younger siblings bought slowly eroded that freedom for other kids.

I remember my mom getting me a bike. She had some fantasy about me riding around with the freedom she had as a kid. But I didn't, because I know I would have died. By the 90s it wasn't really safe to ride bikes in the US. If you wanted to go anywhere, you needed a car. Before I left the US, the giant trucks that flew down our street made it unsafe for my oldest kid to even cross the street. Adults can disappear in front of the hoods of American cars. Children, who can be so unpredictable, are impossible to see. Long straight streets allow American drivers to get their car moving far faster than their reactions allow them to safely control. Kids pay the price in their loss of independence.

Is it any wonder that Americans are maturing more slowly? Trapped in the house until they're 16, how are they supposed to learn the basics of independence that one can only get by experiencing it?

Cars steal childhood. They steal opportunities to grow. But today, they are stealing their future as well. Will my kids have a habitable world? Not if all these fuckers keep driving.

Cars are Patriarchal

And who is doing all this extra work of caring for young and old? Yeah, femme folks. Car infrastructure is designed to optimize driving to work, and driving home. In the historical suburban single-car home, this could leave women stranded, isolated and easier to control.

But in the modern world, women often have to drive as part of the invisible care taking work on which the economy rests. However, unlike the visible workplace, carework revolves around trip chaining. Pick up the kids, take them to football, go get some groceries, this is all more complicated when using roads built to optimize traffic between suburban and business centers.

In dense cities with bicycle infrastructure, everything becomes close. There are 2 grocery stores within a 5-minute bike ride of my house, there's a hardware store, a discount store, and another several grocery stores within 10 minutes. There are several public elementary schools within a couple minute bike ride. (Guess how many times I've waited in "the pickup line.") I can tell you all this and not narrow down my location in the city one bit.

Bicycles are easier to park, so chained trips are much more efficient. But parents aren't required for everything their child does until that child turns 16, because kids can ride bikes. Children here start learning to ride bikes around 3 or 4 (sometimes younger). By 5, they can be fairly confident. By 6, some kids will ride with their parents to and from school. Packs of 9 and 10-year-old will ride with their hands in their pockets, talking loudly to each other. Kids of older parents don't come to pickup. Their kids bike home on their own. By 12, kids are expected to generally handle their own travel.

Americans are shocked and terrified by the idea, I'm sure. "But they could be kidnaped." That's kind of a car thing. When cars dominate the world, there are fewer people walking and cycling. Streets are empty except for drivers. There are fewer eyes on the street. With fewer eyes, fewer people together, it becomes more dangerous for vulnerable people.

Who is disproportionately impacted by that? That's right! Femme folks.

The "Electric cars will save everything" crowd has been, I'm sure, unhappy to find that cars, not just internal combustion cars, are so problematic. "I thought it was just global warming!" Yeah, it wasn't. Not only that, but this is actually one area where EVs make things worse.

Electric cars need to be charged for long periods of time, leaving more vulnerable people trapped and isolated in predictable and low security locations. It would take a man to not see the problem here.

Cars are Racist

We've been talking about the US for so long, and we haven't talked about racism yet. America is like, **made of racism**. How can we not have talked about racism yet? It feels like something's wrong. But you know what, I have great news. The history of cars is, like the history of the US, racist as fuck!

Do you know who Robert Moses is? Go look up "Robert Moses racist" in your favorite search engine, and you'll find one of the most powerful urban planners in US history. Who happened to also, by no coincidence, a monstrous piece of shit.

He shaped New York from 1924 to 1975, and his Wikipedia page literally has a section that's just titled "racism" in which some of his words are described as "excruciatingly racist." But he wasn't just a vaguely terrible person. He **specifically** used roads as a weapon to enforce segregation and attack diverse communities. He built low bridges to keep mass transit away from beaches he wanted to exclude black people from. He used red-lining maps to determine which areas to bulldoze for roads. In his most famous project, he displaced 40,000–60,000 people, bulldozing a line through the Bronx for the Cross Bronx Expressway.

