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FODI || THE IN-BETWEEN

Episode 03: Tyson Yunkaporta & Lee Vinsel

The In-Between theme music

Tyson Yunkaporta These things are just cycles anyway. And times transition - a lot of people call them apocalypses - it's something that we do well as a custodial species. We're really good at moving with these things.

Lee Vinsel I've learned recently that the average lifespan span for civilisations is like three hundred years for complex societies. But I wonder if that is where we're at technologically with energy and so many other things, like whether the scale is different with modern technology of the apocalypse?

Theme music cont.

Danielle Harvey Welcome to The-In Between, an audio project by the Festival of Dangerous Ideas, presented by the Ethics Centre. I'm Festival Director, Danielle Harvey.

This podcast was produced on Gadigal land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations people listening.

Defining an era in linear time is not simple.

But in geological terms, this moment we are living through has come to be known as the Anthropocene - an epoch distinctly marked by human impact on the Earth's climate and ecosystems.

Today we place ourselves between Tyson Yunkaporta and Lee Vinsel for a conversation about apocalypses, if and how our species will survive, and what is required to maintain and repair our planet.

Tyson Yunkaporta is an Aboriginal scholar, whose work focuses on applying Indigenous methods of inquiry to resolve complex issues and explore global crises.

He is the founder of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab at Deakin University in Melbourne, and author of Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World.

Lee Vinsel is one of the founders of the Maintainers, a global research network dedicated to the study of maintenance of technology, and the co-author of The Innovation Delusion.

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He is an Associate Professor of Science, Technology, and Society at Virginia Tech.

This conversation was recorded in September 2021. It is moderated by FODI Co-Curator and Director of the Centre for Ideas at UNSW Sydney, Ann Mossop.

Theme music out

Ann Mossop: I want to actually read something about Country that is from Tyson's book *Sand Talk*, where he says, 'You might join me in paying respects to the people and other beings everywhere who keep the law of the land. The Elders and traditional custodians of all the places where this book is written and read. The Ancestors, the old people from every People now living on this continent and its islands. Our non-human kin, including the various spiky species around the world, the porcupines and hedgehogs who snuffle in the earth for ants and then do God knows what when we're not looking'. Before we open up the conversation, I want to ask each of our speakers whether they are. Lee, tell me, where are you today?

Lee Vinsel I'm in Blacksburg, Virginia, in the United States, and that's on the west side of the state of Virginia. I should say, too, that, you know, like all the United States, this land also had Indigenous peoples on it and at the University we often do land acknowledgements, because we're a land grant university and our land was taken from Indigenous people. And in fact, there's sites just down the road from where I live, where when they were building a golf course, they uncovered quite ancient settlements. So we have similar stories here in the States, as you all know.

Ann Mossop Tyson, tell us where you are.

Tyson Yunkaporta I'm in the lands of the Kulin peoples, Boonwurrung Country right now. It's almost Antarctica. It's three and a half thousand kilometres south of my home in the north of Australia. And yeah it's very cold here. But other than that, I could be anywhere now, it's just a screen, isn't it? And I'm sitting in the middle of a massive amount of laundry that I don't know how I'm ever going to get through, folding it all. (Ann laughs). Although we did go down to a creek the other day. So we're in lockdown. But my woman is like a registered beekeeper, so when we get too desperate, we just throw the beekeeping equipment in the car and all her paperwork and then we go and do some bee stuff. So we stopped off at a creek on the way home. Real sneaky.

Ann Mossop That's excellent! But we're talking today about the shape of our world and what the present moment represents. You've both thought a lot about change and the different histories that have brought us to where we are now. But before we start talking about those big questions, I want you to tell us a little bit about how you got here. So, Tyson, you come from Indigenous Australia and you look at Indigenous knowledge and what it has to reveal to us and to show us about the world, how did you start thinking about that in the way that you do now?

