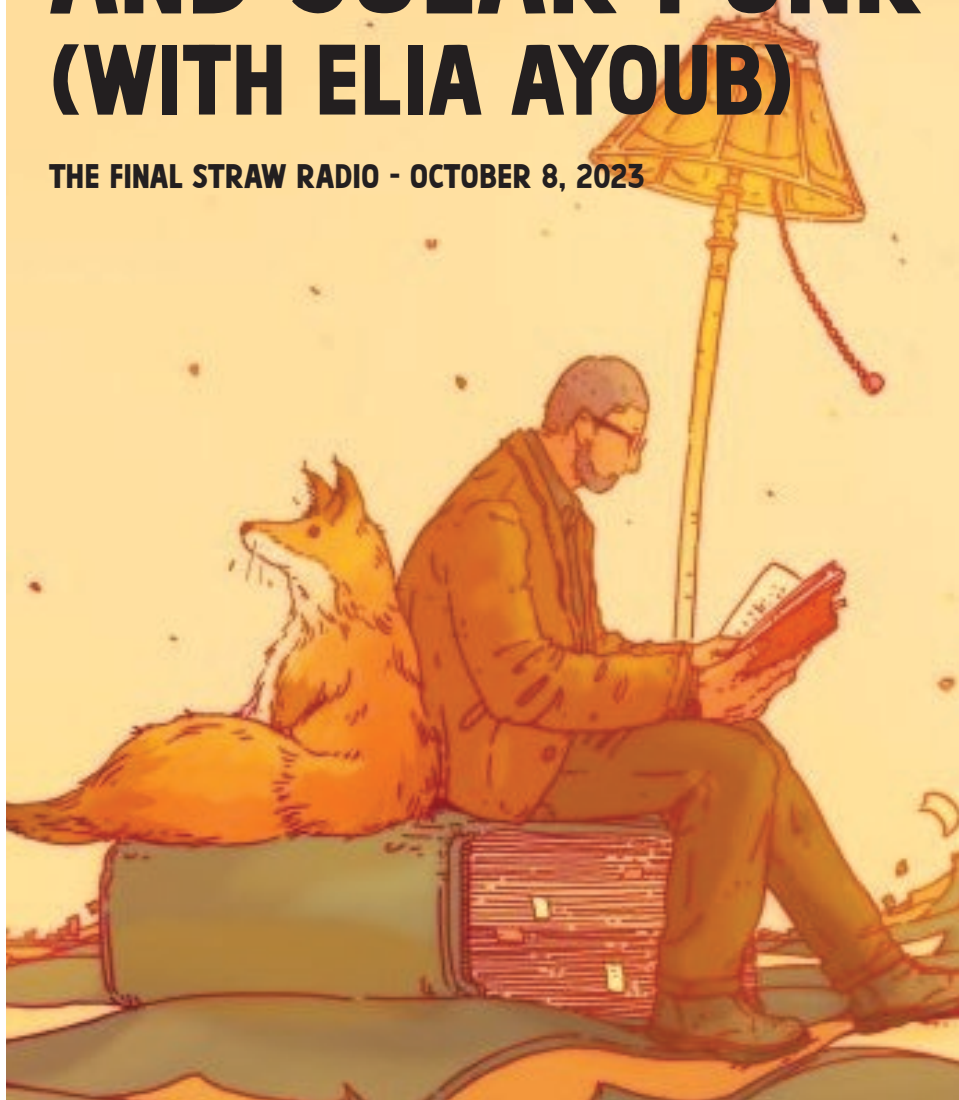


IMAGINATION AND SOLAR PUNK (WITH ELIA AYOUB)

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This week we're sharing a recent interview with Elia Ayoub, host of The Fire These Times podcast to talk a bit about #solarpunk. Elia was on the show with Leila Al-Shami some years ago to speak about revolution and civil war in Syria, uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq.

For the hour, we speak about the importance of radical imagination, the artistic genre known as solar punk, technology and it's role in societies based on pleasure and leisure, utopian movements of the past and the decentering of the imperial cores in an anti-imperialist visioning.

Elia Ayoub's Website: **Eliaayoub.com**

Fire These Times Web: **thefirethesetimes.com**

Patreon: **Patreon.com/firethesetimes**

Substack: **thefirethesetimes.substack.com**

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TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself with any name, preferred pronouns, projects, location or other info that could help set the stage for this conversation for the audience?

Elia Ayoub: Yes. Okay. So my name is Elia Ayuob, I sometimes go by Elia, sometimes by Ayuob, sometimes by both, sometimes by I don't know which other names. I go by he/him. I am originally from Lebanon with like, mixed ancestry, Palestinian, Italian, blah, blah, blah, and I currently live in Switzerland. Been here for the past two years, probably here for some time. And I am an Academic/researcher/what else? Podcaster/writers/other stuff that I sometimes do, because we live in a gig economy, and I need to survive. That's it. And I'm really into solarpunk. So I guess we're going to talk about that [chuckles].

TFSR: Yeah, that's the hope [laughs]. And actually, I'm familiar with you initially because of your podcast, so if you could introduce the audience to your podcast if they haven't heard it before, that would be super awesome.

EA: Sure, thanks. Yeah, and I need to remember to actually advertise, I always forget. So it's called The Fire These Times and I've been running it since March 2020. Currently working with a couple of friends, probably a few more at some point down the line, to expand it, and turn it into a kind of a network, for lack of a better term. Or at least a number of different podcasts are gonna pop up and join the quote, unquote, "main one".

In any case, it runs weekly. I've been, as I said, doing it since March 2020. And what it is, is conversations, normally 50 to 80 minutes on average, let's say an hour, on various topics related to the left, to internationalism, to the global climate crisis -- kind of the broad umbrella and its associated crises as well. Sometimes we do deep dives into specific countries like Ukraine, for example, I've been doing a few recently, Taiwan, as I'm from Lebanon, Lebanon, as well, and a few other countries. What I enjoyed the most really are conversations with folks from different contexts.

A big one I did was on Taiwan and Ukraine, for example. I had one Ukrainian and a couple of Taiwanese, and we had a conversation about similarities, differences, reactions, the experiences that they have gone through with dealing with a certain segment of the online left, for example. Which comes from my background, covering Syria, and being rather obsessed with Syria. So yeah, it's, it's a lot of things at the same time, I guess. I'm still struggling to find, like, let's say catchy one or two or three lines to kind of summarize the entire thing, but it's in depth conversations, very informal, with academics, artists, activists, writers and other cool folks who are doing interesting stuff. And listeners who liked the podcast agree, so that's nice. [chuckles]

TFSR: I think that's really cool. And I like the fact that you bring in so many voices, and you oftentimes are trying to center -- not only people that you know and have a relationship with -- but also people who have experiences and voices that are very decentered by mainstream media, by US media. I just say that because I'm based here, even if you're not, and it has a lot of influence. But yeah, I think that's really important.

EA: Yeah. I mean, if you do anything in English on the interwebs, you have to kind of contend with that. Like technically there are more Indians that speak English, for example, than Americans, but just the US, due to the fact that it's the US, has such a huge influence on discourse, on pretty much everything that, at the very least, those of us who are not in the US or not from the US have to know quite a lot about the US to survive in many ways. Like for one, you know, the platforms that we use, many of them, or most of them are American and stuff like that. You kind of have to be in the know a lot. And you know, this gives you some insights but then the kind of bizarre thing is that, then the only thing you have is this context.

There's this conversation I had with Efe Levent from Mangal Media, "On Nostalgia in the Periphery" was the name of the episode we did, based on some zine that they were working on. And the idea is that we, those of us in the Global South -- and this was like a huge generalization of course -- who consumed American media, especially Anglo media -- some British but mostly American -- would adopt the word in English.

We have this thing in common, which is that we watch you know, Seinfeld or Friends or I don't know 90s stuff, the millennials among us and whatever. And that's, that's bizarre. That's a weird experience in some sense, because those shows are not about us and they're not addressed to us. They're not, you know, they don't have us in mind. Sometimes they actually mock us in insulting ways. But this is what we have in common and so a lot of the expressions that we use towards one another, it's like, you know, for some reason, lots of baseball references, and I've never played baseball, never been there. I still don't understand why it's not boring, but it's a thing. I can speak with a Turkish person and a, I don't know, Thai person, who has watched the same TV series because of Netflix or whatever, and we have these references in common. That-that's kind of the interesting thing that I -- I think I'm getting ahead of myself -- but I find these things quite interesting. I'm gonna shut up now. Go.

TFSR: And if anyone wants to go back and listen to a past conversation that we had with Leila Al-Shami, we talked about the civil war and revolution in Syria and the aftermath of it, as well as some of the news. I think we talked a bit about the uprising that was going on in Lebanon, and also I think we mentioned Iraq, too, at the time.