I'm just gonna pull a quote really quick from a "Segregation by Design" article on this one:

Before the highway, the neighborhoods through which Moses would build the Cross Bronx were among the most racially integrated in the country, with large populations of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, Irish and Italian Immigrants, (and after WWII) Puerto Ricans, and African-Americans (5). After the highway tore through, property values plummeted. White residents fled (lured to the suburbs by government-backed mortgages), while black and brown residents remained (often-times with few other options due to red-lining and racist housing policies). As covered in the documentary, Decade of Fire, subsequent disinvestment in services from

the city led The Bronx to burn in the 70s and 80s, destroying roughly 80% of housing stock and displacing another 250,000 (6).

He wasn't just some isolated asshole. His design was a model for cities across the country. The freeways that destroyed the urban core not only displaced people, but destroyed the value of homes that weren't displaced. He was able to erase the generational wealth of black and brown people with his projects, and that model was replicated across the US. Today BIPOC folks are **still** more likely to be killed by cars and suffer from respiratory because of the roads built through their communities.

Racist road design still segregates white communities from communities of color. I remember a park in Tacoma that was bordered on two sides by roads and on the other by a predominantly white neighborhood. The historical red line ran on the other side of that road, still having a majority black and brown population. Though you can see the park from the formerly red-lined neighborhood, you are cut off from it by multiple lanes of high speed traffic.

When you start to notice details like this, you don't stop seeing them. That "Segregation by Design" web-site that I mentioned earlier calls itself an "An atlas of spatial injustice." Last I looked, it covered 24 US cities and is filled with articles and pictures documenting the way neighborhoods were destroyed and red lined areas were segregated by highways.

And I'm not even talking about how cars legitimize cops randomly stopping people, and how that's a problem because cops just randomly murder black and brown folks sometimes. I'm not even gonna talk about how driver-less cars sometimes just can't see black people. There are so many problems.

Yeah, cars are just so fucking racist.

Cars are Classist

Racist urban design, like that designed and inspired by Robert Moses, destroys generational wealth. But once someone is poor, forcing them to own a car is a good way to keep them there.

When I was supporting a family of 4 on 40k per year, most of my anxiety came from cars. I remember the \$900 Volvo my dad helped me buy and the broken speedometer that made it impossible to know if I was driving legally or not. Would they pull me over if I went too fast? Would they pull me over if I went too slow? Yes. I found someone to drive behind and tried to just keep speed with them. Every time I saw a cop, my pulse raced.

I was pulled over once because I worked the night shift. That was in a different car with a working speedometer, so I was sure everything I was doing had been legal. I was coming home from work around 2:30 in the morning because the newspaper I worked for printed at 2 am. The cop just pulled me over because I was out late. That's it.

Then there was a different time that a cop wanted to search my car because I was coming from a place with a county that was known for meth. That county was my home.

(I'm white. So when I got pulled over, sometimes for a minor infraction or another, I could usually talk my way out of it. Black and brown residents of the same town might not be so lucky.)

The cars I could afford were barely functional, or borrowed. So there was always the risk of something failing. It's not too uncommon for very cheap used cars to be sold without working speedometers, because sketchy used car lots disable them to keep the odometer from going up. But you buy what you can afford, and you can't always afford to be picky.

Sometimes you just have to buy a car with small enough problems that you think you can fix. I was lucky that I could throw a car on cinder blocks in front of my dad's house and work on it. Not everyone has that kind of luxury.

Labor takes time, tools cost money, both are cheaper than paying someone else to do the work. A cheap car can rapidly become far too expensive to maintain, leaving you stuck in a catch 22 of not enough money to fix the thing you need to make money.

We couldn't really afford to live anywhere near where I worked. Rural areas are cheap enough to afford housing, but you pay for it later in transportation costs. Wear and tear on a car, tires, gas, and times. I drove 3 hours total every day and worked for 8 or 9 hours every day. As rough as that sounds, I was working in IT. There are so many people who have had it so much worse than I ever did.

Every mile of winding road was dangerous, leaving and coming back during prime deer hours. Come too fast around a corner, don't pay enough attention, you're going to be paying for a new tail light or windshield to keep yourself legal.