Tyson Yunkaporta Oh damn. I think it was when I was a kid. I was deaf when I was a kid, I had to have that grommets operation. I had a thing called otitis media. So I didn't hear very

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much that was going on. And then after I had the operation, I was still a bit dodgy, so I was missing words, you know. And the old girl said, 'If you go up on the ridge, you'll see lots of old Aboriginal axe heads.' And I like I don't know, like I was a weird kid and I thought she said 'accent' instead of 'axe head'. And when you're a deaf kid, you're still figuring out what words mean, you know. And I knew it was related to language. So I had this whole idea that this old lady had sent me up the hill to try to find language in the land. And so, yeah. I went, I went up on the ridge. And walked around for weeks looking for the language in the landscape and yeah. I found all kinds of things there, and I guess I've been thinking like that ever since.

Ann Mossop Lee, you think about the history of how we live with science and technology, and you've come from that to a trenchant critique of our obsession with so-called innovation. Tell us a little bit about how you got there?

Lee Vinsel It started as being frustrated with all of the chatter about innovation in higher education where I worked, but also in journalism and industry, especially the so-called tech industry. And it just felt really superficial and empty. Like it just wasn't even clear what it meant. It just started to mean like, good or something. And so for a while, I went around and gave a talk where I pretended to be in kind of an Alcoholics Anonymous style 12-step meeting called InnoAnon, where I would pretend to be someone who was giving up 'innovation speak' because it was a bad addiction.

But then, the way my buddy Andy Russell, who I wrote the Innovation Delusion with, our thinking gelled when Walter Isaacson's book, *The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*, came out. And Andy said that we should write a counter volume called *The Maintainers: How Introverts and Standards Engineers Created Technologies That Kind of Work Most of the Time*. We just started playing with that as a joke online, like on blogs and on Twitter and stuff. And the joke just really resonated with people. There were people in their lives who were maintainers, like their fathers or mothers or aunts and uncles, whoever. And it just kind of brought out this whole other side of our life with technology that, you know, obsessing over the novel and the shiny and the new, missed.

Ann Mossop What do you mean when you talk about a maintainer?

Lee Vinsel There's literally entropy. Entropy is gradual decline into disorder, right? Which happens to all things. That's just part of nature, things fall apart. The physical objects we own and use fall apart, our bodies fall apart. And so 'maintainers' are those people who help keep things in play. Whether it could be a nurse tending to our body, it could be our mother, it could be our father, or it could be a mechanic, it could be a repair person. It could be someone who keeps up the world. So it's this set of labourers, care or caregivers and repair persons, maintenance persons that were really trying to draw attention to.

Ann Mossop And Tyson there's something, not that resonates with this a bit, but that you write about, which is when you talk about humans as a custodial species. That we're here to look after the land, the sky and everything in between. What do you mean about humans being a custodial species?

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Tyson Yunkaporta Yeah, well, it's not about maintaining something that's static. You know. (Lee mmm) It's actually not about that at all. I mean, in our way the landscape needs human beings in it. Otherwise, it just all falls apart, we occupy a really important ecological niche. So the land, you know, speaks to us. Country talks to us and we know what we have to do from moment to moment to look after it. But that's not a maintenance relationship, so when I say custodial species, it's not like the janitor, you know, it's a bit different from that. I guess our role is about increase. Which is different once again from growth. So increase is about increasing the number of combinatorials in a system, if you like. We'd think of that in terms of connections or relationships between things. And there are, you know, in a natural system, there's an infinite number of combinatorials, so we're putting those things together all the time.

Music bridge

Ann Mossop Do you feel that we're coming to the end of an era, whether it's this cycle of growth and environmental destruction, whether it's an era in the way we think about our relationship with the world? Do you think we're coming to the end of a period and at a point of transition, and what is that period that we're coming to the end of, Tyson?