But yeah, so, as you said already, I was hoping to have you on here to speak about, well...it funneled through your podcast, because your podcast -- among not only having these really interesting conversations around the settings that people exist in, and also the experiences that people have -- a lot of it is about imagining other alternatives. To be honest I've found myself over the years reacting kind of poorly to imaginative and playful approaches to thinking through and around problems. There's a voice in my head that shuts it down as unrealistic and maybe as escapism, makes me feel guilty about that. And as I reflect back on this knee jerk reaction, it occurs to me that it may be a protective measure against repeated disappointments and failures and a fear of disillusionment, in the shadow of the looming and present existential problems, as you know, regards to climate change and nuclear war and continued American imperialism.

But I'm a big fan of your podcast. So one of the things that I really like about the show is precisely that focus on the importance of imagination and play as integral parts of our social and political lives. And your website asks, like, "How do we build the new in the shell of the old?" How do we make it, I guess, easier to imagine the end of capitalism than the end of the world? So can you talk a little bit about your approach towards engaging the imagination, who you choose to bring on into discourse around that specific approach, and what you feel it achieves regarding your political work?

EA: Yeah, thanks for that question. Recently I was reading a few texts by our -- I'm sure mutual; I'm sure the both of us love him -- Milton Friedman [pauses and laugh] This was a joke. I don't know if people can understand if I'm joking or not. But so he has this, he had this concept -- and I'm a big proponent of reading your opponents, reading your ideological enemies, or people that I generally do not think are good people who haven't had a good influence on the world -- and Friedman is like, on the top of that list, at the very least. In the top 10, let's say, in the sense of how much he's done damage between Chile and the US and whatnot.

TFSR: A big proponent of neoliberal, capitalist economic models. And, referencing Chicago, like influential in the Chicago School of Economics that was imported down there and imposed with the...funnily, we're having this chat on, is this 9-11? I forgot.

EA: It is 9-11. It is indeed.

TFSR: [pretends to cheer] Heeeey! [both laugh] But yeah, the Chilean coup, just to throw that in there.

EA: Thanks. Thanks. Yeah, so he had this code -- which I know recently Cory Doctorow also mentioned that's why I remember it -- but it was something along the lines of: "you have to kind of prepare the grounds and then when a crisis occurs, your thoughts, your philosophy or whatnot, will be, if it is very well organized, the only thing that's lying around." There's something along the lines of "what becomes politically impossible becomes inevitable", something along those lines.

I mean, as I said, he was not a good person so you can take everything with a grain of salt. But there is something about that that I do think is accurate. Which is that, for the most part, those of us who are on the broad Left, or whatever you want to call it, I think haven't done as good of a job at putting forward a coherent vision of how things should be. And so I took that kind of to heart and I tried to ask myself -- and it's probably like a simplification of my past few years of a lot of crisis and thinking about "Why are we making similar mistakes?" Why am I seeing similar things, whether it's Lebanon, or Hong Kong, or the US for that matter, or whatever, because we had these uprisings in 2019-2020 there and in Iraq and whatnot -- what are the similarities there? What are the differences? What can we learn from one another? And how can we actually do something across borders, across nation states, beyond nation states I should say, and so on.

There has to be at some point, or, for me, there was a kind of a reckoning and asking myself this very question. You mentioned, for example, feeling guilt when you engage in quote, unquote, "escapism". I was the same. To some extent probably still am. Why is imagination downplayed? I would never argue that it's the only thing that matters. Of course not, organizing is huge. It's extremely important. But I would not downplay the importance of organizing, so why are we downplaying, usually, the importance of imagination.

I think this comes, probably in one way or another, the result of this internalization that we have all kind of done -- to different extents I'm sure -- of kind of this, for lack of a better term, neoliberalism. By that I mean that the horizon of what is possible has been shrunk. Since especially the 70s, I would say, but probably has accelerated since the 90s in the sense that it has become smaller and smaller and smaller. This is as global a problem as many things, if anything has been ever, I don't know. But it's definitely a global quorum today, that much we can say for sure, I think.

It's interesting, because even when you're organizing, even when you are doing activisty stuff, you're going to protests, you're going there with certain assumptions. Like, that's just normal. You would know -- for example, after going to a protest 10 times -- more things probably than if you had gone only twice. The protests as a thing also changes, it's never the same thing. And I'm using protests as an example because it's kind of the main thing we think of often, but it's actually not the only form of action, of course.

That's kind of, you know, at a very fundamental level, this is what I sort of

concluded about the importance of the imagination. And then it sort of, you know, one thing leads to another so I started looking. I do cultural studies, I study cinema and series and TV, and whatnot. At some point you definitely noticed that a lot of the themes are repetitive. The kind of the genre that's very popular, for example, is the whole post apocalyptic one. What's kind of interesting about that one -- and I don't want to make anyone feel guilty, watch whatever you want, I watch a lot of them, I watch a lot, I hate-watch a lot as well, it's fun -- but even the apocalyptic ones, most of them have a certain set of assumptions. Which is interesting, because they're sort of imagining something that doesn't exist and yet, there is a lot of those commonalities that they -- the people who work in that industry or whatnot -- in some sense, independently reach the same, more or less, conclusions. Or the same assumptions of what the future should look like, or will look like.

So there's a lot of dog eat dog thing, you know, "every man" usually it's a man "to himself". It's like the hero at the beginning of the movie that fights off the zombies, or whatever, survives. And while that kind of makes for a very easy to digest plot -- because it's pretty easy, if you immediately know roughly what the movie is about within like the first 10 minutes or so, "Oh there's zombies. Okay, well, the guy is gonna try and survive" or whatever. While that makes it easier, I think it's also a result of the industry, usually Hollywood, finding the lowest common denominator and repeating it, ad nauseam, until they can't repeat it anymore. And then they find something else to do.

We see these patterns with, like, superhero movies, The Avengers, etc. At some point a lot of repetition happens. And I find that -- I'm gonna say "bizarre" a lot -- but I find that curious. Having all this money, supposedly all of this data that should tell you -- I don't know, this image of like, "Oh, they have so much data, they have so much research on their side that clearly they're going to always find new and exciting things to produce". It's weird that there are some new and exciting things, but not as many as one would think, given that there are billions of dollars being made here.

I think this is interesting. I find that problematic, I do think it is like at least linked to why there are problems of the imagination, lack thereof, of why is it so difficult to imagine a better future? Literally just that. You mentioned that thing, making it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Wait, the opposite! [laughs at mistake] Easier to imagine the end of capitalism than the end of the world, because imagining the end of the world is extremely easy.

And that's weird. It's weird for it to be that easy. Or it's curious, you might say. Like a five year old can imagine zombies, and that's weird. Like they don't exist. So why is it that easy? Because it's such a huge part of our cultural baggage and to the extent that this is globalized, it is a global package that we have kind of internalized to some extent, to various extents.

So all of this led to, like, oh, then I started exploring cyberpunk and then

eventually got into solarpunk. And what I sort of like about it -- and I'm sure we're gonna talk about it now a bit more -- is it's very open ended. You mentioned the disappointment, and I getcha [emits a knowing laugh]. I also have experienced my fair share with this, especially when it comes to, like, the left and international solidarity visa vie Syria, particularly, and all of that. And Ukraine now, for that matter.

For me, solarpunk...I don't think I will be disappointed, because my expectations, I think, are actually pretty sober [mumbles to himself something about the use of that word]. But it's really pretty moderate. Like, I don't expect it to fix the world, and I don't think there is such a thing as an ism, or an "punk", or whatever, that will fix the world. I just think it's very useful. And maybe we can get into that now if you want.

TFSR: Yeah, and just to respond real quick, I don't know, this may be a bit ped of an answer, but I think that Hollywood doesn't experiment because it's a capitalist enterprise. If they know where the money gets made, they're going to continue following that path and beat that horse until it's sadly passed on. But, um, like, for me that-

EA: -sorry, even in that context, even if we accept this to be true -- which, I agree, I do think this is why -- they make a lot of bad decisions. And that's what I find kind of interesting. If they were this cold, calculating, like, the only thing they care about is making money -- which is clearly the case -- supposedly they would put everything else aside and just maximize whatever can do that. But there are so many flops, and so many just, I think my argument basically is: I agree and I think there's also something kind of a broader thing happening.

TFSR: I think, in terms of imagination, like a feeling or a fear of failure around that. Not to totally derail the direction we were going with this, but when I think of myself as within the left, and I think about the amount of really well intentioned, thoughtful people over the years that have chosen to support really terrible political projects, such as the Soviet Union, or the Chinese Revolution as it ended up being. Any of these large scale Communist utopias that had a set answer in front of them... When I was coming up in the late '90s, early 2000s, there was a sort of really positively, Zapatista-influenced sort of "world where many worlds can fit" idea that was in opposition to the then-failing-or-already-collapsed Soviet model of uniformity and universality. But there felt like...I kept talking myself out of what felt like a might-be dangerous position of positing a positive future that looked a certain way, because of all the examples of people up til now chaining themselves to that vision and that vision being driven by a bunch of maniacs.