The average total cost of ownership was \$12,297 in 2024. (I'm just going to trust AAA on that, rather than launching into a rant about how they destroyed mass transit. The premise of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* came from something real that actually happened. I'm just gonna leave that as homework.)

That money is just siphoned off. It goes into fuel (funding oil dictatorships and petro-fascists committing ecocide), tires, "depreciation" (like, the value just evaporates), and maintenance. The less money you have to start, the harder it can be to "buy smart," "be strategic about your purchases," and "retain value with regular maintenance." People at or below the poverty line may not even be able to afford maintenance beyond the minimum required to keep going. License fees and maintenance to keep vehicles safe and legal are really optional, unless you get caught.

Cars can take the place of a modern company town. You work as hard as you can to afford the thing that gets you to work, always slipping just a little bit further into debt. The car becomes a tool to maintain class structure, to absorb any income that might lead to mobility, to make sure no worker can ever stock away enough money to say "no."

Car prices keep going up and most Americans have car loans. Those loans can be as high as 25%. Cars may not even be paid off by the time they start to break down. Don't worry though, it's not like you could even "own" a car any more anyway. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The average person would be much better off if they didn't have a car, if they instead had functional public transit or bike infrastructure that let them move safely through the world. They would be much better off if parking lots were removed and housing was built for them in the towns and cities in which they work. But there are people preventing that, and those people need cars.

Those people need cars to keep the workers from killing them. So they undermine mass transit with promises of "self-driving cars" and "hyperloops" that are never intended to actually be built. The only point of these projects is to maintain car infrastructure so the elites, who cause so much suffering, who would be stabbed on sight if they tried to use mass transit, can be driven around in their personal armored cars. They need cars because they actually do need to be surrounded by the bulletproof glass and armor plates they try to sell as "luxury."

They are afraid, and their fear is justified. These are the worst people on Earth, billionaires who gorge on the profits of oil extraction and war (which, we'll also talk about later).

That pay wall that extracts wealth from the whole population, that keeps the poor constantly precarious, that continues to push what's left of the middle class towards the abyss, that **exact** pay wall directly funds global fascism.

Cars are fascist

Even as Putin's petro-dictatorship spreads right wing extremism through propaganda, subterfuge, and direct funding, fossil fuel companies pour money into far right candidates with the hope that they can save their business model from... from humanity saving itself... from them.

But it's hard to tell, in this moment, if fascism just meshes with the oil industry or if the modern fascist movement is a side effect of the oil industry. Let me explain a bit. Exxon modeled the current climate crisis, with a high degree of accuracy, as far back as 1977. They then spend the following years pouring money into making people not believe in science.

In order to save their business, a business that is literally ending the ecological epoch within which humans evolved, they created the reality bubbles that fascists latched on to and rode to power. The exact institutional doubt they elicited to protect their business, is the very same doubt that fascists need to control their victims.

But the connection isn't just through fuel. Your car, to work, to your car, to home. So many Americans go through this full cycle without actually interacting with anyone where they live. I had to really go out of my way to get to know my neighbors in the US, and plenty of them I literally saw once or twice over the course of years.

Americans interact with giant metal boxes (the other ones *definitely* full of idiots). The human mind cannot process human connection at the speed cars go, only risk and action. You can rarely feel anything but anger at these people, these careless drivers, because you have absolutely no connection to them. They are not people, but others.

Cars decrease the interactions people have, thus decreasing the variety of people that any given person knows. Atomization and isolation creates the perfect environment for fascist ideas to grow and spread. These idiots are everywhere, taking over. Driving is dangerous. Your body knows enough to register these threats, even if your conscious mind doesn't. Fear, anger, distrust, and isolation dominate the emotional landscape of motosupremacy. Car culture is fertile ground or a fascist message that leverages these feelings.

One could even say that motosupremacy creates the social preconditions for fascism.

But it runs even deeper, as this quote describes:

The very making of the automobile is notable, in a hierarchical production line predicated on maximum efficiency even if worker's bodies are expected to perform iterative work that regresses their ability to think and be creative. Then in the very function of the car, there's the performance of a high-speed society unafraid of violence for a higher cause with clear winners and losers as represented by different car brands. These aspects are unmistakably in lockstep with fascist mythology.