Tyson Yunkaporta These things are just cycles anyway. And times of transition, a lot of people call them apocalypses, but, apocalypses are fairly regular events in the world and they always have been. (Lee noise of amused agreement) We've been around, humans, for about a million years or so and, basically, that's what we do. We move with the land or the land will move us. But basically every single human culture on the planet has a Tower of Babel story warning against forming sedentary populations and starting to move towards growth rather than increase. Looking to grow the size of a system rather than just increase the relationships and the velocity of units within that system. And yeah, it's inevitably a really bad idea. You can produce miracles over a short time, but in the end, the only thing you're producing is destruction of your land base and ultimately of your people and everything else.

Apocalypses, it's something that we do well as a species, as a custodial species. We're really good at moving with these things. Everybody thinks it's the Anthropocene, so it's humans that have done all this damage. Like, you know, us, and that it's somehow our nature to destroy and, well, it's inevitable that we'd want to wreck everything because that's just how we are. And they've burnt it all, not for our selfish showering and sheltering and feeding (laughs), but, you know. Yeah. Really just as a way of making surplus value and then trying to transfer that to themselves and then trying to outsource entropy to elsewhere for as long as possible, and it's an equation that doesn't work. So that's where we are here now. And it's just a matter of whether or not they'll let go of that before everything's dead. Rather than just trying to change the optics, and put a woman of colour on a poster on the wall in the boardroom. And I don't know, try and make things feel fair while they recycle a bit more in here and there and put a bit of philanthropic money into Third World debt or some poxy thing like that, it's just like, eh. You know, it's whether or not we can do actual structural change rather than window dressing in the next decade.

Lee Vinsel I agree with a lot of that. I mean, I think an interesting thing from my perspective going on along with what Tyson just said. I mean, I think corporations and their leaders are definitely, obviously responsible for, most of the damage we've been talking about in this

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conversation. At least in the US context, though, it would be, I think it's very hard to imagine serious, significant, meaningful climate policy or any other environmental policy, because it will make our consumer goods more expensive, you know. And there's just such a long history of tax revolts, where people just won't go along with having their energy costs raised and such. So I agree that the responsibility lies with the leaders, but it's also kind of hard for me to imagine in this context, at least, like the people kind of going along with policies that would really change the picture. What do you think about that, Tyson?

Tyson Yunkaporta I mean, yeah, well, I mean, that's just the thing. Everybody, I think people lost the last of their hope with Obama. Everyone's like, oh, at last, you know.

Lee Vinsel Chuckles. Yeah.

Tyson Yunkaporta History is over. Everything's going to be fine. Now, there's a black man as president who would have thought, see the day. And then he goes to the- I don't know why he even went to the climate talks. It's just like he walks in the room and says, 'You know, just before we start, America's way of life is not negotiable.' Laughs.

Lee Vinsel Yeah. Yeah.

Music bridge

Ann Mossop Tyson, you've talked about entropy, the propensity of things to travel towards disorder. What do you mean by that?

Tyson Yunkaporta Oh, my goodness. Sighs. So complexity decreases in a closed system. And that's the model of time that we're operating on in the world. Look, basically, 500 years ago, my family speared some Dutchmen. And I know that doesn't sound like it's answering the question, but so my clan speared a bunch of Dutchmen 500 years ago. They went home. And in order to escape the accountability of, you know, having lost all their investors' money in that trip, they invented the world's first corporation. And they found a way to outsource their entropy. And basically so the whole financial system was invented by the Dutch because of my family. And I apologise for that. Probably shouldn't have speared those fellows, no matter what they did.

Lee Vinsel Giggles.

Tyson Yunkaporta Or if we did, like, spear all of them! Don't let three of them limp home on the freaking boat.

Lee Vinsel Laughs.

Tyson Yunkaporta Jesus Christ. Like, talk about a butterfly effect. Look at the things you set in motion on the planet. Then they invent art speculation. So finance and art speculation.

Ann Mossop Tulips.

