The Swell

boom and bust in 2010's Liaocheng, China

Note from *Return Fire*: A powerful short story published in 2018 by Sophie Hoyle, as part of a series of imaginative fiction hosted by the website underearth.org. The events described range from the entirely familiar[1] (even more so in the years and climate-related disasters[2] and refugee-flows that have continued) – from the detention camp of Mória[3] on the Greek island of Lesvos, which burned down in 2020, to the boom and bust of real estate in Dubai – to those which every day seem more plausible, even here in the colonial core where many have managed to ignore and deny the ecological crisis which has been colonially-distributed so that for others apocalypse has been the reality for 500 years, if not longer.[4] Without giving too much away, we were in two minds about re-publishing this piece: while a frustrating lack of awareness of (or preparedness for) the events which will dominate the rest of our lives is widespread here in the UK, even among anarchists and other radicals (and even compared to our kind on certain other shores), we are also painfully aware of the dangers of using catastrophe as a rhetorical or propagandistic device. As much was summed up, the same year as Sophie's story, by Luis

December 2015: 'Wretched of the Earth' bloc, London climate march, before
anti-colonial sentiment was abandoned by certain of the later movements;
see Return Fire vol.6 pg329

1   For example, to those who remember the impact of Super-Storm Sandy; see **Return Fire vol.1 pg31**
2   See **Return Fire vol.6 pg496**
3   See **Return Fire vol.6 pg556**
4   See the companion piece to **Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation**

I. Prádanos:

> In the concluding chapter of the edited volume *Culture, Catastrophe, and Rhetoric*, Ralph Cintron considers the notion that 'the trope of revolution has been superseded by the trope of catastrophe as a primary means for imagining social change'. As Robert Hariman points out in the introduction to the same book, the twenty-first-century popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives in all media implies a *"reconfiguration of the era's central myth of progress[5] ... The catastrophic model comes without that [capitalist] teleology: progress can occur, but the processes of modernization can also lead to disaster and decline. Thus, catastrophe ... expose[s] the fragility and teleological vacuity of modern economic, technological, and political systems."*

> Obviously, from the critical postgrowth perspective I propose, challenges to the hubristic and linear hegemonic conception of progress are welcome. Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge that the catastrophe trope can easily lead to a dangerous securitization discourse[6] that serves to justify the implementation of a constant state of emergency and extreme forms of neoliberal biopolitics. Along these lines, Robert Marzec's recent book *Militarizing the Environment* studies with historical depth the way in which this disturbing discourse (which the author calls 'environmentality') has become a significant part of today's dominant reformist environmental (not ecological) thought. Marzec explains how accepting climate change as inevitable and preparing for worst-case scenarios of environmental catastrophe through market and military adaptation is already being used as an excuse to further militarize, privatize, and enclose ecological commons.[7] This dominant 'environmentality' frames the problem in terms of national security, technical and military management, and energy geopolitics, completely ignoring the historical root causes of ecological depletion.[8] As a result, the environment is depicted as something separated from humans and as a threat which must be feared and managed with the same technological, economic, and utilitarian logic that alienated humans from their ecological context and created the ecological crisis in the first place. Obviously, the rapid

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5   See **Return Fire vol.1 pg11**
6   See **Return Fire vol.6 pg633**
7   See another supplement to these chapters of Return Fire; **'Centering Relationships'**
8   See **Return Fire vol.6 pg510**

acceptance of environmentality by the elites shows not only that catastrophe is neither pedagogical nor politically disruptive per se, but may actually reinforce neoliberal cultural hegemony and growth-oriented framings. Environmentality, similar to eco-modernist approaches,[9] is a depoliticized environmentalism. It implies that there is nothing we can do to change the ongoing disaster trajectory of rapacious capitalism, other than preparing to weather the storm. As such, this discourse is 'politically disempowering and demobilizing'.[10] It is true, as shown in the previous chapter, that catastrophic socioecological events could move to the forefront the powerful agency of nonhuman forces that tend to be conceived of either as mere background or passive resources.[11] But if this agency is simply perceived as a threat to be managed and countered by a separate human agency, rather than being understood as an inextricable part of the ecological totality in which humans are inscribed, the core logic of the dominant imaginary is not challenged at all and, worse, dangerous geoengineering projects[12] could be encouraged

Perhaps the least we can do in this case is to emphasise both the very real radical potential revealed in moments of crisis and breakdown,[13] and at the same time the harm done in those situations by precisely those who putatively derive their power from keeping 'us' (or at least a certain portion of the 'included')[14] safe. Nothing threw this into clearer relief than the 2024 floods in Valencia, the deadliest in the history of the Spanish State. The regional government delayed informing residents of the danger of the incoming storm (its president falsely claiming that it would dissipate, against meteorological advice) for over 12 hours. According to 'Valencia Floods: People Power vs Governmental Disaster', "It wasn't until 20:12 that his government finally sent an SMS alert to Valencian citizens, who received it when they were already trapped in their cars or grasping onto trees."

Alberto Núñez Feijóo, the leader of the People's Party (PP), went as far as to blame the central government for not handling the

9 See **Return Fire vol.6 pg229**

10 Giorgos Kallis, *In Defense of Degrowth: Opinions and Minifestos*, ed. Aaron Vansintjan (Brussels: Uneven Earth Press, 2017), 198.

11 See **Return Fire vol.4 pg41**

12 See **Return Fire vol.3 pg8**

13 See **Return Fire vol.6 pg500**

14 See **Return Fire vol.6 pg594**

31.10.24: Sedavi, Valencia

emergency response appropriately, despite it being under the "sole command" of fellow PP member Carlos Mazón. He also rejected the deployment of firefighters from other provinces and regions for 72 hours. What's more, the local firefighting units have reported that they were not deployed and instead they were told to operate as if there was no emergency to tackle, which meant that out of 28 available firefighter units, only two were immadietely deployed to assist the citizens of affected communities. […] Disaster relief efforts were also hampered by the Mazón government's prior actions: together with the fascist and climate denialist party Vox, Mazón dismantled Valencia's emergency response units as a cost-cutting measure, despite the region's long history of flooding.

[D]espite the situation being far from safe, thousands of residents of the city of Valencia spontaneously walked to the affected villages to provide them with basic necessities and help with the clean-up. Although the city councils of Paiporta, Catarroja, Benetússer, Alfafar, Sedaví or Albal called for popular assistance, the Mazón government initially attempted to discourage the volunteers. But after observing the stalwart popular will to help, on Saturday, they moved to centralise aid efforts under its control; this government-

directed volunteer program rapidly fell apart.

The Valencian government sent several coaches full of volunteers to clean a shopping centre, one where management had previously trapped their workers [during the initial flooding]. Volunteers were furious as they were under the impression they were going to clean up people's homes, not shops owned by the richest person in Spain. Coaches that were destined for other towns got stuck going through roads that were cut off or were sent to places that didn't need help, highlighting the incompetence of the authorities. In the end, many volunteers returned to their self-organised efforts, which proved to be far more effective. Unable to control the volunteers, on Sunday morning, the Valencian government banned volunteers from travelling to the affected villages, so they could make way for a photo-op by the king, the prime minister and the regional president. Locals responded in kind, by throwing mud at their so-called "leaders", who they hold responsible for the death and destruction. […] Ikea, for example, trapped its workers in a warehouse while the waters were raising around them, while Uber Eats and Glovo forced

04.11.24: Spanish royals, their bodyguards & police overwhelmed, pelted with mud & 'other objects' by survivors upon their visit to Paiporta; the Prime Minister was also evacuated as stones were thrown at him & his car before mounted officers break up the mob; he orders 10,000 more troops, police & civil guards to the area in Spain's largest peacetime deployment

their couriers to carry on with their usual delivery circles, and the supermarket chain Mercadona forced its drivers to carry on deliveries in the rapidly-raising waters.

(The storm itself was nothing unexpected in the region; however, it was state intervention after the catastrophic destruction-by-flooding of much of the city of Valencia in 1957 which led to some of the worst effects of 2024. The Spanish dictatorship government diverted the river Túria to the south of the city; seventy years later, it was the area south of the city which saw the river burst its banks and devastate towns and villages without warning where no rain had fallen. After years of climate heating and drought, the soil was baked hard and unable to absorb the waters.)

Again and again, we see the most effective and inspiring responses to the increasing challenges we face in these so-called 'natural' disasters are those of neighbours and former strangers, not governmental or humanitarian agencies. Tomorrow is already late to leave it to start preparing food, water, first aid, tools and – most importantly – solidaritarian relationships in our neighbourhoods and beyond, where we can plan collectively for collective survival. And a vital part of that survival is attack on those who not only have caused this ecological and social nightmare, but who actively hinder us in adapting to it, even as they try to monopolise the legitimacy for that adaptation itself.

Consider the much-vaunted "green transition"[15] for example. Reading from last year's sadly-prescient 'Ahead of Another Summer of Climate Disasters, Let's Talk about Real Solutions', "[a]nyone who understands how our society works – which is to say, how capitalism works – knows that the probable result of an increase in green energy investment will be an *increase* in fossil fuel production." Leaving aside the specious difference between "green" and fossil energy,[16] the article continues:

> The primary reason for this is that the hundreds of billions of dollars that have already been sunk into pipelines and coal mines and oil refineries and fracking rigs are *fixed capital.* They're worth a lot of money, but it's not money in a bank account that can be quickly invested somewhere else, turned into stocks or real estate or converted into a different currency.

15 See **Return Fire vol.6 pg435**
16 See **Return Fire vol.6 pg45**

A 14,000-tonne coal excavator, an offshore oil platform: these aren't ever going to become something else of similar financial value. This is money that has been spent, an investment that is only useful to capitalists if they can continue to use it to extract coal or drill for oil. That economic rule holds true whether the capitalist enterprise in question is ExxonMobil, the Saudi state oil company, or the Communist Party-owned China Petrochemical Corporation (which was listed as the largest energy company in the world in 2021).