EA: Yeah. This is like maybe one of my controversial takes, I'm not sure, but I actually think that the Soviet Union has done as much damage, maybe more, I don't know, to the left than the US has. It's one of those...so it's controversial because obviously the US has funded a lot of coups to destroy a bunch of left wing governments, Chile being the one of the most notorious examples of the US doing that. But I think because the Soviet Union was supposedly speaking on behalf of this "broad communist left", whatever, there was much less of an understanding, or maybe less incentive to understand what about it works? Which wasn't much. And what is about it that was clearly not working, which was quite a lot of things. And by "working", I mean, like, anything good. Like, for me, it was a very bad project that, maybe even from the start, or at the very least after World War II, got worse and worse and worse, in any case, even during World War Two, obviously.

But anyway, yeah. So Solarpunk, the thing that's kind of cool about it is that it's inbuilt, to some extent, that it can't be co opted. It can be co opted by commercial interests, this is something that can happen because of the aesthetics. And if you just stick to the aesthetics, you can, you know, make a Nike commercial out of it. I'm sure you can. Who knows? It might happen. Like, you know, the cyberpunk aesthetics has been commodified to a large extent. You can be cyberpunk or promote a cyberpunk movie but still be hyper capitalistic or whatnot. In a way that, although cyberpunk -- this is maybe a bit of a deviation -- it has happened and I think solarpunk, it might happen as well.

Same for feminism or anarchism. Like the term "anarchism", right? There was this stupid documentary called "The Anarchist" recently and it has nothing to do with any of the basic practices of like, you know, what it is supposed to be about. But that's kind of the trickiness of things, is that you can say you are doing something or you are representing something, but you may just not do much of an effort to actually do the homework, so to speak. And due to the platforms that you have, or the influence maybe that you have, the money you have or whatever, then that might become the new norm of how it is popularly understood.

So solarpunk is more modest in many ways, it's very difficult for me to imagine like a CCP, like Chinese Communist Party-style thing that calls itself "solarpunk", because it's kind of, almost by definition, there's the punk aspect to it, like, by definition it, if it is co opted then it is no longer that. At least that's the idea. As I said, I'm not, I don't necessarily believe that it's gonna solve everything or anything like that.

But it does allow, a bit like the Zapatista example you mentioned, the "whole multiple worlds within one world", the "pluriverse", would be a term that I've been hearing. Kind of like the fediverse, like federated universe, pluriverse, you know, plural, obviously, multiple universes. I find that more appealing than trying to find one ism that can sort of be as one-size-fits-all. And that's my critique of even certain forms of anarchism. Although I do see myself as like, I kind of call it, an-

arc-ish. So like, I'm more or less of an anarchist, but I would be always uncomfortable at this point -- because I used to be a Marxist, and then whatever -- I'm always uncomfortable with an ism that is very strict. The only one that I'm fine with using all the time is like, I am a feminist. But even that term has been like, you know, Hillary Clinton is a feminist, you know. It's an easily cooptable one as well. So, you know, solarpunk can be co opted as well. There's no, no certainties in life [laughs].

TFSR: We've used terms like "solarpunk", "cyberpunk", there's steampunk, there's these other genres, or whatever you want to call them, and genre doesn't even define the medium in which something comes in. But could you talk a little bit about, just a quick overview of that evolution of terminology? And maybe the political underpinnings that came up, or the hopes that came up, with the development of these literary, or video game, or game genres, and then the sort of mishaps that they had? So like, cyberpunk, right? Came out of the late 70s, early 80s Sci-Fi -- I'm forgetting the name of who wrote Count Zero...

EA: There's William-

TFSR: Gibson!

EA: -Gibson, and there is...what is the name of the other person. I mean, even the term "cyber" obviously, then became kind of synonymous with the Internet. So the broad scope of it is-- it's funny, I have a poster of Nausicaä here, which is Miyazaki film and it's technically steampunk -- ok steampunk I'm not as familiar with but cyberpunk was a response, as you said, 70s-80s, to certain techno optimism that was born out of the 60s. First man on the moon and 69, and stuff like that. That kind of came crashing down in the 70s, through at least, in decent part, like the neoliberal revolution...or [kind of whispers to himself, thinking] counter revolution, whatever, the neoliberal phenomenon. With Thatcher and Reagan being the two most common ones, and obviously Pinochet, as you mentioned with the Friedman example.

And so the idea is that if you watch those cartoons, like the Jetsons, you will have this idea of a futuristic society, you know, flying cars, robots and whatever. The Jetsons, you still have the same gender roles, which is funny. That was kind of the idea, that the future is bright. That was taken for granted, at least in the West, but honestly, also in the post colonial world. Because that was the very idea, that we want the colonialism, now we're in post colonialism, the world is our oyster and the future is what we make of it.

That was very much this forward thinking. Regardless of even the neoliberals, right, they had the vision. They were talking about how the world should be

and based on this abstraction -- which is still the one that's taught in most economics books, even though it's been debunked a billion times -- with this abstraction they put in place a plan. I'm simplifying it, but in cyberpunk was sort of like, "Well, where are these changes?" Cyberpunk was asking these questions, "Where are these changes that supposedly were supposed to happen by now? World hunger was supposed to be super easy to resolve with technology. It was supposed to be a big thing, like it's not that difficult. We clearly have enough food".

That didn't happen, of course, and in many ways got worse in the 70s and 80s, and so cyberpunk was sort of your reaction to that. And I always forget who said this, and that's on me, but the one definition of cyberpunk by one of the cyberpunk authors was "high tech and low life", right? Like, think of Blade Runner, being kind of a quintessential example. Awesome movie, both of them, I love them -- first one even better -- but that's kind of the cyberpunk aesthetic, right? Like there is a lot of technology and things can be super high tech, but life isn't necessarily good. Lots of difficulties. And within cyberpunk, usually we'd have kind of the lone hero arc or something along those lines of like, the man -- it's usually men, but also the woman -- who will fight against the big brother, high tech overlords. Kind of a Star Wars on Earth kind of kind of vibe.

That's cyberpunk. I think that cyberpunk has -- maybe controversial, and I'm not an expert so I could be wrong -- but I think cyberpunk has run its course. At the very least the way it's been popularized, high tech low life, I think we understood how high tech can become. We have reached a certain limit in our imagination when it comes to that, a lot of the movies that explore that, the most creative among them are not trying to just make tech more and more fancy. They are actually trying to create more and more interesting plot lines.

I don't know, I think we got to the point where the low life aspect of it, there's only so much we can watch on TV as a warning. The whole idea of 1984, which was written in 48, obviously by Orwell, was "this is what might happen if there is..." this and this and this, kind of like a warning. At some point with the low life aspect of cyberpunk of the '70s and '80s and the '90s and whatnot I think it's run its course as to the usefulness of that.

An example I like to give, it's not cyberpunk, but the whole movie Don't Look Up that was popular like a year or so ago. A lot of environmental activists and scientists and folks that I know because that's kind of the space I inhabit, in many ways, were very happy with the film because they were hoping that it can galvanize. By showing that this can happen, then maybe we understand how ridiculous it is that we're not doing enough to challenge it.

I think this assumption is, I think, at this point, it's kind of flawed. I think we're not living in an age where we don't know enough. We've never had as much information as we have today in the entire history of the human race. Like that has never happened, this moment, we're talking to each other and it's kind of terrible

to think about it, we've never had as much information. But we also have quote unquote, "alternative facts". We have people who have created entire parallel universes. I was listening to the podcast QAnon Anonymous yesterday, which is pretty good, on like the far right and QAnon and stuff like that and they had Naomi Klein on, and she's she has this book called *Doppelganger* -- coming out now I think -- which explores this other author, Naomi Wolf. She was a conspiracy person, far right, whatever but used to be like a feminist, a socialist, and so on. And now is, like, friends with, buddies with Steve Bannon, whatever.

What Naomi Klein did -- I haven't read the book, but the episode was very interesting -- is that she tried to understand, -- because many people were kind of confusing the two because of the Naomi-ness of it -- she tried to understand what is that other world? What is this parallel world? And we have a lot of metaphors in mass media about the other world, the underworld, I forgot the one that's called in *Stranger Things*. The parallel universes where things are kind of similar to us, but darker or something weirder happened. And that's the thing that's been explored since like from *Star Trek* on and before that, like, *Twilight Zone* and whatever.

I'm saying all of this because I think the more we study this, which, I'm among those trying to do this, the more I realize that there is a pretty serious, I think, crisis of the imagination. That's kind of the thesis, if you want, of the main argument. We can demonstrate that by looking at, almost randomly, 10 films of a certain genre and if you're so minded and you've done your research, whatnot, you can almost predict the main themes that are going to be explored. The main tropes. My wife hates when I do this, but I can predict a lot of the films [laughs]. I can predict the ending of many films, "Ah, this is what's going to happen now." It's not being a genius or whatnot, it's just you study a bit of cinema, there's a bit of a format to things, especially when it comes to mainstream stuff, because as you said, capitalist enterprises are usually risk averse. They find something that works, and they just repeat it until it doesn't work.

I think this has deep implications to our world. I think that we need to think very critically about what does it mean to have characters like Tony Stark being very popular, and being then pissed off that you have a real character like Elon Musk, who clearly sees himself as a Tony Stark character. Tony Stark is this billionaire, playboy, amazing, does everything, is very good at everything, character from the Marvel movies, the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Which is very much, I mean very clearly, many people have written about this, something that Elon Musk sees himself as emulating in one way or another. And I would argue that that has done a lot of damage to our world. You can see that with a lot of tropes.