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Tyson Yunkaporta So that's - Yeah! So NFTs like it's (Lee laughs) all to play from a couple of spears, you know. So, but basically what, what came out of that, you got your Dutch East India Company, then the British East India Company. They ended up coming up with a trick, to trick Native Americans out of their lands there. And so they invented the mortgage, like this idea that land could be capital. What a joke. The Indians don't know better. 'We'll tell them land is capital.' And so basically they got them to sign mortgages for a few beads and axes or something and a couple of blankets and then, came to collect the first payment and Indians didn't have any money. So they said, 'Well, all the land's ours again. Thanks. Bye.' So they said, 'Jesus, that worked well, let's try it through the rest of the southern hemisphere.' And then they started doing it, back in England to all the poor. Pretty much everywhere as they moved everyone into the cities. And so land became capital. It's still something like 65 percent of all the capital in the world is land. It's basically the thing that this entire ridiculous financial system is built on. Now because they have to make those enclosures in the landscape. They're making these closed systems and preventing the flow, the flow of entities across the landscape. The flow of water, the flow of energy, the flow of seeds, birds, plants, everything.

And what happens in a closed system, you get the arrow of time, the second law of thermodynamics. First law of First People pretty much is a much better model of time because that's all vast, interconnected, overlapping, you know, endless systems. Where one system's entropy is another system's lunch and this constant exchange of flow across in between the system. So nothing's created or destroyed a little bit of heat loss over time. But that's compensated for. That energy comes from the sky to top that up from time to time. So entropy is basically created out of this big, horrendous act of sorcery, this big curse of the second law of thermodynamics. And this idea that you can have a vacuum. That you can have enclosed systems and prevent the free flow of information, spirit, energy, water, resources, everything else matter, and entities across in between systems. And that you can own that thing and put a freaking wall around it. What a bunch of idiots. And once again, it's not just your fault, it's our fault as well. We did throw the spears.

Ann Mossop Laughs. (Lee chuckles) And that's entropy.

Tyson Yunkaporta And that's entropy.

Ann Mossop I'm glad we've sorted that out. I'm glad we know who to blame.

Lee Vinsel Laughs.

Tyson Yunkaporta Hang on, hang on, I want to hear brother boy's entropy story.

Ann Mossop Lee? Entropy?

Lee Vinsel Oh, I mean, for what I want to talk about, which is how we care for the things in our lives, both the objects and the people, entropy is a gradual decline into disorder. Right. Which happens to all things.

Tyson Yunkaporta Yup.

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Lee Vinsel That's just part of nature. And it's not necessarily bad over the long haul, but it creates problems in the short term, in lots of cases. So that's what when we talk about maintenance or care, we're talking about staving off entropy. When it comes to, I don't know, my grandmother requiring care in a home or my car requiring care or it falls apart and we need another one. It's that very basic level of entropy that we want to focus on when we talk about the Maintainers. But I like Tysons much more poetic answer better. There was no people being speared in my story. So that makes it not very cool.

Tyson Yunkaporta Ha. (Lee chuckles) Yeah physics, spears, mortgages and NFTs, I think that's all the entropy you need!

Music bridge

Ann Mossop Tyson, there's a fantastic thing in Sand Talk about apocalypses. You say on the upside, apocalypses have proven to be survivable in the past, although on the downside, it usually means that your culture and society will never be the same again. I do feel like we're sitting in a situation where people from climate science, people who think about existential risk are saying to us, there's an apocalypse around the corner and we're not going to get through it. And the rest of us are tuning in sometimes to that message and the rest of the time know keeping our head in the sand. Given that the technology has magnified the speed with which all of these things can happen. I wonder, perhaps, Lee to answer first. What do you think the chances are of putting the brakes on some of that technology driven by destruction?