Capitalism (including the kind practiced by every socialist government in the world) is based on growth. If green energy investment grows, leading to an increase in total energy production, the price of energy will decrease, which means that large manufacturers will make more of whatever commodities they are producing, rendering their products cheaper in hopes that consumers will buy more of them. Consequently, total energy usage will *increase.* This applies to energy from all available sources, especially the most established ones – fossil fuels.
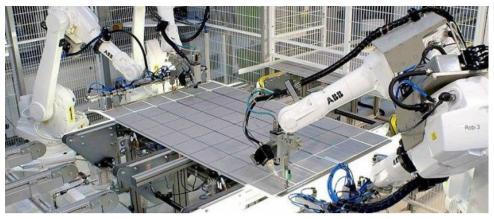
After decades of investment, green energy will finally become cost-competitive with or cheaper than energy from fossil fuels. This has only started to occur in the last few years, though prices still fluctuate depending on the region and the type of energy production. The fossil fuel industry[17] has neither abandoned their operations nor decreased production. Many companies won't even hedge their investments between fossil fuels and green energy. What they will do, however, is invest more in new fossil fuel projects. This is basic capitalist economics: if the price margin on a product decreases, the only way to maintain or increase your profits is to increase total production. That explains why 2023 was a banner year for new fossil fuel projects.[18]

This year has already borne this out, with the news that oil giants BP and Shell are both moving away from their "renewables" portfolios in light of the greater profits accruing to those such as ExxonMobil who only do fossil fuels, while more oil was drilled under the outgoing US President than under any other; and the incumbent certain to try to top this.

And what of the technology sector, so often looked to for those magical

17 theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/04/exxon-chief-public-climate-failures

18 phys.org/news/2023-11-hundreds-oil-gas-climate-crisis.html

automated solar-panel production

"efficiency" hacks alleged to offer a way off the sinking ship? This prospects are as bad as they've ever been. Analysing the leap of the US tech giants onto the bandwagon of a regime centred in explicit climate-denial, 'The DOGE and the Neo-Reactionaries' breaks down likely motivations into a series of points:

> 1. The techno-feudalists have billions invested in crypto and without a big push from the government and the removal of all regulations, their money will be lost. Crypto has not mainstreamed in the way they expected, both because of Biden-era regulations on speculative investments and because the public just isn't into it. They need the state to manage the transition to crypto.
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> 2. Similarly, they're gravely concerned about the trillions they've invested in AI [artificial intelligence]. Any amount of regulation or constraints by the state is seen as a death-knell. They know that AI has prompted a speculative bubble and they need the state to manage the bubble through subsidies and contracts. They also need the state to aggressively shield the US from Chinese AI technology.
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> 3. Both crypto and AI are burning up the earth. The electricity demands of both AI and crypto are enormous. They need a completely deregulated energy industry and rapid shift away from any climate policy. Even the mention of climate change is a threat to their fortunes.

So here we are, back at the catastrophe; either its precipice or its depths, depending on our moment, our ancestral lineages or our place in the world.

Better again in this context would be understanding disaster not as event but as condition;[19] if there are certainly hints of this throughout the short story presented below, even more is spelled out in the piece we have transcribed and added as an appendix, a radio interview from The Beautiful Idea podcast released in early 2025.

Thinking of how the person being interviewed mentions the propensity here in the UK for citizens to await direction by the local government in times of crisis in lieu of taking initiative (although in the case of the arrival of COVID-19 it was rather the other way around, beginning as self-organised before ending up dying of institutionalisation), the short story told here depicts some of the despair-inducing bureaucracy spilling over from the management of migration to that of a population soon to become refugees themselves; the tragedy is that its only upon seeing this process fail them that the protagonists set out to build autonomous structures, rather than already having them in place. Emphasised here is the need to expand the webs of kinship and care beyond the narrow containers of nationality or family-as-we-know-it. Again, in the interests of fostering an imaginative horizon beyond the smug "I told you so" of so much 'climate fiction' dystopias (almost becoming the *utopias* of a certain cynical mindset grown up with capitalist mythologies of scarcity and survival of the fittest), perhaps supplementary viewing to this zine would be the recent Brazilian film *Bacurau*, where the scenario painted in a near-future after some unspecified breakdown is everything that (Western) environmentalism is not: a proud, diverse and conflictual community still under attack by opportunistic local government officaldom and white-supremacist tourists who pay that government to hunt and shoot community members, yet in their resistance sharing a dignified survival, looting and sharing the necessities, and living in non-heteronormative family. These are also the visions we need to accompany us on this path, not just the fever-dreams of apocalypse.

– R.F., March 2025

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19 See **Return Fire vol.2 pg17**

I scanned the horizon – the faint outlines of hills in the dusk, above the rising waters – trying to focus, to concentrate. I fixed my gaze on a point in the near distance: a foamy scum had formed at the edges of the new outline of the river. It had become black, full of silt and debris from the land and buildings slowly subsiding into it. The swelling waters had easily shot over the Thames Barrier, and it still grew and sank with the tides, sometimes revealing the wrecks of car frames, broken fences and scattered bricks at its lowest levels.

I felt a hand softly steadying my forearm, and a lulling voice: 'now, take a deep breath…'

*

Previously, we were hyperconnected – the flicker of screens waking up, eyes re-adjusting, then scrolling through information, piecing together what was happening to my family in different time zones of Beirut, Cairo, and friends in Athens. The background murmur of news from the wider world was reassuring, but it also made me keenly aware of being hyper-localised – stuck in one place, wedged in behind the computer desk, simmering in anxiety. Until I panic-bought a flight to go over and *try to do*

something, however small.

My cousin Aziz seemed confused as to what help I could really be to the surge of refugees entering the Beqaa Valley, seeing as I wasn't a doctor and could only communicate in broken Arabic. I had a sincere, but possibly misguided, sense of urgency. I wanted to reach into the simulacra of high-definition images of people herded behind militarised borders; I wanted to be a counter-response to the states that were withdrawing and tightening, shrinking-themselves-small in defence.

However, after I arrived, the British Embassy issued a warning not to enter the region after fights broke out between factions in the camps, and aid workers had got caught up in-between. So, I waited in the apartment in Beirut for more information, hemmed in by the mountains, the sprawl and the heavy air punctuated by clusters of beeps from below. I could see across the piles of garbage in Mar Mikhael to the new buildings with double-glazing and air-conditioning, left empty after their owners from the UAE returned back home. The sticky juice had saturated all permeable surfaces, and the litter that was swept into the sea had started to return. It piled up until it spilled over into even the private beaches with sea walls and concrete tetrapod breakwaters, and had to be removed each morning before they opened. Even if you didn't have to wade through the festering rubbish directly, people were getting worried about the toxins leaking into the groundwater and the fish that people consumed caught from the sea. The price of bottled water had increased sharply, with people constantly refilling their tanks on the roofs, which started to evaporate after only a few hours. The random power-cuts meant I had to re-shift my workplace to somewhere with a generator, a micro-scale manifestation of the things that were possible-but just-out-of-reach. After searching the backstreets with a fellow student and journalist in the same apartment building also looking for Wifi, we finally found a cafe ready to capitalise on our addiction to connectivity. After scouring for networks, I managed to book a flight and re-routed my trip to Lesvos.

People queued for days to register at the Moria camp, and even slept there overnight to hold their place, shivering in too-thin sleeping bags. Some had come overland as far as from Somalia and Pakistan, traversing the mountains of Iran and Turkey, soaked from clambering down from the boats onto the pebble shores. It was strange to see it up-close, in the always-hurried interactions at night: in the dark, dipping between torn-

down fences, pitched tents and burning plastic. Other than death, starvation, or hypothermia, it seemed that the lack of information was the clincher: not knowing how long they'd be there, where they'd be sent next, and who gets chosen or why. There were no official signposts as the situation was always changing, and no loudspeaker announcements other than the Greek police telling the crowds to push back. I only saw once a piece of card tied to the razor-wire fences with the categories 'Iran, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan' hand-scrawled in English, and then in their respective languages; but the red ink started to spread and splinter in the torrential rain.

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We're not sure how long we'd spent underground at that point. We had crowbarred up the creaking floorboards of the living room, and piled up old mattresses and turned-over tables in an attempt to seal ourselves in. Compulsively clicking through live news updates of world leaders threatening imminent attacks fuelled a moment of paranoia in which I'd purchased a small amount of foil blankets, 5 litre bottles of water and canned food. They'd been kept at the back of my bedroom cupboard, obscured by clothes on hangers, embarrassed at what my housemates might think.

There was a small sense of relief at having thought ahead; though, now, in the dark, in what must have been three days after the torch batteries gave out, we realised exactly how little we knew. No matter how much we tried to insulate the space, there was a far-reaching dampness pervading this area beneath the house: a gap, a link to the outside. Sheer terror had blocked all rational decision-making immediately after we heard the announcement, so we'd rushed and panicked, and were stuck underneath without a can-opener. We stabbed open cans with a pair of old scissors and scooped the cold contents out with our hands. The three of us could only lie horizontally, raising our heads a little before hitting or snagging them, shuffling along and crawling to the bin bags in the farthest corner, which was our makeshift bathroom.

It was hard to know the diurnal rhythms in the darkness, how many days or weeks had passed, but the stench was becoming unbearable.

We hesitated.

We tensely debated the options of emerging: Who would go first? What

had even happened? If there was radiation, an outfall, how would we be able to discern the invisible symptoms, the chemical miasma?

Eventually, somehow, we made the decision.

When we emerged, we felt ridiculous for having even tried to do anything at all. After the initial wave of relief that we were still alive and that our belongings were intact, we tentatively wandered through the shells of houses, mostly empty, cars gone. Did they all have pre-paid bunkers? The ones we'd read about in newspaper columns, that elites had secured amidst threats of a social uprising; though these were in the back pages, buried deep under the fanfare of celebrity scandal and political controversies. We rode around on bikes to scout out what was happening, but were met with days of silence.

I thought I was used to watching known worlds and delicately constructed identities collapse. Through infrequent childhood visits to extended family in the near-mythical *homeland.* It was built-up and given such emphasis and importance; then, simultaneously, over a lifetime, we watched it fall apart from afar: explosions tearing through homes and districts, mediated and abstract. I remember glancing to the side to see the suppressed emotions of family members staring tensely at the screen as the British newsreader gave a terse summary of events. The anticipation of crackling phone-lines checking if they were still alive, – *alhamdilluh* – sighs of relief; but then agitations and gesticulations as if it were somehow their fault for incidentally living nearby the site of the bomb. Tracing the routes of spectacular wide-angle newspaper shots of places we'd once been, now obliterated. A slow grief.