The main thesis is these things matter. They're not just things that we watch on, you know, Saturday evening, if we don't have anything else to do, we watch on the telly, we consume it, and then we go to bed. It actually, these movies -- and I focus on movies, but such it's not just that, solarpunk is mainly literature

for now -- have an impact on us. They in many ways are part of how we define what is even possible. And I think other people have reached that conclusion long before me. Like a person that you know, Margaret Killjoy, one of the reasons I know, she writes these novels, these fiction books, *Escape From Incel Island* -- and I forgot the names of the others, there's "ghost" in the title in one of them...*A Country of Ghosts!* Imagining these different futures basically. That's what Octavia Butler was during the 90s with *Parable of the Sower*. That's what Ursula Le Guin was doing.

I'm not reinventing the wheel here. I just think we reached a point where some of the aesthetics of cyberpunk, specifically which came to dominate mainstream cinema. Again thinking of *Blade Runner* as one of the biggest ones, or *Minority Report*, or whatever. I think it has -- if not run its course, like I'm not saying don't do cyberpunk or don't consume cyberpunk like you, do you -- but I think there should be something else as well. And I think this is where solarpunk can be a very, very interesting addition to the mix. If that makes sense.

TFSR: Yeah. Stepping from there, I guess, if cyberpunk is high tech, low life, you don't have to come up with, on the spot, some sort of like, quippy two sentence "what is solarpunk?" But if you do-

EA: -oh no I have a quippy statement!

TFSR: I wanna hear it.

EA: It's "high life" instead of low life, and the tech is just a question mark. So the tech can be high, tech can be low tech, can be no tech. The idea is that the tech is not an end in itself, which is kind of how we see things now with Silicon Valley, especially. But tech is there to suit the needs of humankind, in some stories, even animals, of nature, and so on.

But that's kind of the premise, you have this high tech, low life, which is kind of mostly cyberpunk. And the low life is definitely not a solarpunk thing. Like otherwise, there's nothing punky about it anymore because the low life has become hegemonic in many ways in the representation of things. So solarpunk is high life and the tech is it can be high tech -- and sometimes I think the aesthetic veers a bit too much to the high tech aspect of things because it's probably cooler to draw or whatever -- but it can be low tech, you know, analog stuff, wood stuff, whatever, low tech stuff that we already know has worked for decades and millennia for that matter. Or it can be no tech, some definitions of no tech and low tech is the same thing but whatever.

There's a question mark as to the highness or lowness of tech if you want, but the life has to be high, ie, we can no longer, in those worlds that are created in the solarpunk genre, you cannot have poverty, you cannot have misery of that kind.

You cannot have homelessness and hunger and whatnot. You can have struggles and complications and I don't know breakups and whatever because humans are still humans. But those things that can be resolved that were promised supposedly to us in the 50s and 60s, like "oh, we'll put a man on the moon." It shouldn't be that difficult to then fix world hunger or whatever, and yet...

That's kind of, I think, the spirit of it all.

TF SR: Yeah. And I the punk, in at least the prior, in the steampunk sort of Dickensian world of grime and high class differentiation and colonialism and all that stuff, where the cyberpunk, like the punk that is kind of an approach towards the nihilistic use of punk in the early days. Like just assuming that nuclear war is right around the corner, and yet you're existing in this apocalyptic or post apocalyptic world, cyberpunk kind of posits the main characters as existing in this world in which they have no agency and that's constantly being driven against them.

I think the solarpunk, the way that you're talking about solarpunk -- when I started hearing about solarpunk, it might have been, probably not this, but like reading *Walkaway* with some friends by Cory Doctorow. It doesn't identify itself as a solarpunk novel but it feels like it kind of goes along that route. Or this novel that comes up all the time in our show, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, written in the 1970s, shows a world where people are, as opposed to serving tech, as opposed to serving the economy and forwarding the economy, the technology is being used to mend the horrible damage that human society has, an under capitalism, has wrought on the environment.

EA: Remind me what that book is about, I remember you mentioned that on the podcast.

TF SR: Yeah yeah. So basically it starts off with the main character is a woman of color who struggles with mental health. And her partner was killed by the police at one point in the 1970s, I think in New York. She may be institutionalized -- the state is constantly trying to criminalize her -- and she's visited by someone from the future. She's wondering, "Am I crazy?" She decides to go with the person, she sees this alternative future that is sort of this like super social ecology utopia, where gender is not necessarily abolished, but a lot of the like anchors around gender are pulled out so that you have people that are co-parenting, technology is used in community to gestate babies, relationships are much more fluid. People have ways of communicating with animals. They're like decolonizing some part of the former US and they're still struggling in it against the existing nightmare United

States patriarchy, Christo-fundamentalist-whatever.

You kind of see her get to dialogue with the characters from it about like, what do you do when people harm each other? What happens when someone murders? What happens when someone steals? How do you make clothing? These sorts of things. And I think that playing with the idea of, “Well, if I don’t have to work a job so that I can make my car payments and buy gas so that I can have my car so that I can go to work my job”, sort of loop that we live in right now. Go to school so that we can get in debt so that we can pay off the debt from going to school. I think if people allow themselves into that embrace of imagination -- as long as they don’t try to stay there, but they try to bring that imagination back with them into the world. -- it could bridge that gap and allow for the organizing to be inflected by our desires and our hopes.

EA: Cool, yeah I’ll definitely check that out. That reminds me a bit of like, it’s giving me an Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin vibe. I’ll read it.

TFSR: **But yeah, I think a reason that I also wanted to talk to you about this, besides the fact that you’ve spoken with authors in the genre, or about media that’s been produced in that genre of solarpunk, is because of those values. Like, the decentering of technology without necessarily some sort of, like Luddic rejection of technology, per se. It kind of--**

EA: Luddite thing is super, a quick parenthesis that, I’ve been getting a lot into the Luddite, like, the history of it all. And there’s a book that of course, on the spot, I do not remember. But I was listening to an interview with that person on...I don’t remember the podcast when I remember it, I’ll mention it, but there’s something very interesting about the Luddites. The image of them being completely antitech is usually wrong. It was more that they were very skeptical of how tech was being used because they were themselves pretty, for the most part, highly proficient and had a very advanced skill set. And they found the high tech “high”, at the time, like the introduction of that to be a threat, not just to their lifestyle or whatnot, but actually to their bottom line. And so it was a class response in many ways, but I’m probably...anyway. All I’m saying is that I’ve gotten, slowly, I’m trying to get more into that history, because I think there are lots of very interesting parallels to our current situation. Okay, I interrupted you.

TFSR: **No, no, no, that’s fine. I think Joshua Clover talks about it interestingly in [chuckles] I’m not remembering the name of that book, but he wrote a book that was published in 2016, that we -- one of my ex cohosts interviewed him on--**

EA: --that might be the one I was thinking.

TFSR: *Riot. Strike. Riot*, I believe. But yeah, talking about how this specific development in the workplace is disenfranchising us and further alienating us from our labor, and also from our ability, like, this is putting people out of work at that point. It's like this is a line in the sand as opposed to some sort of religious pronouncement that all technology higher than a stick and a rock are somehow evil, that I think they get misrepresented.

But yeah, I was hearing about solarpunk or the inklings of it back in maybe like 2016 or 2017, when I think that there was also this rejuvenation or rediscovery of Social Ecology by a lot of people, a rediscovery of some of the writings of Murray Bookchin -- not as the only advocate of Social Ecology, but as one of many -- as well as the introduction to a lot of people in the West of the Rojava project. Which has, at its core, ecological underpinnings, even if they've been stuck in a war on many fronts over the course of the last decade. So some of those projects have had to be put on the back burner. But yeah, projects like *Srsly Wrong* [Seriously Wrong] podcast is one that makes a lot of space for a lot of this imaginativeness, a lot of this questioning of--

EA: --I think it was on the *Srsly Wrong* podcast that I heard about that thing we're thinking about. Really good podcast, I agree.

TFSR: That makes sense. Is this kind of some of the milieu that solarpunk rose out of and I wonder if you could talk a little more about what you think about the post scarcity elements that are available in solarpunk?

EA: Yeah, I think the first, if I'm not mistaken, the first book on solarpunk, or at least with the title came out, like in Brazil, in Brazilian Portuguese. I mentioned the name of the person, I wrote a piece for *New Lines* [Magazine] on solarpunk, so people can look it up if they want. Like, write my name and then "solarpunk" and you'll probably find stuff.

I think the first one was from there, and I remember there's this quote that I had seen that I used in that piece in *New Lines*. Basically saying that we are -- the editor of that book -- like we are saturated with fossil fuels in our imagination, something like that. In the sense that there is something very peculiar about how even when it comes to basic energy, basic infrastructure, basic everyday things that we all most of us live with, there was a certain assumption that in the future we'll sort of have more of the same. And we'll sort of have you know, maybe a bit of things here and there, maybe you'll see an uprising like *Star Wars* -- which is an awesome type of, you know, situation, I'm not gonna spoil it, but like, essentially,

like a rebellion against a high tech overload, partly using high tech against those overloads and so on.

