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[ed. – This concerns the publication in recent years of the Earthbound Farmers Almanac, and the project of some of its producers, Lobelia Commons. The latter is interesting in that it grew as a mutual aid project from out of a specific struggle (that against the sad legacy of pipeline atrocities in the Gulf South of the so-called United States; see ***Return Fire vol.1 pg28****). Yet, despite the tendency of such projects – important as they are – to become pacified (see* ***Return Fire vol.5 pg10****), the focus here is on strengthening a base from which subversion of alienated social relations not just grow but spread, and strengthen the struggles in turn which birthed them. (Figuring out how to perform such a trick – see* ***Return Fire vol.3 pg59*** *– is a key challenge for radicals, especially in the Global North.) Moreover, when talking of realising commons (see* ***'The Principle of Reciprocity'****) and gift economies (see* ***Return Fire vol.5 pg53****), Lobelia Commons highlights the importance of joyful projects that nourish us. For more great examples of anti-authoritarian*

projects blurring the line between sabotage and so-called "self-sufficiency", see Peter Gelderloos' 'The Solutions are Already Here' (also regarding themes mentioned here of connecting rural projects with cities and vice versa, to avoid the more isolating parts of each.]

The Final Straw Radio: Could you all please introduce yourselves with any relevant information that you'd like to share: who you are or where you are, preferred pronouns, etc.?

M: I am M., I use he/him, and I am in southwestern Mississippi at the moment, but I bounced between southwest Mississippi and New Orleans, aka Bulbancha.

B: I am B., they/them are my pronouns. I'm also bouncing back and forth between Mississippi and New Orleans.

Hadley: And I'm Hadley and I use they/them pronouns. I'm also bouncing in and out of New Orleans. But I'm located west of New Orleans, I live in a project called the Ndn Bayou Food Forest. That is a propagation and free plant nursery.

TFSR: Cool. Do you mind if I ask a couple of clarifying questions? Can you talk about that food propagation project a little bit, Hadley, anything you'd want to share, any way that people can learn more about that? Sounds pretty cool.

H: Yeah, totally. It actually grew out of the campaign against the Bayou Bridge pipeline. And folks may be familiar with its earlier incarnation, the L'eau Est La Vie *[Water is Life]* camp. In that same location, basically, after the pipeline was finished, which was rerouted around the camp to avoid the conflict, but currently runs next door to the Food Forest. **This is the fourth year of it as a farm project, basically, and the goal was to take this land that had started as a point of conflict against petrochemical infrastructure in the Gulf South and then pivot from that point to looking towards some regenerative future.** We found that the strategy that we could do with this place was to just use it as a little base to propagate as many fruit trees to give

away as possible. So a lot of the trees that Lobelia Commons, which we'll also be talking about, plants in New Orleans, are propagated here, or another rural space that we'll probably talk about also.

TFSR: There's obviously, depending on how close you are, blowouts from pipelines are a danger that's one of the things that has brought people into the streets or into the swamps, in this case, to block the construction of these large pipelines. And also, they tend to leak. Are there any fears of that? Or have you been trying to work around that in terms of propagating food plants in that area?

H: Oh, yeah, it's definitely a concern. Thankfully, we aren't particularly near to a valve station, or a pump station, which is where the majority of smaller pipeline leaks happen. If there were to be a major blowout all we can do is hope that it's not in the little section of the 165-mile pipeline that we're at. But we do also understand that we're surrounded by a lot of other pipelines too that definitely are a lot older, and probably are leaking a little bit in different places. But that's the nice thing about having a propagation nursery, too, is we're sending out trees, and then hopefully, I think we do have good soil, but even if we sent out a tree that had grown up with a little bit of oil on its soil, it's gonna get hopefully put into a healthier habitat later.

TFSR: Cool. And for listeners who maybe aren't familiar with the geography of the Gulf Southeast, can you all who are traveling back and forth between Mississippi and New Orleans say a little bit about… Is there much distance between those two places? Are they pretty similar biomes?

M: Part of the reason why we're there is the geographic proximity, but the difference in terms of drainage and elevation. And especially just generally in the Gulf South, any amount of elevation really matters in terms of the type of storms that you experience, what flooding looks like, just the general potential inclement scenarios you could find yourself in.