Eventually, we heard some sirens. We approached cautiously with an ingrained distrust of authority, but also with hope, possibly of rescue, or at the very least, information. They didn't have much. We'd caught up with the hazard cleaning truck as it was turning the corner to leave the neighbourhood. They'd been painting large black crosses on most of the houses with a thin, dripping paint, though they couldn't reveal what this was for. They seemed surprised and impressed at our staying put; though as they stood there in biohazard suits replete with breathing apparatus and chemical resistant boots, we looked down at our sullied clothes and felt ridiculous. They mentioned that there was a help centre uphill of where south Croydon used to be. It was in the old London Biggin Hill airport which until then, I was unaware had even existed.

We went back to the house to look at what we could take, packing any remaining essential food, safety blankets, and thermals. I went back into my room, and saw an olive tree wooden bowl that my grandmother had taken across the border, fretting and worrying that they'd be seized by customs. It had made it across continents and decades, and was now sitting on my desk. It was positioned next to palm tree leaves, an ornamental camel figurine and an ankh necklace, the accretions of multiple lives over the years; but they all had to be left behind this time. I settled on taking a small cluster of photos that didn't take up as much space, and got up to head out.

We followed the half-memorised directions, and were co-directed by other people that we met along the way. Some were better equipped, driving cars with stacks of belongings on the roof bound together with rope and cords, with some chair legs and pot handles poking out. One was a black van with a peeling plastic *Zipcar* sticker, either taken by the person currently renting it, or stolen from the street. Others were walking by foot, starved out from their hiding places.

We arrived at a site that we presumed to be the help centre, where people gathered in the flat, grassy areas of the take-off strip, now full of tents. New ones were being constructed, despite the strong winds leaving the thick tarpaulin sheets flapping and gasping in turns. The portaloos overflowed, uncontained by the shallow channels carved out to serve as makeshift drainage. The remaining cars were stuck in the mud, tracks gouged out and deepened by tires revving to leave.

We split to each join a different queue, where we stood for a few hours, each one hardly moving. We felt the disquiet growing, tensions spilling out into arguments, and looked up to see people shouting with a megaphone, not knowing how to handle the crowds, and looking more distressed than us. Someone was throwing small plastic containers off the back of a parked truck, many of which became stuck in the sludge. Inside were provisions: small packets of biscuits, cheese, shortbread, and some bottled water. It reminded me of primary school trips and packed lunches, the same herding of people with barks and exclamations to stand in line or hold hands to cross the road. It started to rain heavily and people dispersed back into the tents. They perched inside, necks tilted up at the skies, waiting until it ceased to start queuing again.

For the first week the queues remained orderly. There were people who'd

waited years for referrals to doctors for life-saving treatments, to be rehoused to an accessible flat, or to get their asylum status granted: a patient tolerance with a quiet, hopeful desperation.

There were many people in the queue that had been trying to register at the Croydon Immigration and Asylum Support Service (IASS), who were now two or three-times displaced. Though after the South Coastal Wall was built, numbers had dropped rapidly, and most people were sent to be processed on the Isle of Wight. To have made it to London means that they must have come far in the process of their application – near hope, but once again, out of reach. Their quiet acceptance was in contrast to the permanently-outraged middle classes, seemingly unused to inefficiency or disorganisation, and gesticulating and shouting with entitled demands. This was ignored by the bored youth, who made music by beat-boxing, or improvising instruments from discarded plastic water and oil drums.

Once every three days there was some hot food: a bland, anglicised curry. We couldn't enter the kitchen, but from the small section I could see through the exit, it looked like those of homeless shelters and camps I've been in previously. These had giant metal pots, human-size sacks of lentils, whole crates of onions and garlic chopped and swept in and swirled with spoons requiring whole-body movements, steadying yourself on the sides of the large metal vats, at least a metre wide each way. Any food when cooked on such a large scale inevitably became reduced to the same consistency. We all slept in the largest tent, huddled on the floor, sleeping with our belongings tied round us and under our clothes, held close to our bodies as if in rigour mortis.

It took a few weeks of hearsay to figure out what the process might be. We were waiting to be accepted as refugees in Iceland, the only country left in the region with stable electricity from their geothermal resources, and the only place that would take UK citizens after many years of isolationist foreign policies since Brexit. I heard the same kind of statements that I had made to those newly arriving in Lesvos only a year before: 'We don't know exactly what's happening… the situation is changing everyday… we'll know later… we're waiting for another aid delivery to arrive…'

Within the camp, a kind of self-sorting was occurring. Despite being stripped of a material base and all belongings, people moved towards others who were of a similar socioeconomic background, forming different niches. Somehow, the petite-bourgeoise politeness and niceties continued:

a want of familiarity, a semblance of normality, the internalised body language and intonation. We caught the eyes of some squatters and ravers, who used the premise of talking to us about our bikes and our tools, among other signifiers that we may possibly be similar, if not the same. Over the months, once we'd built some basic trust, we were allowed into their discussions. We knew that some groups would be prioritised: the ill, families with young children… which none of us were. As supplies dwindled and tensions increased, they'd been considering moving farther out, to set up a community. Cynical, hardened, but also desperate, we went with them.

Soon after, the waters rose again, and all the camps had to move farther out, uphill, and re-settle. I remember how we'd learned about the earlier settlers locating next to natural water sources in my primary school geography class, with pencil-shapes diagrammatically outlining the proximity of the shelter (round) to the river (parallel waving lines in blue). We built structures on elevations, slowly learning which ones would withstand the elements, aided by some anarcho-engineers who helped at the Calais Jungle before it was flattened. As a group of anarchists, squatters, artists and a nurse, we could mostly make and fix things ourselves. We had some basic knowledge of the woods we were surrounded by, and some basic medical supplies. We'd scavenged further necessities from the camp, and by sifting through the water when we forayed down to the new edge of the Thames.

Occasionally, we could still smell the back-wind. It was hard to stand the stench of the dispersed water becoming marshy with dead bodies, building remains, abandoned vehicles, and giant flocks of seagulls pecking at the slimed surfaces. It easily stretched across to the former-Netherlands, and sometimes the EU boats came with emergency supplies they'd been safeguarding in waterproof warehouses. They were equipped with solar panels, and things that looked clean, neat and technical. Though they were often mobbed, so now they just threw parcels off the sides, which bobbed along until they reached the shore of hysteric crowds.

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We spent a lot of the time learning to wait. There was no longer an abundance of white-noise-images filling the gaps, the seconds were hanging, minutes turning into frustration. We had to double-back and go over old memories, to retrieve nostalgic go-to stories stuck in deeply

sedimented neural pathways. Thinking about the boats reminded me of relaxation, leisure, holidays… things that were once within reach. How the clear, salty water had trickled underneath the hulls in the ports, the smell of sun-warmed concrete and tarmac, soft to stand on.

I thought of my uncle who lived in Dubai, who I'd last seen during my shortened trip to Beirut. I'd visited him 5 years earlier: cruising along endless highways that by bad design circled around and back into each other. They passed disconnected sites and vague signs – 'Internet City' – that promised different kinds of pre-packaged progress. You could see the burnt grass by the highways under the 45 °C summer heat, where newly implanted patches of soil had shrivelled up already, shrinking back from the squared templates. He prided himself on not living in the extra-luxury high-rises or highly-guarded gated communities, though he was still complicit; I guess that now I was too. In the more expensive end of town there were fake islands constructed by dredging the shores and dumping sand from the desert, forcing them into the shape of a palm tree (only visible from helicopters and private jets I imagine). However, in between the fake-sand palm-fronds the water had started to stagnate without a natural flow to clear it, so sea snakes had proliferated and populated these tiny lagoons. I'd smiled inwardly when I imagined the starts and shouts of entitled people being bitten or taken aback, that despite the glossy real-estate brochures and censored-media versions they could afford, this hadn't worked out for them. Despite these clear signs of slow-implosion, there was still mass migration to the UAE, the supposed source of stability and employment in the region, but the sandy city of glass towers and construction sites gave way. I read that veterinary scientists were slicing open the stomachs of dead camels they'd found by the roads, and had extracted from the slopping organs large balls of plastic debris. They'd been nibbling on shreds of plastic bags piled up in rubbish heaps, covered by sand outside the city, which had cumulatively tangled and calcified inside them like weights.

Remembering riding a camel as a child in Giza, I asked my uncle how my second-cousins were in Cairo, where he'd recently been. He was initially confused why they hadn't moved out of the cluttered centre with teeming traffic, to the newer, better satellite cities: New Cairo in the east, or outside of the ring-road in the south-westerly sprawl. But now that the pipes stopped pumping and their cars ran out of petrol, people were already walking in hoards back into the centre, thirsty and starving. Some had

driven most of the way on emergency petrol, and then had to push the vehicle for the remaining amount: the hot metal frame slicing through their outwardly spread palms as they gave their whole bodyweight into moving it a few metres more. Others rode bicycles only previously used by their children and domestic staff, struggling with the downsized frames or the unfamiliar physical actions. They stopped over in the half-built apartment blocks for shelter, and looked out onto empty frames of advertising billboards along the motorway; most of the metal had been scavenged, and the once-glossy paper burning on open fires producing an acrid smoke. Some scraps had been hurled by winds into the desert and onto arterial roads, re-grounded in sand or skewered on small rusted fences; they were faded, bearing the faint outlines of cosmopolitan young families enjoying their new villas in the exclusive private compounds. The group finally arrived at the *ashwa'iyat* in the centre, a dense network of dwellings. Many of the people that lived here had once constructed those isolated compounds. Whole families were employed to construct foundations, crossing slivers of timber that looked like balsa splints to make temporary cages, and laying bricks and plaster to surround them, packing them in tight. They were not happy to see the return of the elites who had unceremoniously abandoned them years ago.

This was all reported back to the shocked heads of the Emmar construction company in Oct 6th City, Dubai. They'd been able to fly their most senior staff back to the UAE, and this information was kept from going public, citing unspecified political reasons for their withdrawal if required. After the achievement of the global corporate monument of the Burj Khalifa, this was hard to take. 'But, – *insh'allah* – that wouldn't happen here, not in the much more developed, politically stable Dubai' they'd said. The seeds of colonial modernity accelerated by oil production produced a disordered, mismanaged growth of atomised communities. It ate into all corners of life, relentlessly; until no one knew how to survive the sweltering heat outside of these air-conditioned, serviced apartments.