Even in that though, like even in things like that you have a certain assumption that the world kind of looks like our world, just more futuristic kind of vibes. And yeah, solarpunk came a bit as a response to that saying that it's not enough to just have futuristic vibes being more of the present but like more high tech, again, this whole high tech low light for cyberpunk. Around the 2010s -- for various reasons that I'm sure historians will debate forever -- we've had a turn from the sort of the deep cynicism, or at least pessimism of the, I'm gonna say in 2000, the 911 invasion of Iraq and the decade that followed after that, which is very much the decade I grew up in, and then 2011, obviously between Spain and Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring and so many other things that were happening at the same time.

Also coinciding with the rise of social media, which is kind of difficult to remember that it's actually not much older than that, created a certain different expectation or maybe subjectivities, you might say, expectation of what the future might be. Good and bad.

So you had on the one hand the anxieties around social media, for example, many of which I share, and I still have issues with a lot of the big social media platforms. Most recent episode, actually, if I'm not mistaken -- or by the time this comes out, it will be the penultimate episode -- was on me quitting Twitter, and why I did that, trying to philosophize about it, I guess.

But yeah, so I'm saying all of this because around 2013, 2014, 2015, we had sort of like extremes popping up. You had like ISIS 2013, you had the counter revolutions in the Arab world from Egypt to Bahrain, to obviously Syria which kind of accelerated after that with intervention of Iran, and then later with Russia, especially. And then Turkey in the north east kind of doing its separate thing, although also damaging, I think. And that, for one reason or another, led to a resurgence in one way of people like Murray Bookchin and his work, in any case.

Obviously, the fact that the Rojava project kind of adopted, via Öcalan himself adopting Bookchin's writings, and it being very much an experimental thing with mistakes, and whatever setbacks and whatnot also happening, made it very interesting. Because it was happening in a place as well, like, we have to say that most people who probably think along those lines of Social Ecology utopianism, or that stuff, probably wouldn't have thought of, like Northern Syria as a place where this might be first experimented. Or second after the Zapatistas, for example.

Solarpunk, for me, has this added quality of taking the question of the problematic of the imagination, taking it very, very seriously. And maybe too seriously, like, I don't know, I'm sure you can critique [it], right? For me, there isn't a one size fits all model here that can work. And solarpunk is kind of an umbrella term anyway, there are some basics about it that you can't [change]. As I said high life has to be included.

A solarpunk scenario in a Rojava type of environment will probably look different than one in a Paris or New York or Geneva or whatever. Just by virtue of being in a different setting, the people being different. As in they've had different, recent experiences, therefore the stories won't be the same. Maybe the stories that they tell themselves won't be the same the way they may imagine the future may not be the same.

That's why I'm very interested in solarpunk kind of just being in conversation. And maybe taking some elements of and influencing, you know, Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism and disability futurism and queer futurism and so on. And those four are always in conversation with one another in any case. Like obviously, a lot of Afrofuturism is already, for example, queer futurism and so on.

I think there's something to be said about, like, what do we do when we take the future seriously? In the sense that we accept in this whole prefigurative politics kind of way, in the sense that like, you are creating the conditions of the future in the present, because that's kind of the only time you can do anything, which is the present. You have a certain vision, so you're trying to create the conditions to make that vision more possible, but more more in the sense of a horizon. Like something to build upon and then maybe at some point, our horizon is reached and we can't do more than this because we're humans and we only have a few decades to work on something in our lives. Maybe it reaches it's almost a natural decline, and maybe something else picks up instead.

I don't know, I'll be very curious to imagine a story of a punk that is created in response to solarpunk, because solarpunk has become the new hegemony. What would that even mean, in terms of the movies we consume in terms of the assumptions we have about the future? I don't think we would have this huge obsession with pretty fictional things like inflation and the economy and GDP and very vague terms that are used pretty haphazardly at times. I don't think we would have those as the hegemonic things but maybe we would have other things as hegemonic. I don't know. That new hegemony might be better than the old one, but it's the one that can be challenged.

I see this as in the same way as you had first-wave feminism, second-wave, third-wave, fourth-wave...I don't know which wave we're in now. But you had these responses to previous iterations of what is nominally the same, or at least similar goals, emancipation of women, queer folks, and so on. But it's like, well, why was it only white women? Then why was it only this? And then it expands and expands.

Also, in every case, you will have a reaction, as now you have this transphobic TERF reaction by some "feminists", who call themselves feminists, obviously, and even by queer folks who are transphobic. Obviously, we know that to be the case as well. You have these reactions but you still have kind of a movement trying to push things in a more progressive manner.

I'm simplifying a bit, the immensity of it, because it's a bit more complicated, if not confusing, in my mind. But it's like, you know, the whole Martin Luther King, like "the arc of the universe bends towards justice", something like that. It's more saying, "okay, that would be nice, but it's actually we need to bend it towards that, like, it needs to be actively done, it won't just happen". But what solarpunk kind of adds to that which is very interesting is, well, structures like infrastructure affects the way we live, right?

I'm gonna give a very simple example along those lines, I start with something that's very simple. I live in this specific neighborhood, it has -- I'm not going to describe it too much for the doxxers out there -- but it has, like, you know, asphalt and sidewalks and the way that buildings are built in a certain way, some taller than the other and whatnot. And this affects things like, I don't know how much sunlight do I have on a daily basis, which then can affect my mood, how much of a community building can be done, if you have a community garden versus if you don't have a community garden. Something as simple as, in the lobby of the building, if you live in a building, if there is a place to sit in the lobby, with a table and like three, four or five chairs, you will have more and more people more likely to sit on those chairs. That's just how it works. Like if you have a bench versus not having a bench. A bench, then someone might sit on the bench and then might create a conversation that might create a community. You know, you kind of scale it up basically.

Solarpunk sort of takes this seriously, you know, not to repeat myself too much. One thing I would like to write one day is, what would Beirut, one of the cities that I used to call home, what would it look like in 2050 if we take solarpunk as our assumption? So if you take kind of a techno utopian future with some extraterrestrials and whatnot, as your assumption, you get something like Star Trek. It assumes that the future will be brighter — the present is brighter, because in the future you're writing instead of writing in the present, were you setting the story, obviously, 2050, let's say — what are things that should have happened or have happened, even in the background of your story? Like, you know, in the year 2035, there was a third world war — that was kind of roughly the start Star Trek timeline, I don't remember when — but there's a third world war in the 22nd century and after that kind of humankind kind of got their shit together, kind of the general gist of it.

Solarpunk is like, well, you know, "what's Paris in 2050?" If we have resolved climate change, to some extent, what does Paris look like in 2050? Not because we think this is what Paris will look like in 2050, but because there's a sort of the argument, the main thesis, is that if we do that work, that imagination work, it makes certain scenarios more likely than others. Because like to go back to that Friedman thing, at some point when the crises come — and the crisis are gonna come because they're in-built in the system, it's by design, in many ways — usually

there aren't that many things lying around these days other than, I'm gonna say like, conspiracy stuff. Conspiracy thinking, which always are built upon some kernel of truth, but then coated with a bunch of bullshit. So like antisemitism being the socialism of fools kind of thing, it has this really emancipatory thing, but obviously, it is not.

I think a lot of leftism today has a bit of that problem. That it lends to part of the solution, but not enough. And so, a lot of the aesthetics can easily get co-opted. Like you know, the trucker thing that happened in Ottawa, for example, last year, they had daycare! They were caring for one another. Of course, some of them, we know many of them were far right, some were not. But they managed somehow to create a thing that, you know, maybe a decade prior would make you think more like Occupy Wall Street.

This is something that Naomi Klein actually pointed out, so this is her insight. They are learning from us. I'm not gonna say what can we learn from them? To some extent, yes, I mean, I think we should learn from wherever we can learn. But what are the lessons there? I think that there is a crisis to the imagination. That the QAnon stuff being so similar to the antisemitic tropes of like tsarist Russia. Like quite literally "[the protocols of the learned] Elders of Zion", but in Q format for the 22nd century.

Sometimes it feels copy pasted. Really, I think there's something there, other than "oh these people are dumb". Many are, but not just. I think there's something there, there is something about this socialism of fools, but then mixed with the neoliberal post 70s individualism, where they talk about community and stopping elites and shit like that, but their solution are, "Buy our supplements", and "Attend my master class", and "Pay a monthly subscription". They don't have other solutions or projects, because they are themselves also very stuck. Their aesthetics at some point will run its course, as well. And I think everything does run its course anyway, at some point.

My bet is that if we do enough of a good job in the whole imagining alternative situations and genres and movies and books, and I don't know, whatever, if we do enough of it that's like good and high quality and is able to impact the broader sphere, media sphere, cultural sphere, and so on, I think it can lead to very interesting "future" as in the short term. Not even, like only 2050 or 2080, I mean, only 2050 is not even that long. But you know what I mean. In the here and now essentially.