Lee Vinsel I think it's really going to be really hard. I think there are things that are unprecedented about this moment. And this apocalypse if that's what's on the horizon, when it comes to global scale and interconnectedness. You have to imagine, not only my (laughs) crazy country is Tyson very nicely outlined. But also like China, which is still building lots of coal burning power plants right now, it has like 30 or more plants. So, like putting the brakes on climate. I'm not very hopeful about that often. I think there are more conversations to be had about the long view of changing our relationship to things, not being such a kind of crazy mass-produced culture. But kind of a way I would build on something Tyson said, is I think that the human capacity is about collaboration and adaptation, and it's really going to be about how we're responding to our changing world. More than putting the brakes on, unfortunately, is how I usually see things. What do you think, Tyson?

Tyson Yunkaporta Sigh. Yeah, I think it is really tricky. I guess, whichever side of politics you're on, whoever is being paid the most by the oligarchs that (laughs) are wrecking the joint. They can see the structure fairly well, I think. But for most of us, when we've been trying to resist what this system is doing, this financial system and all the rest. We've just been looking at little cultural tweaks here and there. (Lee makes noise of agreement) It's just changing the window dressing. But so therefore, most of us who are trying to get change done have only been looking at one data set, and that's just discourse. And so that's all we've looked at for like 30 years. And that's just given neoliberalism the time that it needed to get its job done and its job is done now, the wealth transfer is complete.

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It's not possible now to stop quantitative easing, for a start. That's just pretty much built in now. That's baked into the way things are done. Which means a continuous, massive, unprecedented flow of wealth (Lee makes noise of agreement) to the top one percent of the top one percent. And that's just how it's going to go. And until it's done. I feel like there's probably a few leverage points that I'm looking at in the system itself (Lee makes noise of agreement) and in the structure of things that you could leverage just quietly in some nonlinear ways. (Lee makes noise of agreement) You know, that might bring it down just as everything else is collapsing, including the natural systems. It might bring it down in time that there's something sort of liveable and survivable afterwards. But yeah so (laughs) I don't know I, I kind of feel like these guys are dug in and there's no way to move them and that pretty much it has to play out.

Ann Mossop What are those leverage points?

Tyson Yunkaporta Well, I'm not going to tell you because then they'll know.

Lee Vinsel Laughs.

Tyson Yunkaporta That's the other thing. You know what it is? It's not having a thing that other people are going to follow. It's not having a thing where you're like, you know. I mean I mean, in this, you put out a book and everybody's like, oh, I'm going to oh, look, there's five rules in. There are five rules. Jesus Christ (Lee laughs). Everybody's looking for this thing.

Lee Vinsel Yeah

Tyson Yunkaporta There is no thing, you know, they just want to join something. They just want to platform something or get behind something and or amplify something. And it's like, you missed the point. And the thing is that as soon as you get something that could actually move things. And, sigh, liberalism just embraces it. It just embraces it and then sanitises it, airbrushes it-

Lee Vinsel Yeah!

Tyson Yunkaporta Puts it up front and centre and uses it for the optics. But it's basically like cutting off your enemies head and hanging it in your doorway.

Lee Vinsel Laughs. I feel like, if I hear you right, I think part of what you're saying is like you can't create a method for dealing with this, right? This is like a kind of fantasy of modernity where we can create like universal transportable methods that we can put down in a text or in a computer and transfer it everywhere on the planet and it'll deal with the problems. The method will deal with whatever problems we encounter. And if I hear you right, when you talk about emergence and focussing on where you're at, it's really about like that. We have to pay attention to where we are and nurture those connections as they develop around us. And there's really no method for me dealing with things here and you're dealing with things there in some kind of global sense, is that right? Am I hearing you right?

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Tyson Yunkaporta Yeah, pretty much brus. It's just like I said, we're all the same species, we have the same patterning. And, while it's dangerous to be talking about, you know, "nature" and following nature because people will bend that to whatever kind of end they want.

Lee Vinsel Yeah.

Tyson Yunkaporta You know, liberalism can absorb that as much as any idea. Laughs.

Lee Vinsel Yeah. Yeah.