I remember hearing all this, scattered among other things, and spoken of casually as if it were interchangeable, replaceable with other hearsay and minutiae that didn't affect them directly. While I was leaving for the airport to fly back to London, I saw a series of loader trucks tipping clumps of soil into square excavations, with palm trees to be planted held on standby. They were trying to make the barren landscape seem ordered and pristine, though you could already tell from how the dirt fell loosely,

with a fine, powdery dust, that it was drying-out fast in the desert heat.

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A young child had come up to the nurse next to me, 'It's the dirt again'. 'The dirt' was contact dermatitis, thousands of tiny blisters that swelled on the skin of her hands and arms, sometimes seeping a sticky, clear fluid. Perhaps some tree sap or another irritant caused it, and strangely it made a similar-looking substance through reacting on human skin, generating until it swelled, burst and flaked off over the next few weeks.

A number of years must have passed, though even the people meant to be marking the time had slacked; either through apathy, or a reluctance to accept this as the situation, a refusal: *this was only temporary.* We tried to bide the time in a way that could be useful; making paper out of compounded substances, mashing and drying different fibres, flattening them with heavy objects, and learning to not be impatient and flick up the corners just to see if they were ready. We washed everything in the upper part of the river, but despite rinsing over and over again an oily residue coated everything that could never be gotten rid of. Things were never *really* clean – not like before. We spent most of daylight hours outside, as people had either forgotten or didn't seem convinced by the previous public health warnings, and because of the effects of these dangers were immediate.

One day, I was requested to draw, with precision. What I was drawing were medical conditions, what may have been considered 'oddities', which reminded me of 18th century anatomical drawings, stretched out and skewed, next to over-stylised botanical depictions and foetuses in jars at the museum. 'Can you draw?', would previously have felt like a conservative and anachronistic comment, but was now a genuine question. I was unused to it and it felt like I was learning my fine motor co-ordination skills all over again. I tried to be impartial in the way that they wanted, but to draw the baby as a dumb, inert object seemed unfair. Its eyes were wet and moving, lolling around in its head as it made slight movements and jerks that the neck and back couldn't support, instantly falling back to how it was before. Looking back between the child and the drawing there was a disjuncture. The baby's head did have three eyes, a congenital deformity, but it still seemed much more live, curious, in need of being nurtured, and it was hard to see outside of that as it looked directly at me with a wonky smile. My own drawing reminded me of book

illustrations and graphic novels of the monstrous: the unreal and unflesh. But here it was in front of me; so I added a few figurative lines to indicate movement of the face, eyes, and body, gently tugging in different directions.

The mother seemed to want something to be done about the extra eye, even though we all knew this was highly improbable as major surgery was life threatening in itself. We sent the drawing to another commune we were in contact with, to be sent along the chains until it reached somewhere that perhaps had a doctor or surgeon. We drew the plants we now knew to be poisonous and placed them on the trees for all to see. I was embarrassed at my own lack of artistry, and how the ink spread through and blotted the bumpy paper, so their outlines were sometimes indeterminable. I don't truly believe that I could have identified any of these plants from the drawings I'd just made, but it was all we had left after the Big Electric went down.

It was a sharp tug at the skin that made me look back at my hand. By now I'd spent so long – hours, days – dissociating and practising switching my mind to a different channel.

They were trying to extract an xNT bioglass capsule that had been subdermally embedded. It no longer worked to open doors as most buildings had collapsed or their systems were down, my old passport had by now expired, and the smartphones and tablets we'd been charging by portable solar power panels had broken. A capsule injector had punctured the surface and shot it into place, to where it now nested under a pinch of skin between the forefinger and the thumb. But it had missed the mark by a hairline and was too close to the bone, which had now begun to grow around it. The physical labour of repairing the roofs of the shelters, cleaning pipes and filtering wastewater had made it gratingly painful, and rendered me less useful; as comparatively younger and able-bodied person I was required to undertake basic tasks to maintain our collective survival. They had scraped the rust off another tool, boiled it to sterilise it, and tried to sharpen it as much as possible to try and disentangle the capsule from my hand. The deep pit in the skin pooled with blood, and I looked away again – trying to concentrate, focussing on elsewhere – looking out over the horizon.

APPENDIX:

Hello. You're listening to The Beautiful Idea. A podcast from a collective of several anarchist and autonomous media producers scattered around the world. We're bringing you interviews and stories from the front lines of autonomous social movements and struggles, as well as original commentary and analysis. Follow us on Mastodon and at thebeautifulidea.show. Thanks for listening.

TBI: Today we're going to take the conversation in a slightly different direction. And a direction that I myself personally am really connected to. And this is a direction which focuses really on the question of what it is that we're doing as radicals. As anarchists, as fellow travelers, what is it that we're doing in the world and how is it to be understand what we're doing?

I think that right now there's a lot of open conversation about rethinking revolutionary thought, that's incredibly productive. And so I want to try and push a conversation a little bit in that direction. So, do you want to just jump in and maybe introduce yourself real quick, talk about some of the stuff you're working on, things that you're interested in, those

kinds of things?

Adam: Yeah, sure. Hey, so first off, thanks for having me. It's a real pleasure and privilege to be on the show, especially, so early in its youth. I'd really honored that you've chosen to invite me. My name is Adam Greenfield. As you can hear from my voice, I am a New Yorker, but I've been resident in London for the last 10 years. And I've got a really mixed background, but most recently, I spent about 20-25 years in technology; and looking particularly at the ways in which technology intersects with design, intersects with politics, and intersects with everyday urban life. And it has taught me a great deal. I mean, I'm really chastened by that experience in a lot of ways and I've come out the other side of it with all of my utopianism stripped away, fallen to my feet. As the tech industry does. I mean, really, if you want, if you want a place where dreams go to die, it's that entire sector. We can get into that later.

And, with my dreams in ashes around my feet, what I'm left with is optimism. This is definitely one of those "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" sorts of situation: but it is where I am. And so what I've been working on lately is A), how to undo all the damage that I felt that I did in the course of my time in the technology sector and B) specifically how to undo that is in helping myself and others forge more productive ties with one another at the local level, in a way that does an end run around a lot of the political discourse that we're fed in an ordinary mainstream society; that lets us get to the root of some of the major issues that we're contending with. Most primarily, of course, climate system collapse.

So to put it in nutshell, how do we get together with one another? How do we organize ourselves as individuals, as communities, to survive the thing that's coming at us; and to do so with a modicum of grace and dignity, and with our values of justice and equity and freedom intact? How do we do any of that? That's what I've been working on for a while.

TBI: Yeah. And so, you know, I want… Obviously, you've written a lot

on smart cities and stuff. I think I want to focus on your recent text, on *Lifehouse* very specifically; and maybe get into... Maybe if you could kind of walk people through how that text came about. You talk about it in the book a lot and it's a fascinating story... but how someone who had been writing about smart cities and working in tech and doing tech things, all of a sudden had this kind of formative shift in experience. Like what was the process of bringing that text up, and why were you interested in writing it?

Adam: Well, I think it's fair to say that even in technology, I was trying to extend a lineage of thought and action that, even at the time I got interested in technology, was already dying: and has since just been, I think, intentionally extirpated. There was a line of… Idealism is accurate, but it doesn't even convey the sense of what I'm talking about. I mean, we're talking about going back to the Whole Earth Catalog[1] or *A Pattern Language*.[2] There were real left libertarian currents of thought that expressed themselves through individual and collective empowerment through the tools that we had access to at the time. And I was very deliberately trying to keep that traditional live, and to extend that tradition in contemporary network digital information technology. So it isn't like I was this typical Silicon Valley tech bro who had an epiphany one day and decided to become an anarchist. It was more like this was a natural evolution of beliefs and tendencies that had always been part of what I was trying to realize and actualize in the world. And frankly, just failed in actualizing.

The critical point, the nodal point (the inciting incident as my partner would say; she's a documentary filmmaker, and so she always talks about inciting incidents) is Occupy Sandy. And I realize now that we are 12-and-some years downstream from that. That all of a sudden I'm finding that I have to explain to a lot of people not merely what super-

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1 R.F. – Counter-cultural '60s-onwards mail-order listing and forum for self-sufficiency, personal growth, utopian visions and – most of all – innovative technology; its statement of purpose read "We are as gods and might as well get good at it."

2 R.F. – 1977 book (aiming to give non-professionals tools to improve a town or neighbourhood, or design houses, workshops, public buildings, etc.) co-authored by one of the first architects to use a computer, and who also worked on cognitive science, cybernetics, and artificial intelligence.

storm Sandy was, but what Occupy Sandy was, and why it came into existence and how it came to its existence.

So for the benefit of those of your listeners who might not have been out of diapers when this all happened: in the fall of 2012 in New York City where I was living at the time, there was an extraordinary weather event. It was something that was fairly unprecedented. It was a large Atlantic hurricane very late in the season and a continental cold front that in itself was just outscaled. And these forged in the atmosphere over the northeastern United States, and made landfall on New York City in the fall of 2012. And brought the city to its knees.

I mean, it was like nothing that anybody had experienced in the city's living memory. All of the infrastructures that support us in our desire to keep on living everyday life; all of that just came down in splinters. And in some of the more affected neighborhoods, those infrastructures stayed out for weeks. And it really left hundreds of thousands to millions of people at very real risk for their lives in some cases, and with just absolutely serious consequential risk to their health, their body and their ability to go on existing.

The good news in all of this was that within 24 hours of the storm making landfall on New York, there was a response. There was a very robust response, that had already opened up two disaster relief and recovery hubs within 36 hours or so, were serving tens of thousands of meals out of those hubs, was operating in every neighborhood that was affected, was getting out to the hardest hit communities, was getting relief supplies out to people: and was really pulling people out of some really dangerous situations.