Where we are is about an hour and a half north of New Orleans, and New Orleans is between 10 feet above sea level and 10 feet below sea level, and where we are is around 300 to 400 depending on where you are. So it's a pretty dramatic shift even though 300 feet about sea level is not really obvious that much, but ecologically, it's quite different. And that's largely because of that elevation. So the forest types is, like, pine, oak, hickory/piney woods area. We're in the very southern and what's called the Pineville, historically was like long-leaf, pine forests, pitch pine. So harvesting turpentine and growing pine for lumber and that continues on today. So historically, it is quite poor soil, very acidic, as opposed to New Orleans being a lot more flat, not having a ton of agricultural space in the area immediately surrounding it. And largely because of the logistics that go into literally just reclaiming that space for development.

TFSR: Yeah, we're here, among other things, to talk about the Earthbound Farmers Almanac. Can you talk a bit about the project, and how it got started? And what people can find in it?

M: The Farmers Almanac started a little over two years ago, I think, this is our second printing. And we finally started as a little bit of a haha joke, "Wouldn't it be funny if we type thing", but then we liked the idea. A lot of the projects that we'd come up with in Lobelia Commons have been experimental "what if" ideas that then we took seriously and saw what we could do with them. That's the story of the Almanac at least for me. What I've been inspired by is just how it's grown and other people have taken to it and it's an open-ended thing that people can obviously submit to, but also has been a way of meeting people through… We put out on social media that if people want to distribute it, they can and just basically pay at cost, sometimes we just give them away, and they pay shipping. Then they can use it as a fundraiser if they have some food sovereignty project or local neighborhood initiative like that. Sometimes there's a rural garden center, book club thing,

fundraiser, they can contact us on social media or lobeliacommons@protonmail.com. And we're definitely looking for folks to contribute to next year's issue, we are going to have the deadline for that is July 31 of this year. Feel free to reach out, and send us pitches, you don't need to come up with a whole piece, you can send us an idea, and we will answer as soon as we get it. You can just put the "2023 Almanac" in the subject.

TFSR: Thanks again for having this chat. I look forward to putting in an order myself for a physical copy of it. I'm sure that Firestorm [Books] will carry it. So I will just grab one from over there.

M: Yeah, we actually had to send some, I don't know if we did last year,

B: To Firestorm.

M: Oh, wait, you probably dropped it off.

B: No, I just put it in the Tranzmission Prison Project book stack. So it went out to folks at TPP but not Firestorm.

TFSR: I bet people'd really appreciate receiving some of that stuff on the inside. That's awesome.

B: It was so cute. Because immediately after I dropped them off, someone texted me and was like "I was just reading a letter that had a request for an Almanac." It was like perfect timing. Super cute.

M: Yeah. I have many pen pals in Angola [prison] in Louisiana. And we sent them to a few buddies in there. There's this crew of guys who meet now and then and they talk about gardening and stuff and apparently, they're super hyped on it. That made my year last year.

B: That's the best.

garden is this example in which growing our own food has become this thing that is no longer contributing to our autonomy, but it's contributing to our subjugation.

I find that to be a really useful framework, if we try to transpose it a little bit onto the modern era, just ask ourselves: "Is my community garden contributing to autonomy and giving people more ability to live their lives and have successful struggles against their bosses and the state? Or is it a captured garden?" With a rural land project, if an uprising comes along, and you're too tied down taking care of the chickens every day to be able to go into the city, maybe in some ways that is functioning as a captured garden for you *[ed. – see **'Our Anarchy Lives'**]*. Obviously, there are lots of other ways that a well-positioned project could have really useful interactions with those conflicts.

TFSR: Thank you. Those are really insightful answers to a totally convoluted question, but you got what I was trying to communicate.

How can people get a hold of the Earthbound Farmers Almanac? How can they learn more about Lobelia Commons and maybe get involved or contribute to either the projects?

M: The 2022 Almanac is finally out, it was late three months because of a paper shortage. People can get it, if they're trying to buy an individual copy, or a couple of copies, they can support the project. All the money goes back into the printing of the Almanac, which we're still very far in the red, it all just gets paid out of pocket and we owe a bunch of people a bunch of money. So they can buy that at emergentgoods.com. They can also find us at @LobeliaCommons, on both Twitter and Instagram. There we have more information about stuff we're up to. We're also posting the Almanac, pretty much the entire thing, in social media posts over the course of the year. And if anyone is interested in distributing it, or starting a book club, or maybe selling it at wholesale, or sticking it in the free little libraries, coming up with some way to use it or use it as a

or just giving out to a bunch of rural friends or what have you. So we've made a lot of connections, and I think other people have made connections through distributing it, which is definitely something… I think that we thought there was potential for that but I don't think that we expected to have the impact that it has.