Music bridge

Ann Mossop Really, if we think of ourselves at this point of transition, moving into a changed future, what should we regret about where we find ourselves? And what should we celebrate about the age that is passing?

Tyson Yunkaporta If you can find any kind of use for regret, then employ it. But otherwise, it's not helpful. I don't even like talking to settlers at the moment in Australia, they're just useless. Like, I don't even want settlers on my team if I'm doing a research project because they waste your time. They spend the whole time bloody apologising for being white. The whole time! They can't even think, now. They're too busy apologising for the fact that, you know, 'Ah all the capital I have was covered in blood. And, it's really bad that I have it.' I mean, 'You gonna, are you gonna give it to me? Are you going to share it?' No. All right. Shut up. We've got a research project to do. Can we focus? Australians can't even think straight right now. And I'm finding a lot of Americans are the same except for the weird ones. (Laughs)

Lee Vinsel (Laughs)

Tyson Yunkaporta The weird anti woke, like the butt hurt ones on the right in the butt hurt ones on the left. They're insane. You can't talk to them. But the weird ones there who are floating around just sort of, I don't know, muttering about the Enlightenment (laughs), they're pretty interesting. I've been talking to them. They can at least still get a bit of work done. I would just try and be at least moderately, productive and motivated around stopping everything from dying in the next decade or so. I don't know, is that a priority? Should we have a look at that? I don't know, just if you got a minute. When you're done bloody flagellating yourself and navel-gazing.

Lee Vinsel Laughs.

Tyson Yunkaporta To find the sin of your bloody inner racist or something. Can we just have a look around and sort this out? Anyway, that-

Lee Vinsel That's a refreshing perspective, I like that.

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Tyson Yunkaporta That would be my thought.

Lee Vinsel (Chuckles) I mean, regret's an interesting word, right? I think that the amazing thing is that when it comes to a lot of these environmental crises, including climate change at this point, we've known for decades where we're heading and what the problem is. And we haven't - we collectively, when it comes to legislation and such, have not been able to get our act together and really push for change. So I think that if there is something to regret, it's that. If there's something to hope for, you better hope that what happens is that in a vast number of communities around the world change practises start to emerge. I mean, that's what's happened before in human history. And let's just keep our fingers crossed that that's what happens because I don't see a kind of top down technocratic solution, (Tyson mmmm) coming even through democracy at this point. Unless it starts in that kind of mindshift emergence, where people start doing something different in their own community. And then that translates into changing ways of voting and stuff. That's the hope, I think.

Music bridge

Ann Mossop So we've been having the most cheerful conversation about the apocalypse that I've had for a long time. So if we're thinking about what comes next. And you're talking about changing our relationship to things, about collaboration, about really the potential of returning to an era of stewardship, of care, of custodianship, from an era of extraction and disruption. Can you see a future where we have rediscovered that ethos of care and of looking after things and people?

Tyson Yunkaporta I think it's just happening now, you know. How we are as people, as you know, basically, we're just trying to survive in the sort of the game theory structure that's been put in place for us with all these rivalrous dynamics. And we've gotta outcompete each other all the time or die. Even in the developed world, you want to be in the top 10 percent of people or you have a pretty shitty time right now. It's not a good way to live and it doesn't make for good relationships.

But what's really interesting that I'm seeing emergent right now, all around the planet, is the massive amounts of cooperation or mutual aid that's happening around disasters. As the disasters are escalating, this kind of adaptive response that humans just seem to be having altogether without really thinking too much about it. You know, but it's this thing! People in disasters are sort of coming together and they're finding that. As they were all sort of struggling together and figuring out how to survive this, they found they had the happiest days of their lives. because they're actually doing what human patterning is. And you can't get away from that. You know, birds migrate and they have the migration routes hardwired into them. Human beings cooperate. Those things are hardwired into us. That's our patterning. That's what we do, you know. I can see it sort of starting to be emergent everywhere and that people are just acting, kind of instinctively. And I think that's how it needs to happen. It needs to be quite emergent. You know if it becomes too organised, if it gets a brand, if it gets a name, then that will just be co-opted and it'll be turned against the Earth and all its people again.