And I'm always at pain's distress that this organization wasn't the government and it wasn't anything in the philanthropic or charitable sector. It wasn't the Red Cross, which Americans generally think of (or at least used to think) of as being the prime protagonist of events like this. It was a consciously anarchist, avowedly mutual aid organized, self-organized initiative that was put together by people who had come through Occupy Wall Street the year before. These were people who

retained their networks, stayed in touch with folks all through a year in which it seemed like Occupy Wall Street had pretty much played itself out and was no longer a force in American life. And when the storm made landfall, all of a sudden they were able to stand those networks up, begin directing supplies towards these relief hubs, and really generate an extraordinarily impressive mutual aid effort that, as I say, really helped anywhere from hundreds of thousands to maybe even millions of people get through the storm together.

To me, that experience… I always say the role that I played in Occupy Sandy was very small. It was literally merely shifting boxes,being part of human chains that were bringing parcels in off delivery trucks and sorting them into the pews of the church that we had kind of appropriated as a relief hub. My role in Occupy Sandy was not that of a theorist. It was not that of a strategist. It was literally just a pair of hands; and not even for very long at that. I think in my calendar, there are 12 days that I was a part of this.

So we're not talking about, you know, a huge commitment on my time, but it transformed utterly my sense of the possible. It transformed my sense of what it was legitimate to ask for from people, from communities; what it was legitimate to expect of people. And really the question I began to ask myself after the success of this initiative was, my God, why don't we organize more of our lives like this more of the time? I mean, it's right there for the taking.

And that is the question that I basically kept close to my heart to this day. Why is it that we don't organize more of our lives like this more of the time? Can we? Is the space available for us? Can we claim that space? How do we make that happen together? How do we overcome the very real forces that are trying to prevent that from happening? And can we together forge a trajectory through all of the stuff that's already fallen upon us, will continue to fall on us, and will determine most of the rest of our lives on Earth? Can we forge a pathway through that that responds more to the values of the politics that I hold so very dear (and it sounds to me like you share)? How can we do that? Can we do that? And in what ways can we learn from places and times in the past that

people have done that, and maybe glean a thing or two from them and pick up some tips and some tricks and see if we can't do it for ourselves?

TBI: Yeah. Well, there's a lot of threads in what you just said. I want to mark a couple for people to take a look at so we don't end up getting sidetracked on them, because they themselves are whole conversations. But you'd mentioned the Whole Earth Catalog and the early kind of techno-utopianism that came out of the hippie community. It's a really fascinating story if people really want to dive into it because that circle of people ended up creating the Electronic Frontier Foundation.[3] John Perry Barlow (who was a songwriter for the Grateful Dead) was the founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

And there's a lot of complicated reasons why they moved into kind of a techno-utopian space as opposed to a like physical activism space. There's a lot of story behind it. But one of the things that comes up in that story is this very specific incident in which a crew of hackers from New York (and this is early hacker scene, so they were still dumpster diving and picking locks and breaking into offices and stuff like this) got on to the WELL, which was the Whole Earth Electronic Link. It was like one of the first bulletin boards. And they started arguing with John Perry Barlow about how what was happening wasn't this super-liberatory thing; that it had these elements, but that it was also deeply tied in with capitalism and the State. And he said, well, I don't buy that. And so they hacked into TRW[4] and stole his credit record and doxxed him on the internet to prove that TRW had been gathering all this information about people without anybody knowing it.

So that's a whole really fascinating story. And that's a whole conversation, that someone like myself who comes out of the hacker scene…. There's a whole conversation in itself. There's also another thing you bring up about the importance of learning movement history, which I really want to encourage people to do. I mean, Occupy Sandy

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3   R.F. – Digital civil liberties group and source of guides for more secure use of technologies.

4   R.F. – Thompson Ramo Wooldridge Inc.,; defunct American corporation involved in a variety of businesses, mainly aerospace, electronics, automotive, and credit reporting.

was 12 years ago, right? The anti-war movement[5] was 20 years ago. Seattle[6] was 25 years ago. And those are the roots of what we have today. So for those of you that are getting involved with this stuff now, really go back and read those histories, talk to the people that are in their 40s and 50s that have been around this whole time; because it'll really help you understand the depth of the thought and the experience and the drive and the energy that has gone into these kinds of things over a couple of decades. And so...

Adam: Yeah. You make a great point – sorry to interrupt -- but I just gotta say that I'm 56 years old. And I still feel quite young and involved and vigorous. But it occurs to me that just through the passage of time, I've become kind of an old head. That was like the old heads that I remember who had been through the post-'68 moments, right? They had been in Chicago in 1968.[7] Or they grew up in Panther schools.[8] Or they were members of various anarchist and anarchist-inflected movements in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

And I always thought that once they had established certain beach-heads in popular culture, that we wouldn't need to fight those same battles. And what I've seen in my time, sadly, is that there's no

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5   R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg345**
6   R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg80**
7   R.F. – Riotous mobilisations in that city of the 'Yippy' counter-culture against the Vietnam war and the Soviet Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.
8   R.F. – Some of the programs set up by the Black Panther Party in the 1970s to serve neighbours included free kids breakfasts, an ambulance service, and education: in Cleveland, Ohio, those based around the Willson Tower council estate inspired to continue this legacy in "one of capital's sacrifice zones" assert that "[e]ach pandemic, tornado, power outage, water outage, shooting, winter storm or other disaster that has hit Willson Tower has just added more fuel to the fire to resurrect the spirit of the Black Panther Party in Cleveland, with thriving free breakfast programs, free laundry, haircuts, Christmas toy giveaways, mask distribution, grocery deliveries, community cookouts, animal rescue and care programs, conflict mediation, clothes distribution, first aid, and more. […] Regular, daily, consistent survival programs are an integral part to how Willson Tower's residents survive the invisible disasters of unemployment, extreme poverty, post-incarceration, addiction, generational trauma, and extreme societal marginalization, and these steady efforts are rarely ever shown on the nightly news" (A Pillar in the Land of Ruin: Mutual Aid at Willson Tower). At least one participant was also a mutual-aid responder to Hurricane Katrina (see footnote 12), Superstorm Sandy, the 2010 earthquake in Ayiti (Haiti).

permanent victory; and you have to re-establish each of the achievements that was won in a new time and a new place with new protagonists, right? With people who… And if you do have our kind of politics, especially what this means is that you can't rest on your laurels; because they might have achieved opening up some kind of liberatory space for technically-savvy, white-male-privilege programmers with a particular kind of access to technology. And because of the mediation that we had at the time, we might have regarded that as sort of movement history. And I'm not saying it's not movement history, but it was incomplete. Even as an achievement, it was radically incomplete.

I'm both humbled and awed, in a sense, by the responsibility that now falls on the shoulders of people who have lived through the transition from pre-Seattle to post-Seattle. We now live in a world in which horizontal organization, as you say, is sort of de rigor. This is just the way we do things. It was not always that way.

TBI: No, that was not that way when I got involved in the early 2000s, even. Like at all. It was still hierarchical coalitions and liberal organizations with their steering committees and like all of that. Yeah.

Adam: Wow. Okay. So, so tell me more about like, for you, how did that wave crash against you? How did you find your way into horizontal organizing?

TBI: Oh, that's interesting. Well, as you were talking, I was going to mention a thing which just kind of came across my Signal feed from a friend today who works at a book warehouse, and had come across a box full of old radical newspapers from the early 1970s: one of which my mom worked on! So you get this… There's this lineage. And what's funny about it in that context is there's a statement that my friend took a picture of, about how, you know, all these people playing these games of ideology are really playing these power games. And really what they need to do is they need to not play power games. They need to bring politics back down to life. And it's like so similar to the conversations we're having today. Like it's so, so, so similar.

My trajectory was… I was lucky, to put it mildly. I was lucky. I came up in a city with a strong political history, in a family with a strong political history, in the rust belt in a time when everything was collapsing. And so my whole life has just been collapse. It's part of why I'm so drawn to some of the things you're writing. Because that's all I've ever seen. I mean, LTV Steel[9] collapsed when I was in high school and that was pretty much the end.

Adam: Okay. And so you've been in like the kind of the light cone of the de-industrialization ever since.

TBI: Yeah, pretty much. And you can even see it starting when I was young, right? So starting in… in my case was the early 80s, but about 10 years before that the oil crisis[10] really started seeing things go downhill here. And so I came up in that world of economic stagnation and then collapse.

But I think it's one of the things that this points out though is, we all have our stories, you know, and they're all fascinating stories. They're all different stories and they're all fascinating stories. I know maybe two or three other people who have a background like mine. And that's it. Mostly other people I know came out of evangelical Christian families or, you know, just normies, suburban families, whatever. There's not a lot of that connection, unfortunately, to the movements of the past, which we really need in order to inform the things that we're doing today. It's critical.

Adam: And desperate to reinvigorate. Yeah. No, I couldn't agree more. And that is in large part the project of the book, which I'm going to get to in a second.

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9   R.F. – One of the largest steel producers in the US; its bankruptcy left at least 1,000 unemployed in Hoyt Lakes.

10 R.F. – The 1970s saw at least two crises for Western importers of oil when the Yom Kippur War and the Iranian Revolution triggered interruptions in West Asian exports, prompting the first shift towards energy-saving (in particular, fossil fuel-saving) technologies.

So to your point, and particularly about the point about finding a box full of old magazines, you turn out to have a connection to… So the book is called *Lifehouse*. And I'll get into this in more detail, but the fundamental proposition of the book is that we have to organize these neighborhood-scale disaster relief and recovery hubs; but they're quite a bit more than that. They're places that are designed to offer a shelter and refuge from the ordinary insults of late capitalism, as well as the insults of the climate crisis.

And the deep irony is that the very end of this project, a friend of mine sent me… It turns out that in the meantime, the Whole Earth had digitized their entire archives. They are at archive.org. And so a friend of mine who's been doing like a deep dive into this sends me this link. He's like, "well, surely you must have known about this." I'm like, "what, known about what?" He's like, "it's your proposition. It's even called the Lifehouse. It's in this footnote of the 1969 edition." It's crazy.

And so not only is it really, really important to maintain a vital connection to the past… And here is a place where I do feel that network information technology has made a big difference in our ability to do that and not rely on crates full of, you know, mouse shit and gnawed-upon old fanzines. But oh, it was so painful to read this and to realize that I had reinvented the wheel, right? And that, you know, that there are aspects to my proposition that are novel. But the emotional core of it was articulated in 1969 and even had the same name.

