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# The Megamachines Are False Specters

## A Response To Gelderloos

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I think it's a shame that anarchists don't write more on either geopolitics or analyses of the future; over the last two centuries our greatest successes have come from our imagination and foresight. For this reason I applaud Peter Gelderloos' recent attempted forecast, published in a variety of forms by Crimethinc.

There's much to agree with in Gelderloos' analysis and I applaud his effort, but there's nevertheless much in his analysis I find askew.

We could do with more predictive evaluation of geopolitical or institutional forces, and I hope this opens the door to more writing in these arenas by anarchists, but there's an ever-present danger to such lenses: you start seeing the world primarily in terms of big social structures and miss other critical dynamics — often assuming too much solidity, integrability, or centrality to said social structures. In my opinion Gelderloos' analysis falls into this trap when considering capitalism, fascism, and technology. To be more specific on each account:

he follows a rather marxist notion of capitalism as a unified whole system with a tendency to self-preservation, he frames fascism in terms of dictatorial institutions rather than an ideology of hypernationalism, and he struggles to maintain the dated narrative of a unified technological global social system.

What's common across these is the projection of solidity to abstractions where the institutional macro structures are privileged as the most relevant causal forces. This glosses over the root dynamics of individuals, ideologies, and tools, treating them in short as mere cogs making up the broader "systems."

Gelderloos' analysis of fascism should be the most glaring issue for anarchists since he attempts to break with the longstanding near-consensus in antifascist analysis by instead casting "fascism" purely in terms of dictatorship — a structure of institutions — rather than as an ideology. Gelderloos is correct that fascists are ideological opportunists on a variety of things, for example they really don't give a shit about economic systems. But it's profoundly mistaken to assume fascism hasn't had a stable and coherent ideological core. Fascism is always a hypernationalism, a "might makes right" fetishization of raw power and denial of empathy with beyond one's tribe, community, or imagined "people." This doesn't require a centralized state apparatus, much less one structured in dictatorial terms. The last few decades of fascist permutations have shown clearly that you can have democratic or decentralized variants of fascism (eg "national anarchism"). Indeed these are arguably the most common varieties of fascism today, from the populists of the new European right to the goat sacrificing tribes of the Wolves of Vinland.

Gelderloos demands to know what conceptual clarity is provided by analyzing fascism in ideological and philosophical terms rather than as a specific lost historical moment. Well first of all, it can give us insight into the actual fucking organizing of fascists, or at the very least their descendants. But second of all it's useful because — despite their opportunism



unexpected degrees of freedom, to what liberals (and marxists) see as mere cogs inexorably a part of a whole.

Gelderloos writes,

> Capitalism has invaded every corner of our lives, turning us against ourselves. The power of the State has grown exponentially and they have defeated us so many times before.

But we are still here. We are not merely here as marginal spectators whose one good trick — rioting — is increasingly toothless. We have been coursing through the veins of this system, reconfiguring things and pressuring back in countless ways. Central to our success has been our appreciation for the possibilities beneath the feet of the giants and the actual terms of the millennia old conflict we're all in.

Unfortunately the very leftist legacy of preoccupation with the macrostructures, of reifying them into giant omnipotent monsters can only grasp two equally absurd paths: reform or revolution. Maintaining the monsters or making some kind of magical sudden break with them. This traps radical leftists in the mental cycles of depression.

Anarchism needs to break with this leftist frame and instead view things in more diffuse, myriad, and dynamic terms of erosion and insurrection.

There are no magically holistic megamachines, just complex ecologies and chaotic weather systems. And history is not a drama of giant storms, but of the butterflies beating our wings.

The danger and constraints of geopolitical analysis — of thinking in terms of the macroscale institutions — is that you risk growing as stupid as they are with as confined a scope of attention. You see things purely in terms of the persistent macrostructure and miss the degrees of freedom among the base, shifting or pushing in ways sometimes deeply antithetical to those macrostructures. Institutions seem invulnerable, infinitely capable of appropriation and cooption… until suddenly they fail.

I suppose it's better that Gelderloos, in his categorization system, frames transhumanism as a liberal project rather than fascistic or dictatorial one. But of course he views it in terms of technocratic flows among the ruling classes rather than as a sincere grassroots ideology. Thus he misses the intensely anarchistic bent of morphological freedom.

This smacks of nothing so much as a myopic preoccupation with the neoliberal ruling order, with the existing systems and institutions, like Glenn Greenwald's infamous tendency to dismiss the threat of fascism/nationalism while hectoring us to go back to focusing on the usual capitalists and imperialists.

There is of course a serious danger that neoliberalism will eventually triumph again and use fascism as a specter to better ingrain its own technocratic democratic order, but there is also a threat of nationalism winning, and a nationalist victory is in fact worse. A forthright fascism that isn't twisted in on itself in obfuscation and delusion can be clumsily brash, but it can also grasp the longer game in a way liberalism almost never lets itself.