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Lee Vinsel I want to hope that Tyson's right. I certainly feel like a lot of people that I know and a lot of thinkers I follow are having this conversation about the need for human connection. Which we know, has been lost in so many places in the world. And so, you know, like, this is just a silly little example. But my wife and I, we had a breakthrough Covid case about a month ago. And it was through having this Covid case that we realised we had this community of friends. Because people were reaching out to us all the time saying, like, 'What can I do for you? Can I get you anything?' But it wasn't until we had this moment. You can think of a crisis, not an apocalypse. Obviously, that would be overly dramatic, but at a moment of crisis we realised that those human connections were there. And so, with my wife and I and some of our friends in the group, we've now been having a conversation about, 'How do we now grow, kind of like practises that can foster that thing?' Because I think that for a long time in our culture, we relied on institutions like churches and voluntary associations and clubs and all these things, all those things are waning or are gone already. So what do we do? I don't know. Do we start a monthly potluck? Do we do projects together? I don't know. I don't have the answer yet, but I know that that's where my head's starting to go.

Ann Mossop Tyson, what does that look like for you, that whole thing about how you live in relation to what you're thinking about these giant forces that are changing the world?

Tyson Yunkaporta Well, the trick is you can't tinker it. You can't. So there's a lot of, theoretically, regenerative design in the world right now, people are thinking, 'Oh, we're going to design, we're going to innovate these systems that are going to be sustainable.' And basically you can't. Whatever action you do, it has to allow for emergence. And that's to allow for that auto-poiesis or self organisation. And that doesn't mean chaos and *laissez faire* like just let the chips fall where they may, because you still have to be the custodian. So you still have to be out there making all those connections.

And I guess I mean, if you're increasing the relatedness in your human and non-human inhabitants of your neighbourhood, and you're making those relationships happen and you're making sure that there's lots of interaction, lots of information. You'll see like governance systems emerge. You'll see different little economies kind of emerge. You'll see different local ecologies emerge as well. Because what you'll be doing in your gardens to provide for the people, there to sort of bring or add value to all your exchanges. That will be doing different things, bringing in different kinds of birds. It will be bringing in different kinds of seeds. There'll be flux happening. And it's just a beautiful thing to watch.

Music bridge

Ann Mossop So if we think that this kind of human connectedness and building those kind of relationships and so on, is something that we need to keep and encourage - without thinking that it's something that we can make in a five bullet point process - if that's something that we want to see flourish. What are the practices and ways of thinking that we need to try and put aside and say, the time for this kind of way of living has gone? (Lee mmm)

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Tyson Yunkaporta Man. I'm really reluctant to give advice lately because, I mean, I don't trust myself anymore. It's weird that a lot of the stuff I'm saying is basically anarcho-communism and, I should have been disappeared from my house and thrown in a deep, dark hole ages ago for saying some of the things I'm saying. But for some reason, all these big corporations that dynamite Aboriginal sacred sites and do horrendous things globally, just doing the most awful things. And are all about autocracy and control and oligarchies. They're getting me to come and speak at their events and shit. So I don't trust myself. But what I've been saying until I sort of came to that realisation is that we need good story. The best thing that we can do is to leave the tools behind that our grandkids are going to need. As they're really getting into the thousand year cleanup, which is coming. What tools are they going to need? And I don't think it's going to be infrastructure or any physical tools we can leave them. That certainly won't be technologies based on rare earth metals.

Lee Vinsel Yup.