I think this says a couple of things. I think it says primarily that we'd be in a much better position now if we had done what people in 1969 were suggesting we do. And so I'm kind of hoping that collectively we undertake the project that I'm proposing we undertake in the book together, with the idea that maybe if we do, we'll be in a better situation 40 years from now. And also just by way of observing and really putting some respect on all of the efforts of the people who have come before us, without whose efforts we probably wouldn't even be able to articulate, we wouldn't be able to have the conversation we're having. We wouldn't have the language to have it in. We would always have *a* language, but the specific terms and ideas: so many of it… It's not

novel to me. It's not novel to the book. It's things that I've soaked up from respectful attention to other times and places in history. And so that is the project of the book, is to disinter those experiences and hopefully bring them to life.

So what is this book? Why have you had me on your show? After Occupy Sandy, after I had that experience, the idea lay fallow for a couple of years. I wasn't in dialogue with anybody that was interested in these sorts of things. And frankly, after the crisis of Sandy passed, very much against my expectations (my perhaps naive expectations), New York City went back to New York City-ing. Just like we've now seen again after the pandemic lockdown; late capitalism has this ferocious way of reasserting itself. Even in the wake of what you would regard as pretty significant disruption. It just kind of picked up, you know, resumed your previously scheduled broadcast, right where it had left off. And all of the energy that I thought was going to go into a horizontally organized anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal way of being in the world in New York City didn't really happen.

But the idea kind of stayed with me. And then, the pandemic and the lockdown happened. And again, one of the most effective modes of response was autonomous local mutual aid popping up spontaneously. [11] And I really began to see that there was a longer historical arc to what I was talking about. It wasn't simply about response to crisis, but it was it was a response to the meta crisis. to the larger rhythm of collapse that you experienced in your lifetime, that I've seen in my lifetime. And that really seems to be picking up pace.

And this is something that I think of as the long emergency. And the long emergency to me isn't simply global heating. It is the second- and third-order consequences of enormously destructive weather events and the withdrawal of insurers from ensuring commercial real estate against those events. And, ultimately, the withdrawal of the State for some of the things that it previously took responsibility for; its disappearance from our lives and the necessity of us organizing ourselves in response to that.

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11 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg502**

So if this is now the fundamental grounding circumstance of our existence together, how do we begin building structures that might see us through? And so I began to look back in time and across space. And I found amazing examples of things like the Black Panther survival programs, of things like the Common Ground mutual aid effort in New Orleans (which I think pretty much directly inspired Occupy Sandy) that happened after Hurricane Katrina.[12] The Greek solidarity networks after the crisis in Greece in 2011.

So those things felt to me like they were about care, but they all kind of delaminated at some point. I mean, the Black Panthers, most obviously, because they were the target of really extreme repression by the United States and local governments. The Greek solidarity networks because they were co-opted in some ways by a putatively left-wing government, which kind of took on some of the effort, and then I would regard them as having betrayed that effort by having… In technology, we'd say embrace, embrace, extend and extinguish. We used to say that's what Microsoft would do to technology companies it was buying. And to me, that's what the Syriza government did to the anarchist efforts, the local clinics and the local pharmacies and the local kitchens. It absorbed it, it embraced it, extended and exterminated those things.

So I began looking at like ways. If these care efforts are to survive, what do they need to do? Well, they need to achieve local power. And so the next chapter of the book is how do you do that? How do you claim local power sufficient to articulate in the world a network of mutually-driven, mutual-care-driven programs to protect them, to give them space, to allow them to breathe? And so I looked at things like Spanish municipalism,[13] and, most triumphfully, most interesting to me, the experience of Rojava.[14] Where, after 2014,[15] by some reckonings up

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12 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg31**

13 R.F. – Regarding the last decade's antics by this tendency, we recommend 'What Went Wrong for the Municipalists in Spain?'.

14 R.F. – see another supplement to these chapters of Return Fire; **'The Temple Was Built Before the City'**

15 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg97**

to the present moment… I really regard the classic period of 'high' Rojava as being 2014 to November 2019. But, you know, a society on the scale of a State (so, up to about 5 million human beings at times), organizing itself on non-state principles. Organizing itself on eco-feminist, on anarchist principles, organizing itself on really very profound values; and doing so in the middle of a grievously bloody conflict, the Syrian Civil War, and the fight against what the West knows as ISIS and what they would know as Daesh. In this crucible of absolutely bloody interstate conflict where the local factions of Syria were used as puppets by state actors from outside. So the people, what is now called the Autonomous Administration of Northeastern Syria, but we more generally call Rojava: these people managed to do anarchy at a very large scale for a very long time with very good results.

And so that becomes the next chapter of the book, like collective power. And then all of these things culminate in the proposition that gives the book its name, the chapter on the life house. What if you organized in every neighborhood, in every city, in every town, in every community, in every two or three blocks there was a physical place you could go to that would protect you from the effects of climate change, that would be off-grid, would be able to power itself, would be able to run medical devices for the people that needed them, would be able to purify water, would be able to possibly even grow a little bit of food. And in general, would physically and psychically sustain people against the insults – as I said – not merely of a world where all bets are off in terms of what the atmosphere is doing, but also the ordinary everyday insults that we're intimately familiar with because we've been on the coal-face of late capitalism. And we know what that feels like.

TBI: Well, and to put another historical marker there: I think one of the really interesting things that I picked up on when I was reading the text… And you mentioned this, but the idea of the kind of hub for community to be able to have its needs met is a thing which… I mean, we have roots in doing these kinds of things in the United States, especially in the Rust Belt, right? Where I grew up in the city I live in, they were called community houses and they still exist, a lot of them.

And they were there for everything from teaching people how to read all the way up to getting them food and clothes and medical care, right? Like everything else in the middle. At a time when, you know, most of the population of the city was living in grinding poverty, even more so than now.

And just how core and how central those institutions are still to whole communities 100 years later, right? Because they fulfill a need that capitalism can't. And they do it in a way that's empowering, right?

Adam: That's right.

TBI: A lot of the projects I've personally been involved in locally have been very inspired by that for these exact reasons, right? So there's a number of things that kind of come up here that I want to sort of hone in on for the last half an hour that we have. But they have to do with some of the implications of what's being said, right? So like one of the more controversial claims in some circles… And this is controversial in the sense that like whenever people talk about irreversible collapse, you always get pushed back, right? I generally face that as well a lot of the time. But one of the more controversial claims that's made (and one that I have a lot of affinity towards) is the idea that the situation that we're in now currently – ecologically, politically, economically – is not even if one would want to salvageable. That it's so far beyond gone… I think you put it like we had crossed many red lines at this point, right? Like many points of no return, many thresholds: we're living in a world which most of the infrastructure on the planet's been built since 1945 and isn't able to be sustained with the amount of resources we have.

So that really realigns a lot of things politically, right? And I think a couple of the things I want to kind of talk about really quickly are first, one of the things that came to mind was how this sort of a reading evokes a conversation that we had where I live four or five years ago, where someone from Mutual Aid Disaster Relief came through. And we were talking about disaster response, and someone raised their hand and went, "how do we tell the difference between a disaster and a not-

disaster?" Which was a really great question, right? Especially living in the place where I live, where there's murders and people starve and you know, it's bad. It's an incredibly poor American city. How do you tell the difference? Right.

And I think one of the things that's happening in this text is a disruption of that separation, right? But I think secondly, that's the other thing that's happening is this sort of push back against the concept that political work is there to conserve or save something, right? Which is sort of an idea that comes out of the environmentalist movement; but it's one that saturates a lot of political discourse. And so what do you think that the implications of that are? I mean, like that's two things to move beyond that are relatively significant in the way that people understand their relationship to what they're doing.

Adam: Yeah. The first thing: I think that's a really pointed question. I think it's really welcome because anytime you invoke the idea of a disaster, the thing that sort of falls by the wayside… It's such an overwhelming idea that I think people forget to ask, "well, disaster for who or for what, really?" It's become in some quarters almost a cliche by now to invoke the idea that the thing that we've done to the atmosphere (barring the really bad runaway greenhouse effect scenario where you get Venus on the other end of it, which I think is pretty much, you know, unambiguously a disaster for everything), there are any number of scenarios that are alternately bad for the current ruling class, or bad for some relatively privileged sector of humanity, or bad for the entire human species but not the other species on the planet. There are all kinds of scenarios that are… There's a lot of violence in them. There's a lot of kinetic energy in them. But they might very well represent sets of conditions in which other things can thrive.

So I think something that I do need to be explicit about is, who are the sets of circumstances that we're now having to contend with a disaster for? I don't think it's simply that they're a disaster for CEOs. I'm very sensitive to the argument that we might as well call this the capitaloscene because it's capital that created this.[16] But I do think it's

16 R.F. – i.e., instead of terming the current climate-changed era the Anthropocene; see

going to be really hard for *all of us*, and not merely all of us in the global north and not merely all of us who currently enjoy privileged positions within the global north. I mean, *all of humanity.*

There is a larger and closing… There are many larger and closing circles to that. I have to confess on some level, I'm not a doomer, I'm a Daoist.[17] And so, at the ultimate last call, end of the day, my sorrow is that the kinds of relations that have grown up around will become impossible. That the particular sets of experiences and structures of relations that I grew up around and have nostalgia for are going to be rendered completely impossible. And I'm very clear about that. You know, just hanging out with people, having conversations that are not charged with the freighted weight of everything that we're living through; having, in that sense, the privilege to have kind of an unambitious, unproductive, not particularly dramatic life: that's out the window.

The people who say, "okay, so what? This is how people have always lived under pressure. This is how eight-tenths of humanity or more have always lived. Get over yourself." I think there's justice to that, right? And I admit that. They're not wrong. It's just this is a disaster that I'm experiencing as such.

The other question, which is very closely related to this, is about resilience. And in the book, one of the things that I pick up on is a discourse that I first heard being offered maybe around 2013-2014, which is that we had the discourse of sustainability for a long time. And early in the 21st century, it became evident that not a damn thing we're doing is sustainable in any way. And so what is the discourse that replaces sustainability? And that discourse came to be known as resilience. And particularly even after Occupy Sandy, there's this thing called the Special Initiative for Resilience and Recovery in New York City. People to this day talk about, "oh, you know, your book is about resilience hubs." And I'm like, well, no, no, it's not. Why is that?