I think it can make things more likely in the same way that I think the argument was made by others and I'm remaking here, that when cyberpunk becomes a bit too hegemonic and sort of gets mixed in with this weird, neoliberal thing, I think it gets to a point where it's very cynical, and individualistic, and so on. I think it has run its course, or at least it should have run its course by now. Sorry, it was very long. [laughs]

TFSR: It's okay [laughs]. No, but it makes me think like, yeah, there's something there. Just to just to pin on the QAnon thing. The antisemitist tropes of the 20th century were building off of the Protocols of Learned Elders of Zion, that was a known production of the czarist secret police to undermine political organizing and create an internal enemy that would be easily refocusable, you know, a populism could be focused against the internal enemy of the Jews. And then that was based off of, probably that was based off of, pre existing blood libel things within Christianity.

EA: Oh, sure. Yeah.

TFSR: There's the tropes that get reproduced and the tropes aren't reproducible because there's a kernel of truth to those things, like, it's not that someone is drinking baby's blood. But it evokes a feeling or it plays on a common symptomatic anxiety within society that can be reproduced. Then you can be like, "Oh, well, you feel this way? Here's the story that explains why you feel that way."

I think also, though, without the cynical approach-- because these are harmful, right? These are harmful things to bring to people to explain, in this very vibes and feels way, why they're feeling a way that they are. In part because it redirects anger, angst, all these feelings towards people that don't deserve it, but also because it redirects away from the actual institutions that are causing the harm, but simultaneously, away from constructive activity that could counter those and the creation of that anxiety in the first place.

This is kind of like off in another direction, but I wonder how when we're creating imaginative situations and trying to address not only the material -- note to the listeners, I realized that what I started describing here was just a reiteration of Robert Anton Wilson's approach towards conspiracy theory. Which is great--

EA: --I know we wanted to talk a bit about also decentering, you know, Empire. Decentering centers of power. I think solarpunk can be quite useful in that.

TFSR: Yeah. I wonder how much, like, because that seems to be like you mentioned that the first use of that term that you came across it sounded like was from Brazil.

EA: Yeah, the first book, anyway, it was Brazilian Portuguese.

TFSR: Does it seem like that as a genre is more inclined towards being open
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towards people pitching in their diverse images for possible futures that fit the people that are in their audience better than something like cyberpunk that's kind of predefined format wise, or steampunk or whatever?

EA: Yeah, I mean, steampunk and cyberpunk were largely set in the west with the notable exception of Japan and to some extent, I guess, South Korea, Singapore and other countries in East Asia. But Japan was obviously a big one. Steampunk, I think, is overwhelmingly in the West. Solarpunk, it can be that. As it happens I first learned of solarpunk, from Emmi Bevensee, who is a friend who writes about interesting stuff. And then what I did is I interviewed Emmi on the podcast, that was like, three years ago now in 2020. And then, I don't know, I wrote solarpunk into the YouTube search bar or something and I came into Saint Andrew, at the time it was his name, Saint Andrewism video, called "What is solarpunk?" And I think if you still write "what is solarpunk?" on YouTube, or even just "solarpunk" that's the first one that pops up.

Andrew is from Trinidad and Tobago, and I have noticed a number of folks -- and maybe there's just kind of the circles I live in -- that are from the Global South and that have that sort of a different mindset to it. But, and this is I think it's a huge but, I don't think this is inevitable. I think solarpunk can, as I said, be coopted in one way or another, in any case, can be redirected in certain direction. I think that if this isn't part of a very conscious, active kind of framework, then solarpunk like any other genre can be siloed into something specific and predefined.

In the same way that mostly when you think of cyberpunk, you can kind of think of like, I don't know, Blade Runner, and I don't know futuristic Tokyo style cities, that's kind of the the vibes or the general aesthetics if you want, for the most part. Solarpunk can easily become "Oh, it's just a 'go back to the village vibe and live in small communities.'" I mean, that's fine if people wanna do that, but that's also already been done as a genre, this is not new. So it's not punky in that sense.

It has, I'm gonna say, a flaw, or potential flaw. But also, the other thing I want to say is, yeah, for example, Andrew is from Trinidad, Emmi had moved to New Zealand, I'm here from there and whatnot. And other folks I was also meeting have this thing of being from, or living in, a place that is usually not dominant in those conversations on these things like the future of the left and futurities in general and stuff like that.

This goes back to what I mentioned, the whole nostalgia and the periphery thing of how we have America, especially as this dominant center of gravity. That's kind of how I think about it, like centers of power as being in some sense -- I think very visually -- so, like, centers of gravity in many ways. That also means that some of our assumptions, some of our priorities, some of our expectations can be predefined by, for example, the US. Because the US is what it is, and because a lot of

solarpunk is an English -- although, as I said, our Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, I'm other languages, French there is, of course, as well -- but because it is -- the English language on the internet tends to dominate obviously, these days -- there is that risk that due to the ebbs and flows of the US political system and what might happen if Trump wins again, and what might happen if this and that, then you will have an impact on how what most things happen and that will include solarpunk.

It's of the world, and so it's not going to be completely disconnected from that kind of problematic Earth. What I'm hoping to do -- and those are two of the main themes of *The Fire These Times*, my podcast -- I'm trying to do this in one way or another, is to see how I can link things like solarpunk to, let's say, intersectional feminism, through, let's say, anti-imperialism from the periphery, which is going to be probably the last episode by the time this comes out, it's going to be that one. So it comes out on the 12th of September, tomorrow, with Leila Al Shami, Romeo Kokriatski and Dana El Kurd, so Syrian, Ukrainian, Palestinian and myself, people on the left who have had a pretty specific and similar like, that's kind of the thing we have in common, experience with a lot of the online left.

We are Pro-Palestine people who are very alienated from a lot of the Palestine space on the internet, Pro-Palestine space on the internet.

TFSR: And why?

EA: Well because there is often -- that's kind of an entire conversation on its own, obviously -- but it's there is a "crude, anti-imperialism of fools" that is a bit embedded in that space on the internet, specifically. And on some college campuses in the US especially, it's just a thing, it's a phenomenon. I mean, there's lots of bad in it, but it's just a phenomenon that I think is very alienating that has led a lot of people who, for example, are Syrians, including Syrian Palestinians, from being actively rejected in those spaces, if not called, you know, terrorists and Jihadis and Islamists and whatnot in the same way that many Ukrainians get called Nazis just because they don't want to be murdered by Vladimir Putin.

That kind of problem, the anti-imperialism of fools, you might call it, "anti-imperialism of idiots" is what Leila Al-Shami called it, I think I've called it like "essentialist anti-imperialism", "psuedo anti-imperialism" because I was trying to be more academic. But to be honest, anti-imperialism of idiots sounds fine. It's a problem in Palestine spaces on the internet. Pro-Palestine folks are either blinded, or actively whitewash and downplay the Assad regime, because the Assad regime claims to be Pro-Palestine and apparently that's the only criteria needed.

I think that has caused a lot of damage. Not just in the Arab world, but in the West, across solidarities, like you can see a lot of Syrians and Iranians linking up in the diaspora and you will see a lot of Syrians and Palestinians, of course, but it's a bit more of a tension there due to this problem, I think.

So we had that in common. Then when it came to Syria -- and when it came to Palestine, for that matter, because both Diana and I are Palestinians as well and we obviously are Pro-Palestine, and my grandfather was exiled by Israel, and you know, all of that stuff -- but we were not seeing ourselves represented, really, in a lot of the discourses that we saw online in places like Twitter and Facebook, and so on, because of this problem.

Obviously if you're in Palestine, if you're a Palestinian in Palestine, the main thing you're going to worry about is the Israeli occupation and colonialism and so on. But if you are a non Palestinian outside of Palestine, I sometimes question -- not always, but sometimes question -- if the only thing you are focusing on is Israel, I have questions. I need to know why, maybe there is a good reason, but maybe there isn't. The reason why I say "sometimes there isn't" is that Israel is not special. Israel as a criminal state, an enterprise and settler colonial, but it is not the only one that does that.

This is not a "whataboutism" actually, although it veers into that if you're not careful. But there's something unhealthy about thinking that it is the center of all things. And it can, due to the whole antisemitism of fools, it can veer into antisemitism. And it can be called out; I recently signed a statement signed by other Palestinians about Mahmoud Abbas' recent antisemitic Holocaust denying crap, basically saying that Hitler did not did not kill them because they're Jews or shit like that. Like it's a problem, it exists.

It's not a nonzero...it's not like no one is like that. It's not a majority, no, but the people who are like that are very vocal. They have certain influences, a certain hegemonic hold, I would say, on the left. That's very, very different, I should say, from like the far right type of antisemitism which is basically Nazis. It's a different thing. For the most part, it's not even recognized.

It's kind of a Daniel Randall, a left wing British Jewish worker, came on the podcast to talk about left wing antisemitism, which is a very specific phenomenon. At some point he made the argument that like "antisemitic conspiracy theories", that phrase, in many ways is a tautology, because conspiracy theories are almost by definition, also antisemitic in the sense that they may not be about Jews.