Editorial: Is the automobile fascist? – Haytham Nawaz

But it shouldn't actually be surprising that fascists and fossil fuels are intertwined. Fascism has always been intertwined with cars, since Mussolini coined the term. Yeah. Fascists **fucking love** cars.

Mussolini, like all the other fascists of his day, had a huge car collection. He dumped money into car racing, creating the Italian industry that ultimately produced the famous sports cars, such as Ferrari and Lamborghini, that modern fascists covet today.

He also built the first road in Italy exclusively for cars, the Autostrada. This inspired the Nazi Reichsautobahn system. (The Reichsautobahn later went on to inspire the American highway system.)

Like Mussolini, Hitler's car collection is also well known. But Hitler didn't just want cars for himself. He wanted every (so-called "real") German to drive a car (Jews, of course, were banned from driving). To put Germans in cars, Hitler and the Nazi party famously created Volkswagen.

Hitler admired one car manufacturer in particular: Henry Ford. Hitler actually kept a large portrait of Ford in his private office. Ford even shows up in *Mein Kampf*. Why? Ford was rabidly antisemitic.

Ford used the wealth from his automotive company to buy up media companies. He then used these, combined with his image as an innovative industrialist, to spread antisemitic conspiracy theories in the US. He published antisemitic conspiracy hoax created in Russia to undermine labor organizing, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and an antisemitic newspaper called the *Dearborn Independent*.

Truly, as it has been observed by others, Elon Musk is the Henry Ford of our time.

And Trump, admiring both Mussolini and Hitler, also shares their obsession with collecting luxury cars.

Now, of course, being into cars doesn't necessarily make you a fascist. But it is probably worth taking a moment to notice how much fascists invest in spreading motosupremacy and how much motosupremacy benefits fascism. The fascist obsession with cars seems like more than just a coincidence, don't ya think?

Cars are hard to fix

Trump put out a memo on the "right to repair" cars. He may be fascist, but not wrong that the right to repair is important. The book *Dawn of Everything* identifies 3 fundamental forms of domination: violence, knowledge, and charisma. The ability to repair something lives at the intersection of the first two.

To repair something you need to have materials and tools. To repair cars you need spark plugs, ducts, tire balancing rigs, lifts, socket wrenches, timing lights, etc. Access to these objects is mediated through capitalism. Put another way, access is restricted to those with money at the threat of police violence. Fortunately, collective mechanic shops do exist. This allows some groups of people to reduce this barrier. Unfortunately, that runs into another barrier of the cost of a shared space.

For cars, shared spaces like this scale up well, but they don't scale down. If you have a bunch of mechanics sharing a shop it works. If you have one car, it's cheaper to just pay a mechanic to do the work than to have a shared space. This means there's simply a minimum cost/scale that you have to get over before your system becomes viable.

The situation is radically different with bicycles. Access to tools and parts is still controlled by state violence, but tools and parts are relatively small and cheap. You can share a bike easily.

You can fix most things in a few hours, in a living room or on a sidewalk, using tools that won't even fill a backpack.

I've worked on cars, and I've worked on bikes, and the difference between the tools you need is an order of magnitude. To disassemble something like a VW bug, you can get away with a minimum of a floor jack, screwdrivers, a collection of crescent and socket wrenches, and a handful of other specialized tools. A fairly complete bike repair kit is smaller and cheaper than the floor jack alone. Parts, like a transmission or an engine block can cost more than an entire bike. Disposable car parts, like a set of tires, can cost more than a lot of bikes.

Now, I've hung out plenty of times in an O'Reilly or Autozone parking lot, cursing with a wrench and a friend. People do plenty of their own auto work. But there are a lot of barriers, there's a ceiling to what's possible, and basically everything is more expensive than bike repair.