17 R.F. – For more on the anti-authoritarian history and present of this ancient East Asian philosophy, see the forthcoming R.F. book, *Instigations.*

Because resilience, as we are now increasingly hearing, means the capacity of a system to return itself to the status quo ante after some disruptive event has happened. And it took, you know, a couple of years of people being told this for a lot to sink in on a more widespread level. But the system that we now experience, that we now live with, that we now contend with, is not just; does not deserve to be restored; deserves to be transcended.

This is in some ways the argument of a really interesting book called *Anthropocene Back Loop: Experiments in Unsafe Operating Space*, by a woman named Stephanie Wakefield. Her argument is. okay, well, it was never something that we should have even countenance trying to restore or recover or protect or defend. We now have an unparalleled opportunity to reinvent all of the fundamental conditions of our existence. I mean, really, a lot is up for grabs now. And let's make the most of that and not settle for these really epistemically weak claims, you know, like, "okay, well, we're going to, what, keep the power on, and we're going to make sure that people have access to like ongoing supplies of insulin; but we're not going to do anything about the reasons why things got so fucked up in the first place." That's crazy to me.

TBI: Yeah. I mean, that's the Democratic Party's proposal, right, essentially, is let's deal with the fallouts of capitalism without actually dealing with capitalism.

Adam: Yeah. And you see this from across the political spectrum and a variety of different guises, but they're essentially… These are extraordinarily conservative propositions. The Green New Deal[18] to me is nonsensical to talk about. With all due respect to the people I know and care about who are very motivated by that language: good industrial jobs, working on the solarization of late capitalism; is it better than what we have now? Marginally. But when everything is up for grabs, why settle for the marginal?

TBI: Well, and I guess the question, as we're seeing with the actual

18 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg246**

effects of solar panel production: it doesn't necessarily make the situation any less disastrous in the immediate sense, right? It's sort of like, if you want to be ecological, you live in a LEED-certified[19] building, which is going to be new. Meaning you just tore something down and built something new to be ecological, right? That's so much of how that discourse plays itself out. It's based in these kinds of sort of reductions of the general global situation to individual acts, as opposed to understanding it systemically.

And I think one of the things that's really changed, that's become really a kind of sea change in the way that that we're starting to see things…. And it's similar to, you know, we were recording the podcast with Eric King[20] recently, and we were talking about the CEO shooting.[21] And one of the things I said is that one of the things the CEO shooting exposed, interestingly, is a sort of realignment of what people consider to be self-defense, right?[22] And the way that people are talking about this is as self-defense against a person who carried out mass societal violence: and normally that mass societal violence is considered legitimate and therefore not something to defend yourself against, but that is what has changed. That is the shift in the discourse.

And I see something similar happening with the idea of what we consider to be normality and disaster where these kinds of breakdowns… And this was talked about a really brilliant article about Sri Lanka, I'm forgetting the author's name off the top of my head. But these kinds of disasters, these sorts of collapses, don't appear necessarily as anomalies. But they actually appear as a slow shifting of what normality means. And so the way that it was discussed in Sri Lanka is, it's like, you know, you go to work in the morning, and you go out at night and then you wake up and you hear a news story about there being a bombing somewhere and then, you know, go to work again and you go grocery shopping and you come back, you hear another story about there being a firefight somewhere. And that's just

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19 R.F. – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, most widely-used "green" building rating system in the world.
20 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg350**
21 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg587**
22 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.6 pg512**

how it is. Every once in a while, you see the effects of it. But most of the time, you're living in this situation which is degrading almost imperceptibly until it's not imperceptible anymore. Which is kind of the way that people talked about the fall of the Soviet Union, right? That it was impossible until it was inevitable.

And there's this kind of sense to that. And I think one of the questions I have is, how do we address that? How do we deal with that without allowing those things to become normality, right? Without allowing disaster to just become acceptable as the situation that we find ourselves in? But without also falling into the other discourse of trying to save what exists to stop the disasters from happening, right? It's a difficult space to end up in.

Adam: It's really challenging. And my only way of addressing that is equally complicated. It's sort of a multi-part maneuver.

I think we have to preempt disaster. And I think we have to preempt disaster by living prefiguratively, right? And this is the wonderful thing is that so many of the theoretical tools and practical experiences of movement and community in the last 20 years already prepare us for this. They're right at hand. We have to live prefiguratively.

In this particular context, that involves what would ordinarily be thought of as prepperism. And so one of the struggles around this book and the set of ideas that we're discussing is how do we retrieve some very, very valid, very valuable, life-critical information from the paranoia, from the racism and the xenophobia and the fear of the Other that it's generally bound up with – from the machismo that it's generally bound up with, from the affect and the aesthetics that it's generally bound up with. Can these things be disentangled? And I believe they can be. I just think that it takes people doing the work. And so that's one of the challenges that I've set myself.

I think that if we organize ourselves cellularly, as communities, as neighborhood-scale assemblies, making real, dispositive… Basically having deliberative control over actual resource, right? So that the

assemblies are dispositive of actual resource in the world. And if this becomes more of the way we live our lives, more of the time, all of a sudden the disaster when and as it happens (and it's already happening) doesn't have that extended, that infinitely drawn out and then all at once quality to it, right? The dynamic is shifted completely.

What you need to do is… And here where it's difficult for people with politics like ours, because I don't believe in vanguardism, right? I don't believe in getting too far out ahead of people. I think the idea that I use isn't leadership or certainly isn't vanguardism, but it is initiative. You have to take the initiative. And you have to be modeling these ways of survival and thriving, which I believe will become quite mainstream. And I think that they'll become mainstream because there will not be any other way to do this.

And I think the degree to which we model and practice and live those things: nothing that happens afterward takes us by surprise. The physical infrastructure is there, the social infrastructure is there. And in a way, this is exactly what Occupy Sandy did, with Occupy Wall Street. The network was there. It was stood up immediately. So just make the networks now, forge the networks now.

And the thing is, you're doing this. Literally by doing this podcast, you're doing the work. You're beginning to have conversations with the people that you're going to need to have as part of your network. I know maybe you have and maybe you haven't made this explicit in the context of this podcast: I know that you personally have a lot of the skills that I would certainly want to have access to in untoward situations. We begin by spreading this knowledge and by reducing... Do you know what I think makes people make bad decisions is fear. And I think when you're all up in your fear, you make bad decisions as individuals and you make bad decisions as societies. And so I just think what helps with fear is practice, is drilling, is living with the incipient reality of something until it no longer scares you because you know exactly what you're going to do and who you're going to do it with when it eventuates. And so this is the mission.

TBI: Yeah, and I think we're going to have definitely an episode we're going to talk about to Margaret Killjoy at some point in the future about prepping as well,because Margaret also…

Adam: Ask her about her black metal band!

TBI: Oh, definitely, that's coming up. And so is the electronic band: that's absolutely coming up too.

Adam: Outstanding.

TBI: But Margaret has a lot of really interesting thoughts about this. And I know we've talked about this: not during this recording, but one of the really difficult things about the idea of prepperism (in the United States, very specifically) is that it is so deeply tied in with a notion of the isolated individual at war with the world. That you need to get as far outside of everything, as far away from everybody else as you possibly can, with as much guns and ammo as possible, and just lock yourself down in a bunker and come out 10 years later. That's generally how it's thought. And it is a deeply problematic understanding of what that means for a lot of reasons, but also flies completely in the face of human experience.

In the communities I grew up and that's how people survive, that's how you get food, that's what happens when you don't have a job: you rely on your neighbors. And somehow, though there's a very long history of that even in the United States, that is not how we think about these things. And so I think maybe a couple of questions to close on is first, how do we get people in our circles to start thinking about things in this way to get past… I mean, there's a similar conversation around gun culture to: to get past the right-wing connotations, to get past all of the machismo and militarism and all of that and understand that you are learning to use a tool, and getting through the demystification part. How do you think we can do that most effectively in relation to things like this, because it is so deeply bound up with so much of the culture war stuff that happens in the US right now.

Adam: So much to say about that. One thing… I'm going to go way out on a limb here. This is just a conjecture. It may be that some of the culture war stuff is beginning to die down a little bit. I think this might be a silver lining of some of the reversals that broadly progressive forces have experienced in… I don't want to get into electoral politics or whether what happened in November was a defeat… I personally do regard it as one of the worst people I've ever met becoming more and more powerful. And just the worst people in the world doing their little touchdown and zone dance is just really unattractive. But let's put that to the side. You know, let me just, for the sake of argument, let's just say that that was a real reversal and a real injury for anybody who believes in justice and anybody who has a soul. You know, and I say that with all due respect, I know there were people who have been living in a lot of pain. And this was, you know, voting for the eventual victor was their way of giving vent to some of that pain. But let's leave that to the side for a second.

I think one of the silver linings of that experience is that there is a discursive space that's open, that is in some ways the experience of defeat and of recognizing that whatever it was that we were doing didn't work. And there may be some people who conclude from that, "well, we should have… we should double down, we should do that harder, we should just go absolutely (no pun intended) guns blazing." But for me, it was like, yeah, some of the language, particularly some of the stances that we took managed to strongly give voice to the experience and perspectives of people who have never been listened to. And that is right and proper and just, and I don't believe that we should retreat from that at all, but that we failed to have the kind of conversation that could bring people into those perspectives. This is my personal opinion now.

And I think there may be just a little bit more patience now and sorrowful reflection about, "well, what might work if that didn't?" I have very many strong existential beliefs that separate me from other people. But I really, you know, particularly in mutual aid, you need… It's all hands on deck. You really need everybody to be there and you need access to all of the energy and all the skill and all the ingenuity that

people have.

And so one of the things I'm really interested in the book is invitationality. Which is not quite the same thing as radical inclusivity. It's different in a nuanced way. Invitationality is like, how do you make sure that people feel comfortable and welcome in these spaces of mutual care that I'm talking about putting together. And it means really just a minimal commitment to treating other people with dignity.

TBI: It's funny how far that goes, right? Treating people with basic respect and dignity. That's amazing how far that goes.

Adam: Yeah. So I'm not even necessarily asking what you do outside of this space. But when you're in this space, if you cannot agree to treat the people around you with respect and dignity, then you're not welcome in this space. And I think that from that, you can begin to knit relations outward. You know, one of my kind of culture heroes (and she's become a good friend) is Kim Kelly…

TBI: Oh, yeah. Kim's great.