The greatest weapon of anarchists is that we see the roots. We are in a long war between power and freedom. Liberalism — being an ideology of the existing order, of existing institutions — can never allow itself to recognize this. And so it is only in the roots, the unruly masses beneath the institutional structures, that we will find the opportunities liberals can't see or plan for. The little twists and turns, the reconfigurations, the



on some fronts — fascists are often refreshingly clearheaded about things in a way liberals cannot afford to be. Liberalism is the tortured grab-bag of contradictions, with capitalism and democracy desperately trying to distract us (and themselves) from the functioning of the existing system. If liberalism is a pack of lies and distractions, fascism infamously doesn't bother disguising its lies, flak, and prevarication. Fascism is the most confident and explicit expression of the ideology of power itself: Might makes right. Care only about your own. That there is a philosophical position diametrically opposed to anarchism is important and provides a lot of illumination. Fascism clears the air. Just as anarchism is not a fixed blueprint or system, fascism is not a system but a set of values, a motivation and take on power utterly at odds with our own. This means it has just as diverse expressions as anarchist ethics do. But at the end of the day you are either for or opposed to power, you either care about all or just a few. Inevitably the scales tend to fall and everyone is forced — as in the Spanish revolution — to side with anarchism or fascism.

Ideology and philosophy matter. They're not always post-facto rationalizations of an existing context or system, but often the sincere source of new developments. The problem with lenses as sweeping as geopolitics is you get into the habit of evaluating the behavior and function of *institutions* and ignore the roots — the actual people and psychologies and patterns of relation that give rise to these structures.

One of the worst legacies the left has infected anarchists with is a totalizing molochian view of capitalism. This often leads to some really skewed predictions when we start freaking about "commodification" (often really just meaning a more fine tuned accounting of certain considerations). A certain type of pop-marxists have convinced many that "commodification" is magically in-differentiable from capitalism per se. *Got some commodification? Someone's keeping finer-grained track of something? Fuck son, you've got a bad case of capitalism —*

with all the attendant things we associate with it, nevermind tracing any specific causality. If you're filling out an itemized form on a dating site ("commodification of romance!") somehow that's class society and workplace hierarchies growing stronger. Never you mind what the causal mechanisms are, *think holistically*!

This leftist view of capitalism as an unified monolithic megamachine with its own clear plan and needs — rather than conflicting loci of power, orthogonalized mechanisms, and acidic currents of bottom-up market pressures — blinds people to possibilities today and ultimately encourages us to cast our dreams off beyond the veil of a magical revolution. If the abstraction is treated like a cohesive whole, if we treat institutions as the only relevant agents, and ignore everything below as constituent cogs, well then there's no hope for anything substantively different save via some kind of total break.

For those well and truly spooked with this kind of leftist thinking, there's ultimately little option besides despair, or a reification of the same old rituals of subcultural community. When the world is filled up with gods like "capitalism" or "civilization" and drained of actual living breathing human beings there's no hope of salvation, save through some kind of divine intervention.

So something new gets mystified and worshipped, The Revolution, or The Collapse. The Party or The Natural Order.

What gets lost as our attention focuses entirely on these big abstractions is the concrete issues of freedom. What possibilities are available to us in our social relations, in our projects, in our environmental conditions, in the configuration of our bodies?

Gelderloos unfortunately writes,

> We are increasingly being sold a transhumanist narrative in which nature and the body are presented as limitations to be overcome. This is the same old Enlightenment ideology that anarchists have fallen for time and again[.]



We've "fallen for" transhumanism because it's fucking correct. Anarchism's aspirations are not to become fucking stewards of some kind of reactionary "natural order" but to champion positive freedom, to collaboratively expand what is possible rather than retreat to a single blueprint or ecological niche. Those who would tell you to make do with and embrace the current configuration not just of the world but of your body are reactionaries of the highest order.

This endlessly repeated mantra that technology is not methods or blueprints, not even the *specific infrastructure* being built (which is surely skewed to the interests of power), but is some kind of closely knit together global political system, where every component props up the whole, contains the DNA to inexorably rebuild the whole, is becoming an ever more desperate rhetorical maneuver. While there are certainly countervailing authoritarian pressures in certain normalizations — like bosses in certain sectors of the first world demanding you be on call via a cellphone — what we also see is across the planet is greater diversification among technological forms and uses from the bottom up.

And what conceptual *value* would there really be in seeing "technology" as a unified system rather than an ecosystem or a vast arena of complex conflict? Sure there's a kind of mental reassurance in clustering a bunch of mechanisms together and declaring them a unified whole, a sum of their varying parts, a single megamachine. The simplicity of totalitarian thinking has always held an appeal, but that doesn't make it a correct or an adequate lens for anarchists.

This sort of thinking can cause us to cluster too much together and fail to see the joints, the root causes, or ways things can be reconfigured (for better or far worse).