Tyson Yunkaporta And whatever you can make out of sand and plastic, it's not going to be that stuff. It's going to be story. So for a start, they need cautionary tales about how we fucking got here. (Lee mmm) They need good cautionary tales that will be remembered for a thousand years. You know, so that we don't allow any of these permanent hierarchies to develop again. And they need enough of the old stories, like the old old stories, preindustrial stories. They need those ones as well. But we also need to be making good stories, good cautionary tales that could be handed down in the only form that data can survive long term. Which is not in our hard drive, I'd hate to tell you. And it's not even in a book. These things decay. It has to be oral knowledge, verbal knowledge, verbal or expressed through dance or, whatever. Something that can be passed down from one generation to the next over deep time. That's the only good way to store data, over deep time.

Ann Mossop Lee, is the other side of what we need to leave behind, is it that incredible, intense focus on individuality?

Lee Vinsel I do think individualism is a problem when it comes, a lot of these issues. But I also think that, you know, I think that the way mass production has developed in the last 150, 200 years. It's in a sense, like one of the largest changes in human history. It's as big as agriculture is, as big as you know, it's that kind of shift. And if I look back in time, I see cultures that took care of the things they had. And I can, you can still find cultures where there is a lot more maintenance and repair. If we look at places like Cuba, places in Africa, places in Latin America. What is common between these places back in time and these places now is that things are dear. That the objects in people's lives are valuable to them because they're not easily replaced. And I think that the world we've made through mass production, which is just we can go to big box stores wherever, and they're full of cheap plastic crap that we can just buy on a whim. That is not a sustainable thing, you know. (Tyson mmm) And, maybe it will be destroyed by an apocalypse (laughs) and we just will lose it or something. But you just cannot, we cannot keep up that huge practice which has reshaped the face of the planet over the last 150, 200 years.

Ann Mossop So if we just go back to that question about how we are having a conversation on the one hand about systems. But what we really want to think about in the end are these realities that are anchored in a physical world, and what we do every day. And whether that's

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something like the concept of story, whether that's about relationships, whether that's about Tyson telling us about going to look after the bees, to experience plants or animals in nature. How we need to solve some of these problems is by being grounded in our own lives and in a physical world. And interacting with it in a way where we are experiencing people, we're experiencing nature, we're experiencing trees, dance, whatever it is.

Lee Vinsel Yup.

Tyson Yunkaporta That's it. Well, I mean, you know, just so I'm not, like, selling you a false sort of image here. It's not being 'all natural' keeping these bees here. These are Italian bees.

Lee Vinsel Laughs.

Ann Mossop Good.

Tyson Yunkaporta These are like racist Italian bees. And whenever the little- we have tiny stingless native bees here. And whenever they come around, all the Italian bees come out and get out of here mooli, you know, in that kind of way like they do. And I don't know, it's not, we're not being that natural. But the Italian bees make more honey than the little black ones. And the little black ones don't do well in the cold.

Lee Vinsel Yeah. So there's another way you know. I do have a list of policy changes I would love to see made. There's other ways we can have this conversation. But I think that the conversation we've been having together is, in a sense, the deeper issue, you know.

Tyson Yunkaporta Yeah.

Lee Vinsel I would love to see and see these changes happening in community, in our daily lives together. And again, if it needs to change up top, that's- that would be wonderful. And I have a whole list of things I would ask for to change the systems in our lives.

Ann Mossop Thank you so much to both of you for your generosity and for your conversation. It's been wonderful to talk to you.

Tyson Yunkaporta Sweet.

Ann Mossop Well I think we'll be getting you to come here for a bit of a yarn before too long or or Tyson will be heading for Virginia. Laughs.

Lee Vinsel Ha good! That's what we're shooting for.

The In-Between theme music

Danielle Harvey: Thank you to Tyson Yunkaporta, Lee Vinsel, and Ann Mossop. Accompanying this episode is a short response in sound by artist Alexandra Spence.



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It features the sounds and objects of the ocean, recorded onto cassette tape which was submerged and degraded in seawater for the duration of Sydney's recent lockdown. In our next conversation, we sit between Slavoj Zizek and Eleanor Gordon-Smith.

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