Adam: …the amazing metal journalist and labor activist.

TBI: Best metal journalist ever, by the way, if all you don't know that, Kim was an amazing amazing metal reviewer, back in the day. Oh, my God.

Adam: Yeah. I first came to know her as Grim Jim. And so her latter-day career as a labor archivist and journalist has been kind of extraordinary to watch. But she talks a lot about working in unionizing with folks who are Trumpists, or who are evangelical or who are… They have opinions and beliefs that are upsetting to her. And she's like, "you know what, we have a fight on our hands now that needs all of us if we're going to prevail; and let us not suppress our differences, but let's take that off the table for now. Let's win this victory. And then we can get into the things which divide us and hopefully do that from the perspective of people who have won some victories together and

maybe develop some appreciation for one another."

And I do not believe that she's naive. You know, there's, there's kind of a liberal kumbaya version of that, and I don't think that's what she's pedaling, right? I really take a lot of inspiration from that. I think that particularly for people in the States, collective survival will require developing relationships with people who have beliefs who are different from yours. It's not just going to be anarchists.

TBI: Yes. One of the lessons you learn in the Rust Belt a lot when you're doing organizing here is that you end up organizing situations with a lot of people with a lot of problems, and that do, you know, not always the best stuff. And you have to learn to deal with those people as people in a situation that's real, right? And not as symbols who broke a moral rule or something like that. It's a lot more complicated. Real communities are not spaces of moral simplicity. Right?

Adam: Yeah. And I think we kind of… Again, this is just me shooting my mouth off, but, I think we let that moral simplicity guide… It was founded in genuine and legitimate rage, but it guided us to places that were not functional. And I hope that we were able collectively to come back from some of that.

So for me, what that means is trying to decouple a lot of things which I think are really healthy and positive from things which I think are deeply imical. So I'll give you an example. It jumps out at me every day because I live in the UK. It turns out that when crises happen, people in the States take initiative. They do what they need to do. And weirdly, I think that it's because in the settler colonialist DNA, that rugged self-reliance that is so deeply and profoundly unhelpful, at least means you don't wait around for the state to come to your assistance. It at least means that you understand that you're on your own. What I'd like is for our understanding of what it means to be on your own to be a collective one and not kind of a clannish, small family group, armored bunker based one.

But here in the UK, when something terrible happens, the first

recourse, very ordinarily, even among people of pretty significantly anti-authoritarian politics, is to wait for the council to do it. That the local government… No, this is crazy. I was at a municipalist workshop here. And the scenario was one of flooding (which increasingly happens here due to the rains that we have now, which are just unprecedented in the experience of anyone now living).[23] And the scenario was, you are an autonomous local assembly for a village that has received a weather forecast that flooding is going to begin in the next 48 hours. What does your assembly do? And, there's a lot of discussion. And then midway through the exercise, the moderators were like, "well, guess what, the storm is here. The community has started to flood in a matter of a quarter hour. What does your assembly do now?"

And I cannot tell you how surreal it was for the conversation at that point to be like, "well, we negotiate power sharing with the local council, and we see what we're allowed to do and what they'll let us do." And other people were like, "well, I don't know why we would have an assembly now in the moment of maximum danger." And I'm like, "dude, this is not a hypothetical; I mean, this is how Occupy Sandy did things. This is how generally mutual aid communities do things. This is not just a talking shop. This is how decisions are made and resources are allocated. And this is how communities respond."

And mind you, this was a group of people who were explicitly self-selected and gathered to discuss municipalism, you know, libertarian municipalism, like the anarchist version. It blew my mind.

So let's just be thankful that in the States for all of the things that we contend with (including everything that comes as a consequence of having a gun culture), at the very least, people are primed to take care of themselves. They don't wait. They don't sit in place and wait for the council to rescue them. And I think that is a material to work with.

TBI: So why don't we end with kind of the question I end a lot of interviews with: what does that mean for us now? So we're coming into a moment in which the future political situation in the US is… incredibly

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23 R.F. – see **Return Fire vol.2 pg15**

precarious I guess would be the nice word for it. The world is on fire and it feels like everything is burning down.

We're in the like slow tale before everything happens all at once. And I know that a lot of the sense that I've been getting amongst people I know is that they're kind of falling into one of two categories. One is people that have just been like, "well, I'm done. I'm just going to just rest for the next six months, and I guess we'll see where we're at." And then there's people who are doing the "let's build mesh nets, let's start stockpiling supplies." Which is a very different way of approaching that kind of a situation. And it's one which is grounded so much more in the idea that… And this is kind of how my community is approaching this right, which is how I can speak about this with some level of information. But the idea where I'm at is: political activism is grounded in complaint, right, complaining at people. And that's not a form of politics I personally engage in. But right now, that's not a form of politics that's even viable for those that want to engage in it, because the people that you'd be complaining at literally declared war on you and do not care. Like, they are antagonistic forces.

And so that makes the structure of protest irrelevant in this moment. And I think it's kind of pointing out a lot of the shortcomings of the idea of protest in liberal democracy.[24]

Adam: A million percent.

TBI: This is this is definitely a topic of a thing I'm going to write about at some point soon. But a lot of people are kind of lost in that situation right now. They don't really know what to do. They don't really know how to break out of the norms of activism that they've been sort of brought into as part of their political development. They might not be in a place where there's a whole community of people. I'm very lucky to be in a city with a lot of anarchists in it, and a lot of us gather in one spot and we can sort of organize things like this. But for other people, for people that are outside of these communities, for people that live in

24 R.F. – Perhaps including times when insurrectionalism becomes activism by another name; see **Return Fire vol.6 pg169**

rural Tennessee, for someone who's the one anarchist they know in their weird suburb or whatever: what can people like this do to sort of start the process of getting the conditions together for something like this? Because like one of the most damaging outcomes of American capitalism is the way that isolates us. And that it keeps us away from collective understanding of ourselves and who we are and the communities that we're in; and overcoming that is a major problem. And so how can we help or encourage, or, what should we be telling people that are trying to create the conditions to create something like this going forward?

Adam: So something that I derive from my understanding of like chaos and complexity theory, dynamics and behavior of complex systems, is that in any situation of turbulence, where it's unclear what basin of possibility you're going to wind up in, the best strategy you can possibly adopt is a strategy that pays rewards no matter what possibility you wind up in. And so to me, that councils things like developing the knowledge base that you're talking about, it consists in forging relations with your neighbors, no matter how tentative or uncomfortable that might be. In getting as fit as you possibly can, whatever that means for you. (And there's another whole conversation there about extracting the idea of fitness from ableism and toxic masculinity and all the other nonsense that it's miring in.)

I think that if you are somebody who is capable and knows how to do things and exists within relations, no matter what happens, you will find yourself with something productive and valued to do. I think that to the degree that people are hearing your words, they're probably already at least liminally aware of some of the networks that might help them connect to people who share more of their beliefs and values than maybe their immediate neighbors. But I always say, the most radical thing you can do is literally go and knock on your neighbor's door and introduce yourself. And again, there's kind of a liberal kumbaya version of this. And I don't necessarily mean that everybody bringing sugar to each other's door is going to stave off some really bad things. It's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable to be cross that threshold of intimacy with people that you might have good reason to fear. I get that.

And I think that it's worth attending to the experiences of people like those in… The immediate example I always go to is the Bosnian War.[25] But there are examples from every period of history; where, you know, guess what? It's your neighbor that actually poses the biggest threat to you. I think none of this is without risk. None of this is without nuance. You should certainly never do anything that… Trust your instincts about safety, and certainly don't open yourself up to people who mean you harm. But to the degree that it's safe for you to do so, there is literally nothing that you can do that will better prepare you for a wider range of outcomes no matter what comes than getting to know the people around you. Because it is going to be those people who you depend on and who depend on you when it happens.
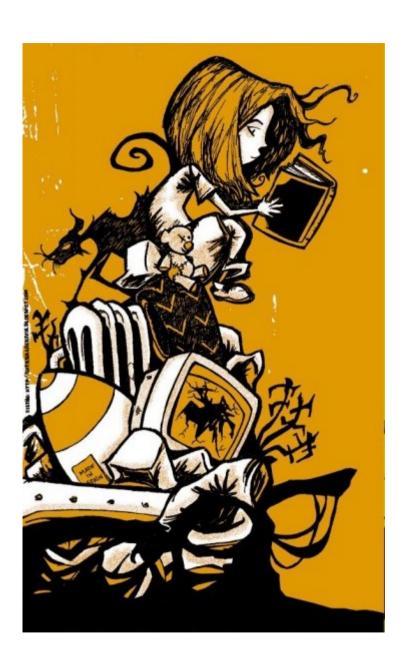
TBI: Well, thank you for joining us. This has been a wonderful conversation. And you've been listening to The Beautiful Idea: do you have anything you want to plug before we sign off?

Adam: You know what? Not really. It's weird; yes, I would love it if people read the book. I hope that they would find it meaningful and enjoyable. But you know, they'll find their way to it or not. For the folks that are listening to this, if anything I've said makes sense, the book is called *Life House: Taking Care of Ourselves in a World on Fire.* It's on Verso Books. And it's available in wherever better progressive books are sold. How did that… That's a plug! Yeah, that's a good plug. I learned the language of pluggery from late capitalism. Exactly.

Thank you and take care. Be well, be safe, be healthy, and really consider introducing yourself to the people around you. It's very powerful.

TBI: All right. Well, thanks for listening, everyone. And we will be back soon.

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25 R.F. – During this genocide in the early '90s, targeting Bosniaks, Croats, Romanis and other non-Serbs, some were killed by their own neighbours.

"It took a few weeks of hearsay to figure out what the process might be. We were waiting to be accepted as refugees in Iceland, the only country left in the region with stable electricity from their geothermal resources, and the only place that would take UK citizens after many years of isolationist foreign policies since Brexit. I heard the same kind of statements that I had made to those newly arriving in Lesvos only a year before: 'We don't know exactly what's happening… the situation is changing everyday… we'll know later… we're waiting for another aid delivery to arrive…' (…) We knew that some groups would be prioritised: the ill, families with young children… which none of us were. As supplies dwindled and tensions increased, they'd been considering moving farther out, to set up a community. Cynical, hardened, but also desperate, we went with them."