They may be about Bill Gates instead of Soros, and Bill Gates is not Jewish, but if the critique of Bill Gates is about "Oh the secret cabal" and whatnot, then you're sort of using the same tropes that were already created under the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and older than that, the moneylending stuff and shit like that.

This is not new is what I'm trying to say. It manifests itself in the Palestine space in very specific ways that I think can be disentangled, and can be, and have to be challenged. Otherwise we give a lot of ammunition to the Pro-Israel side, the zionist side and so on, to our great detriment, is the argument.

There's a very good term, if I may, to just mention it, it's called "su-

moud-washing.” So sumoud is like, “steadfastness” would be the translation. It’s usually associated with the Palestinian cause, like “We’re steadfast against decades of colonialism but we’re still here”, that sort of thing. It’s in a paper in Kohl Journal, K-O-H-L Journal, by Nayrouz Abu Hatoum, Razan Ghazzawi and another person whose name I keep on forgetting -- and I apologize if she’s listening to this -- from the very specific positionality of Palestinian Syrians, so very specific positionality. This includes Palestinians who grew up in Syria, under the Assad regime, and Palestinians who grew up in the Golan, the Golani’s, we call them. So under Israeli occupation.

And the things they have in common and the things they don’t have in common, and how they see the Israeli occupation and its similarities to the Assad regime in Syria in the way they operate in many ways. And some of the excuses they use can be similar as well, and different in other ways. And what does that mean if you are someone from the Golan who is anti-Assad and anti-Israel? If you’re someone from Yarmouk -- before it was destroyed by the Assad regime -- who is anti-Assad and Anti-Israel?

What does it mean to have a group like Hezbollah, Iran, or Syria or whatnot, or the Assad regime basically, say that they are pro-Palestine while murdering Syrians and Palestinians? What does it mean? Or murdering Iranians for that matter, or Lebanese or whatever. And that’s kind of sumoud-washing. They describe the Assad regime’s tactics basically, in the same way as the Israelis use pinkwashing, which is something that leftists usually are maybe more familiar with.

The Assad regime uses sumoud-washing, and Iran and Hezbollah and the others use some sumoud-washing, by saying like, you know, they are on the side of the working classes and the people of the global south and whatnot, but basically being like fascist ultra-reactionaries in the Levant and Iran. So like in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, to some extent Iraq, Iran, and are extremely misogynistic, extremely homophobic, extremely transphobic. People like Hassan Nasrallah calling to kill gay people, shit like that. While being supposedly the voice of the resistance. Like, then what are you resisting? Is the question.

So that’s kind of sumoud-washing, I think it’s very useful. I want to play around with this, as much as I can, with these concepts. If you think of a solarpunk in Gaza in 2050, surely you have to also include the post sumoud-washing situation, as well as a post-Zionist situation, or maybe, I don’t know, a post-Islamist situation given this Hamas in Gaza. You see what I mean? There are these different ways you can, if you try to, intersect these things, and I think it becomes easier to do so the more we normalize taking the imagination very seriously.

In the same way -- again, I’m not reinventing the wheel -- for example, in Indigenous communities, a lot of Indigenous communities and Indigenous politics, there is taking very seriously, not just the future, you know, preserving the earth for future generations and stuff like that, but taking very seriously the past as well. The

ancestors and the stories that were passed down and the myths and taking them seriously. Not necessarily believing everything, if you want, believing is a different thing, but you take them seriously in the sense that they have something to offer. Then of course you decide what they have to offer. Like “being better ancestors” would be a different way of phrasing it. A friend of mine, Daniel Voskoboynik, who’s going to join the podcast in a greater capacity as well, he introduced me to that concept, being better ancestors would make sense in the solarpunk framework as well.

TFSR: So when addressing these ongoing current issues it seems important to touch on them as, like, I mean... If you’re imagining in one of these communities, being beyond, for instance, Islamism, or beyond Christo-fascism in parts of the US or whatever, it’s kind of hard to posit yourself as beyond that without saying “There was this thing that happened and we’re not only showing ourselves to be in opposition, but saying ourselves to be in opposition”. So it’s not just an unspoken, assumed undercurrent that we’re just gonna not talk about. This is actually what would our relationship to the land or to each other look like, or to neighboring communities, be without that dynamic?

EA: Right. yeah. Exactly. I think for me, these are all like -- I’ve learned recently that this might be an autistic trait, I’m not sure -- but there are boundaries that exist in our world, right? We have certain assumptions of what should be done and not be done and stuff like that. And autistic people like myself, obviously, notoriously have difficulties with such values. Sometimes to our detriment, like we don’t understand certain social cues that we’re making someone uncomfortable, for example, or stuff like that. And then you know, at some point down the line we learn, which has been my case and now I’m much better at it.

But there is a sort of a funny or interesting upside to not always understanding social norms, is that you don’t take them for granted. You don’t take the social norms as being the only way social norms can happen. Because why would you? Except if you haven’t done it, there’s no reason why you would do it, other than you have to. Like if you’ve never been told that there are only two genders and “this is just the way things are, there are two genders” why would you naturally conclude that there are two genders? Obviously, we know societies in which they already had more than two genders in any case.

But that’s what I mean by saying that there’s something about it--carla joy bergman introduced this term to me, “neuroqueer”, which I want to play with at some point, and this intersection between queerness and neurodiversity. Obviously lots of folks are both. I think there is a case to be made that in the same way as a lot of creatives have ADHD, or a lot of ADHD people are creative -- you know,

chicken and egg thing -- there is something to be said about a lot of autistic people's difficulties with certain social boundaries and why that can actually make us better activists.

Social boundaries are not always good. That's the thing. Social norms, I should say, are not always good. They are just norms. They are not good. Not bad. They're just norms. Some of them are bad, some of them are good. Some of them are neither, I don't know. And so I used to, for example, try to fit in the box of nationality. Like am I Lebanese? Am I Palestinian? Am I Argentinian? Am I Italian? Those are my heritage's. At some point I was like "that's probably too many, in any case, let's choose one". So I picked Lebanese because I grew up there. But at some point, I wanted to reconnect with my Palestinian identity as well, so I started calling myself Lebanese Palestinian.

At some point, I was like, I think I'm trying too hard. I think I'm trying too hard to fit into one box. And the difficulty is not being a certain nationality, or whatever, people do whatever they want. But I think the potential problem, rather, is that there is a certain assumption of what you need to accept if you are Lebanese. Like there is a certain mythology to Lebaneseness that you need to sort of internalize and if you don't, maybe you're not a good one. So on and so forth.

I got to the point where I was like "I see these categories as social norms, as constructed identities" and constructed in the sense that everything is constructed in terms of identities, not that they are quote, unquote, "fake" or whatever. Because by definition, all nationalities are fake. And I tried to see, like, "Okay, well, what does that mean?" Like being Palestinian 100 years ago is not the same as being Palestinian now. So being Palestinian in 100 years, very likely is not going to be the same thing as being Palestinian now.

So I can take all of these impulses together, as much as I can -- and this is largely, like, in my brain for now -- and try and see, like, what can it look like if you have a post-Zionist Palestine, Israel-Palestine, a third name, I don't know, whatever. In that context, what does it look like to be post-Zionists, but also post-patriarchal. It can be post-Zionists, you know, I mean, anti-Zionist... Hamas is anti-Zionist, and they're heavily patriarchal. What does it look like to be post all of those bad isms and bad, you know, authoritarian structures, and so on. Post capitalist, for example, all of that stuff. There's no guarantee that if you just have post-Zionists that it will also be anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal, for example.

You have to work for that. And obviously queer Palestinians, especially, are the ones that are trying most to work on that. And it's the same in these other contexts. I like to keep them fluid, it is when I'm saying, these categories. I'm hoping that by talking about them a lot, I participate in making them more normal. Normalizing it, basically. To normalize this framework that like, well, this thing does not exist yet, let's make it exist. Let's create, let's think about it.

Just this impulse that we kind of all have as kids anyway -- it's kind of de-

stroyed along the lines due to the education system, blah, blah, blah -- but what does it mean to have that. It not just it not being destroyed and phased out for us to become better capitalist subjects, but what if it actually gets better and strengthened and more encompassing and more, whatever, all of these things? I think solarpunk can be at least one of the tools, if done well, in my view, towards that. Towards making that an easier thing, if that makes sense. I say “if that makes sense” a lot because I always doubt...[trails off]

TFSR: I think I picked that up from listening to her podcast a lot. You’re like “Does that make sense?” and people are like “Yeah, why wouldn’t-yeah, you said it very clearly” [and then you] “Okay sorry, just checking in.”

Yeah. So we’ve been talking for about an hour and a half now and I wonder if there are any good resources, specific places where this sort of, like, a discussion of shaping and sharing what can be solarpunk, or what exists within it? If you have any of that that you could share with the audience? Like, are there discord servers where people are discussing this or any--

EA: Andrew, Andrew. I would actually start with Andrew, he has a discord -- I think he goes by he, I don’t remember...yeah, I think so -- he has a discord, and the YouTube channel that he runs is very good on that. It’s solarpunky, and he calls himself a solarpunk anarchist, but it’s not just about solarpunk. It’s like mutual aid, and one of the recent videos was “Why the barter myth is harmful?” For example, “Oh, we used to barter and then we discovered mercantile economy, and then we discovered capitalism”, but there’s just not how, that’s just not accurate.