And that ceiling has grown as engine compartments have become more packed with more expensive parts and more electronics have been integrated into the mix. This brings us to the other side of the intersection: knowledge. I'm not exactly talking about knowledge in the classical sense though. Sure, you probably need a Haynes manual for whatever car you're working on if you don't want to spend a bunch of time piecing things together from YouTube videos. But I'm talking about something else.

Modern cars, especially EVs, are filled with electronics. You have diagnostics interfaces, like OBDII, that can give you information about what's happening, and you have control electronics, like your on-board computer, that make the whole system work. Manufacturers have realized that they can restrict access to diagnostic information and prevent repairs by using the same methods that printers and electronics manufacturers use. Like printer cartridges, parts may be "vendor locked" so that it's only possible to install parts from "authorized manufacturers" (who pay the car company for the right to make compatible parts). Even mechanics can be forced to pay for expensive licenses in order to use diagnostic software or install certain components.

Modern cars have "firmware" (special software) that can disable cars that are modified by "unauthorized" mechanics. It has even become standard practice for finance companies to have manufacturers disable cars for missed payments. Car computers have become much more advanced and connected to everything. Car computers, like other networked electronics, require regular updates to keep from being hacked (for the record, that's been **a huge** problem for a long time) or even just broken by accident. These updates, and even functionality like GPS, can be turned into a subscription service. We're not very far away from car owners paying a monthly service fee for the ability to start their car, and risking having their car permanently disabled if any one outside of an "authorized repair facility" opens the hood.

Cars are cops

So we have a computer, with GPS, connected to everything in the car. It can tell when you speed up, when you slow down, and what your physical location is at all times. Oh, right, and it's always connected to the manufacturer via an internal cellphone so it can be updated. What exactly stops them from recording your real time location at all times? Oh right, nothing. Sounds like an absolute privacy nightmare. Oh, I forgot, they're also **covered with cameras**.

Tesla is kind of known for this. They use car video to train the generative AI that is at the heart of Tesla's famous autonomous crashing system. (In the EU, this would absolutely be a violation

of GDPR. I honestly don't think Tesla is complying with EU law, but, unfortunately, I'm not really able to investigate. I guess that's homework for another reader.) But when they're not using their video cameras to kill and maim people or drive into buildings, they're giving it to cops.

Cars, especially Teslas (because Elon Musk is a fascist) have become extensions of the modern surveillance state. Like Ring cameras, they become privately owned pieces of public surveillance infrastructure. Every car is now a cop, with 360 degree vision, constantly patrolling undercover.

These cameras are, of course, not all pointed out. Drivers regularly kill people. As I mentioned earlier, driving is both extremely dangerous and extremely boring. The only real way to combat the predictable distraction of driving would be by pointing cameras at the face of every driver and constantly monitoring them. This is just a basic safety issue, but it's impossible for it to not also be a privacy nightmare. Drivers should not be trusted, but neither should anyone with control over so many intrusive cameras.

But cars are not just surveillance platforms, they're also excuses to deploy other surveillance platforms. Surveillance platforms that happen to be incredibly insecure. Even if your car isn't tracking your every movement, "Safety cameras" are. The brutal American police state uses them to hunt down people who may be seeking abortions.

But cars have never really **not** been a privacy nightmare. In the US, no one is legally required to carry ID. (Now, I know there are a **lot** of caveats, but let's just pretend laws aren't "threats made by the dominant socioeconomic-ethnic group in a given nation." Trust me, just roll with it for a bit.)

The moment you're driving, you are legally required to carry valid government ID. Police can pull anyone over, for any reason, and the very first thing they say is essentially, "Papers please." It's so normal most people will do it without even thinking that they're acting out the trope that storytellers use to inform the audience that the story is set in a fascist police state.

And cars are just big. They're big enough that they can be tracked from the sky. Even before drones, helicopters could easily track cars. Most cars have to keep to specific paths. They can't just duck into the woods or into somebody's house. They can't cut down a narrow alley and disappear. Is it any wonder that Nazis took so many Dutch bikes?

Bikes were critical to anti-fascist resistance. They provided back channel communication for partisans. Women on bikes could easily smuggle pamphlets, guns, and bombs. Wanna put a bullet in some fascist occupier, Stasi informant, or some other villainous monster? Bikes are the tool if you want to mysteriously disappear into the night afterward like some kind of video game hero or something.

Bikes have been a tool of anti-imperialist and anti-fascist resistance for a long time. The Vietnamese logistics network was largely just a bunch of bicycle trails. Despite being massively out resourced, Vietnamese troops were able to supply their resistance and operate on a significantly lower supply budget. Vietnam threw out both French and American occupiers using bikes as their primary tool. Could they have done that if they'd relied primarily on cars? Of course not. Their supply lines would just get bombed.

The Ukrainian resistance to the Russian occupation has also used bicycles to carry out quick and quiet strikes. As the occupiers have run low on fuel, they've tried to do the same but have failed. Bicycles, it seems, lend themselves well to asymmetric resistance but poorly as a tool of occupation. When you understand the way guerilla warfare works, it makes sense.

It seems we've followed a tangent right into our next topic.

Cars are militarist

Since we're on the subject of war, let's talk about how cars make (offensive) war more likely.

Unlike bikes, which can literally be built in a garage, cars require huge manufacturing facilities and tons of steel. That manufacturing capacity can be, and has been, retooled to manufacture military hardware. It's common knowledge that Volkswagon made military vehicles for the Nazis.

A lot of people don't realize that things went the other way too. Messerschmitt and Heinkel, who made aircraft for the Luftwaffe during the war, went on to make microcars after. A good chunk of military vehicle manufacturers, Axis and Allies, switched back to the civilian market after the war. Ford had made the B-52 bomber. Chevy made army trucks. Chrysler and GM built tanks.

Today, as the automakers face declining demand and external competition, they're looking again at military production. When you have all of this production capacity and a capitalist economy, there starts to be an economic incentive pushing towards war. War is extremely profitable, because things keep blowing up. If you make a bike, it can last 100 years. If you make a tank, it will be obsolete before it stops working. Missiles and bombs are expensive, and they blow up when they're used.

If you're in the weapons business, the longer you can keep a war going the more money you make. The demand is never satisfied.

This was one of Eisenhower's points when he warned about "the Military Industrial Complex." Of course, during his term Eisenhower also built the largest piece of military infrastructure ever: the U.S. Interstate Highway System. It allowed rapid deployment of military hardware across the country. It was modeled after the Autobahn. It was this very military infrastructure that allowed the suburbs to be created, and that was used as a racist weapon to segregate and destroy vibrant diverse neighborhoods.

The highway system became a selling point for cars, which allowed something else interesting to happen.

The 1998 Gulf War was probably the first war where the critique of it being an oil war was popularly recognized. In fact it was quite explicitly over oil, as Iraq's stated reason for the invasion was Kuwait's accused over production violated OPEC production agreements. This alleged overproduction drove down the price of oil, which Iraq called "economic warfare." Overproduction benefited the US, so the US intervened on Kuwait's behalf after the invasion. At the time, Americans broadly supported the war.

As the 2003 Iraq War became unpopular, people started to take the "oil war" accusations more seriously. (The decision by the 101 Airborne to name forward operating bases "Shell" and "Exxon" probably added to that.)

But US military policy has actually been primarily dictated by oil since WWI. Oil determined the outcome of that war, and oil would become the center of the military industrial complex.

Military strategy for all actors in WWII was dominated by oil, which only accelerated this strategy. Part of Hitler's fatal invasion of Russia was about seizing oil fields in the Caucasus. Japan targeted Pearl Harbor to clear the way for its seizure of pacific oil resources. In the end, American oil production was one of the determining factors in the war.

Vietnam had its own oil fields, which US companies drilled during the war while the US bombed North Vietnamese oil wells. Other oil wars have become more obvious, but the role of oil in Vietnam is often overlooked.

US foreign policy isn't just wars. It's also assassinations, coups, and weapons deals. All of these, especially in the Middle East, have revolved around oil. It's odd that people seem confused about the reason the US continues to fund Israel, even while they commit genocide. But how could the US afford to give up a strategic foothold in the region?