I would happily recommend people start there, because it’s very easily accessible. It’s video and you know, it can also be easier to digest at least as a first thing to begin before then diving deeper if folks want to do that. So I will start with that, and honestly, the writers I had mentioned, like Octavia Butler, and Ursula Le Guin, are not necessarily solarpunk, although Ursula Le Guin maybe a bit more. I mean, for one, they wrote before that kind of became a thing. But they have certain elements -- especially Le Guin, but also Butler -- of taking these what-ifs, these alternatives, like reimagining the past, reimagining the future, creating scenarios in which those things are taken seriously.

And for me, that’s kind of as important as just getting whatever book is solarpunk and just reading that. Folks can do that as well if they want. I will say that I think it’s Grist, if I’m not mistaken, that has a yearly...I don’t remember if it’s solarpunk, or it’s hopepunk or something related to positive futurities with climate change in mind, basically. I think every year they released a number of short stories that won. They have this contest or whatnot. I would recommend reading, you know, maybe the top three if you can’t read all those. They are very interesting,

they give a lot of food for thought, would be my argument on that. Annnnnnd uh-hh my podcast [chuckles]. I try and talk about these things, too. So hey, I just plugged myself, that's convenient.

TFSR: [laughing] I think there's the imaginary element of imagining who we could be, what we could be, that's really cool and a part of solarpunk. But I think that, for me, also the interest is not only what sort of structures can we create in the midterm or short term, but also ways of materially reimagining the way that we relate to our day to day existence and our communication with each other. Like I think there's a tech side to -- without putting it as the positivist "this is going to solve our problems" thing -- you had [loses train of thought]...was it [hums in a singsong way]...you had a podcast, with....

EA: [Jokingly] I had one, yes.

TFSR: [sardonically] Alright. I'm going to cut this and make it sound prettier.

EA: I'll release an unedited version for my Patreon, just for the lols.

TFSR: Noooo! [they both laugh] Okay, so one reason that I keep coming back to Margaret with this is that I listen to frequently, and sometimes I'm an editor of the audio for, *Live Like the World is Dying*, and she is a part of the collective that does that. But *Live Like the World is Dying*, a member of the Channel Zero Network, also approaches anxiety and current survival issues from a, what she might call, "left survivalist". How do we collectivize survival and getting through current difficulties, or not even climate change per se, but the crisis that is capitalism, or ableist capitalism or whatever.

We'll have people on who talk about hacking technologies to make them fit their current need. If you're on more of the tip of wanting to make stuff and reimagine, like, take apart your phone, turn it into some sort of digital server to offer Wi-Fi data sharing to all of your neighbors who can log into it with their own devices, that's great. Make it solar powered, who knows? But like, if fiction isn't your bag, necessarily, we can put some resources in to talk about some of the people that have sub stacks or that have blogs that are talking about how do we reimagine our relationship to technology. There was someone, trash is in the name of their-- [simultaneously] Hydroponic Trash!

EA: --Hydroponic Trash.

TFSR: Thank you! Yeah, Hydroponic Trash is someone that's been on both of those podcasts, yours, and also Margarets, and talked about some of these ideas that I think is like really inspiring. And while they may not do all of the projects that they're working on and describe, I think it's really great that someone's out there doing that.

EA: Yeah. Just speaking of Margaret, quickly, I love everything she does. One of the best insights I think I got from her -- I think it was audio or maybe YouTube podcast, I don't remember -- but there is this prepper thing that I think a lot of folks are familiar with. That's not usually left wing. Like it's usually dudes, it's like, you know, big guns and "I'm gonna build a bunker with my bazooka" and whatever, stuff like that. And other than -- whatever, you do, you -- it's not very smart. It's not just ridiculous, and probably wasteful and expensive and whatever. But it's not objectively a good survivalist framework. And Margot does a very good job arguing why.

One of the main arguments, and one of the best examples -- and I've mentioned this a billion times, I basically stole it from Margaret -- is that if you have a community that has a bunch of doctors, a bunch of lawyers, a bunch of engineers, a bunch of teachers, a bunch of moms, of dads, of cousins, and I don't know, priests if that's your thing, whatever. A community has a bunch of different things, different people doing different things, that's easier to deal with problems that may arise, that will arise, then you trying to be all of the above. It's actually not rocket science. In some of those survivalist videos -- the right wing ones I'm mentioning, the libertarian US side ones -- you have like, "you need to do first aid" and, yeah, sure. That's good, learn first aid. That's nice. But you probably also need to know a doctor, I think that's a good thing to know. Have like five of them [doctors] in your wheelhouse, whatever.

There's this argument -- it's the same thing in a different framework -- but the argument that the only solution to congestion in highways is to just add another lane. Whereas, actually, no, it's just fewer cars and more trains and trams and buses and whatnot. This is a problem that has been fixed, it's already been fixed in other places. But it's talked about, especially in the US from what I know, as like, almost like a mystery. "Oh, how can we resolve congestion?" We know how it's not complicated. Survivalist stuff is a bit like that. Like, some of it does not have to be as complicated as it may sound at first. Some of them, sure, there's a learning curve to most things.

But also there are things you can do. Like, if you're not good at first aid, it's okay. Take your time to learn, maybe speed it up if you think is very important in your life, stuff like that. But also do something with someone else. Like, you want to start a community garden but you don't know shit about gardening? That's okay. Start one, if you can, if you have the ability and so on, accessibility and stuff

like that. Do it and almost certainly at some point, especially if you live in cities, you will have a bunch of people who are also interested in it. Who are also into it and some of them might have extra knowledge, some of them might actually be extremely good at it. You suddenly found yourself a cook, a friend who's a cook.

There's a reason why humans live in communities. Somehow with capitalism, it's kind of like the end result or the natural end of that kind of thinking, people who have completely internalized it uncritically basically. It's almost like "Well, I am me, I am only me, we are a bunch of me's, and so therefore I need to know everything, be the best at everything, if I fail, it's on me. Everything's on me. Me me me me". And I think that's a very dumb way to--an unsatisfactory way of living, in my argument. The whole "I'm gonna have my bazooka in the bunker" like, yeah, you're gonna get bored in a week. You're gonna need to do shit. You can't just, what? 40 years in your bunker, then what?

It's very poor in terms of imagination. That's, you know, that goes back to the initial argument, maybe I'll sort of closed off on that. Some of these people -- I'm talking about the survivalist types, not Margaret style, but the others -- have, like, I don't know, tens of thousands of dollars, clearly from the stuff that they're buying, and yet can't think of anything better to do with it? They're so focused on just buying the latest thing and the fanciest thing and the thing that may last you seven centuries, and yet you'll die in two decades. It's very, it's very mediocre in its horizon, in what even they seem to believe is possible. That's kind of the irony. They're certain the world is ending, but what I like about the podcast, obviously, is "live like the world is dying" but there's an emphasis on the "live" bit. You still need to live. If you think that there's no point and then I mean, what's the point of any, why are we talking? I do find the black pill'd vibe, sometimes, aesthetically fun to engage with but I don't take it politically seriously. At least not anymore. So yeah, all of this to say I guess, listen to Margaret's stuff.

TF SR: [laughs] Ok but for people, like you mentioned that you're not on Twitter anymore, so how do people find The Fire These Times?

EA: I'm not on x.com, you mean?

TF SR: I refuse to call it that, it will always be my Twitter. This is my nostalgia. Trump is there, and all of my friends are there. But yeah, how can people find The Fire These Times and check it out?

EA: thefirethesetimes.com, and yeah, where pods are casted. You can find me, I keep an archive of my stuff, on Eliaayoub.com. On thefirethesetimes.com right now it's mostly just episodes and progressively me and the buddies who are gunna join me. Whoever is listening if you're into this you can reach out to me as well,
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wanna publish zines, and resources and stuff like that. As well as the monthly newsletter, which people can find on substack, it's just **thefirethesetimes.substack.com**. And I'm probably forgetting things because I always do. You can find me on Mastodon, write my name. On Bluesky if you're there, Instagram if you're there. I'm not super active, to be honest. I got bored, I'm very old, I'm 32, which is very old for social media in my view. I'm joking, I know.

TFSR: Get on the Facebook, you've retired.

EA: Exactly. Oh, Patreon! Jesus [snaps fingers]. **Patreon.com/firethesetimes**. Hey folks! Patreon. I'm so bad at this, I'm so bad at this, it's crazy.

TFSR: [laughing]

EA: Hey if you have money, send some. Please. We need food, and shit.

TFSR: [laughing harder]

EA: But anyway, yeah. Thanks, thank you.

TFSR: Yeah of course. Give a listen to some of the podcast cause I'm sure, if you're on the Patreon thing, you'll wanna subscribe and help support the work that's being done. The discussions I think are really valuable and the voices you get on there are really a great resource. Thanks for doing it, and thanks for having this chat.

EA: Sure, thanks for having me.

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