"Very interesting tangent," I can hear you say, "but what was that interesting thing that happened when Americans bought cars?" Oh yes, that. Well, since US global power relies on oil, and cars rely on oil, Americans relying on cars aligns the interests of the military and the population: everyone wants cheap oil. Plenty of people knew full well that the Gulf War was over oil, and they didn't care. Hell, more than they didn't care. They agreed with that justification. They agreed, because **they wanted cheap oil**.

Cars are terrible for so many reasons, but I'm tired of writing.

I could go on about how cars are fundamentally elitist, how they were non-consensually forced on us (kind of like how AI is being forced on us now). I could talk about how cars make people easy to control by controlling oil. I could keep going, on and on, but we're like 8k words in, and I'm pretty tired. I bet you are too.

Cars are terrible. They're terrible for the environment. They're terrible for our relationships. They reinforce hierarchy. They're tools of control. They make us easy to control. They're inseparable from war.

Cars are a bad thing. But you know what's a good thing?

Bicycles are fine, actually

Bikes have been at the center of all sorts of resistance. They're a naturally social tool for moving through the world. You don't need stop lights or signs at an bicycle intersection. You **look** at each other. You communicate through subtle gestures. When you're cycling with people you're not just interacting with a bunch of machines, you're reading people.

Kids can bike. Old people can bike. Old people who can't ride regular bikes can ride modified bikes. People who can't ride modified bikes can use bike lanes with other mobility devices. The other day I saw a bike built specifically for moving wheelchairs. I didn't even know that was a thing.

I'm just gonna drop a quote here real quick:

"The bicycle is the most efficient machine ever created. Converting calories into gas, a bicycle gets the equivalent of three thousand miles per gallon."

— Bill Strickland

But I think there's actually something else. The Netherlands is incredibly dense, and this is only possible because of bikes. It also has a lot of anarchist spaces, relative to its population. I **think** that this is partially because of the density. There are enough people around to **do the work** and support the spaces together. There's just a minimum density needed to support any given project. If anarchists are a portion of the population, you need a minimum density of people to reach that critical mass of anarchists.

Bikes enable that density, but they are also cheap and efficient transportation. Anarchists can work less and “anarchy” more if they aren’t paying for a car. Each trip is short and fast, so there’s more time to **do** stuff and the barrier is lower. You don’t have to spend a bunch of time parking. You don’t have to pay for gas. I **think** that bikes make anarchism more viable.

But I also think that bikes are, at least to some degree, prefigurative. Cars signify class in a way that bikes just don’t. You’re in a car, you’re excluding everyone else with your display of wealth (or poverty). You’re on a bike you’re vulnerable like everyone else. On a bike, we’re all in this together.

So I’m not a bike guy. I’m an anarchist. I just happen to be a bicycle anarchist. I hope by this point, you understand why because that’s all the words I got for you to read.

I’m not a bike guy. I don’t know what brand my seat is. I think my gears are Shamano. (That’s a brand, right?) I think that’s how it’s spelled. I’m not going to look it up. I saw it on the window of a bike shop once. I think that’s what I have. I just use my bike to get around and to get my kids around. It’s just a tool for me. That’s pretty normal here in the Netherlands.

I’ve done some hacky repairs on bikes, not because I especially care about bikes but because I especially care about autonomy. I don’t like being controlled. If someone can lock me in, control my ability to fix my main mode of transportation, they can control me. I use open source software for the same reason. My instinctive hatred of cops comes from a pretty similar place.

I’m not a bike guy. I’m an anarchist. That’s where I’m coming from in this text. I’m not here for the bikes. I’m here for the liberation. And it is specifically **to** anarchists that I am speaking. If you happen to be a bike person and also an anarchist, great. You’re not alone. I hope this lines up with your existing critique, or helps you fill out your critique, of car culture. If you happen to be a bike person and not an anarchist, well... I’m working from a set of assumptions you may not agree with but enjoy the ride. If you are an anarchist who does not already identify motosupremacy, the enforcement of the motorcar as a form of transit at the exclusion of all others, as an oppressive system and a structural component of the interlocking systems of oppression that we oppose, well, I have some words for you to read.

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