TFSR: How has it grown from issue to issue? You can only see that scale, I guess, because you said it's a second issue. How has it changed? And can you talk a bit about the content of it?

M: I would say it's more robust this time around, I think there are so many things that you can put into an almanac. If you look at the ones you would find at a grocery store, there's everything from like horoscope to recipes to the moon calendar, maybe growing tips, and some weird Christian stuff, and some weird funny stuff. It's all over the board. So, as a project, the possibility sometimes can be very overwhelming. I think the first issue, we did a good job of trying a bunch of stuff and trying to be like "Oh, we should do this, we should do this, we should do this." But we're all doing this as volunteers and definitely not making any money off this. So we were stretched pretty thin. But what's nice about this most recent issue, the second issue is that I think other people took to that and started submitting things that are elaborating on that idea of what reference material can you include, what's a comic that can be done for it, different ways of writing for it. I think it's more filled out. It's maybe even a little bit longer, maybe 15-20 pages longer than the last one, but it feels denser or richer. And we also printed a lot more of them and are hoping to distribute them more widely, both regionally – regionally, we distribute in garden centers and some friendly nurseries, various local businesses throughout the Gulf South – and to friends around the country and actually even outside of the country.

H: Just to add on to that a little bit. I think one of the things that are really clearly grown in to the second issue – and I'm excited to see how it develops into later issues – is that the

reference section is just getting more and more filled out. And we're reprinting things from the previous year, there was a really nice comic strip from last year that explains fruit tree propagation with nice little diagrams of how to cut the branches and everything like that. And we reprinted that and a comic on banana propagation and also have a lot of just new resources like maps that show some of the shifting hardiness zones are growing zones throughout the US of where the coldest minimum temperature is and how climate changes change that and things like that. For me, doing stuff around the garden, I'm actually starting to have the Almanac around to reach for it because it's like "Oh, the seed germination temperature chart is going to be really useful for this, the soil chart is going to be really useful for that." Another thing that we filled out a lot more this year was historic dates and things like that, and the calendar section to add more reference points of a global radical history of struggle around food and land and stuff, which is obviously an incredibly huge topic that covers struggles literally all over the world, but we tried to at least have more little entry points or just citations of things for people to get excited about and then do more research.

TFSR: It says in the editorial statement that not all the contributors and editors are a part of Lobelia Commons. But for those who are involved with that project, can you tell us a bit about that collective and its relationship to the so-called New Orleans? And could you repeat the indigenous name for the territory that somebody referenced, I think it was M.?

M: Bulbancha. Lobelia started pretty much right when the pandemic hit. It came out of the swelling of interest and mutual aid. A number of us had started in the New Orleans Mutual Aid Group. And that grew out of this pre-existing food share. Basically, there wasn't food coming in from the port that was providing the excess with which that food share existed. Then the project basically was buying bulk from Costco as many mutual aid projects around the country were doing. NOMAG, as

projects became isolated and weird in different ways. There is a general understanding now, certainly, among anarchists that our projects need to be conflictual, they need to be part of these larger struggles, we can't escape climate change, it's coming for us wherever we are.

So there's like a lot of really material things I think people should be thinking about to try to avoid that isolation. Because it can happen even with the best of intentions if you get just too involved in projects that keep you facing inward and you're just biting off more than you can chew with the land itself, or what you're trying to do with it. Distance and gas prices and the jobs being nearby or not – all of these things are factors that matter when we're trying to figure out and cultivate the flows in and out of these spaces. The flows of people and resources that are needed to sustain a project and the people involved emotionally, physically, financially, socially, etc.

That's going to look really different in every context. **But just a general framework or an idea that I found useful is this concept of the "captured garden."** The standard example of a captured garden is from the height of the coal era in Appalachia when people are living in company towns, where the coal company controls everything. In a lot of cases, people were actually required to have a garden so that the mine owners didn't have to pay people as much because they knew they were growing their own food. This stands in sharp contrast to just a generation or two before that, when growing food was something that gave people more freedom and autonomy and bargaining power when it came to dealing with the coal companies. If the wages were too low, you could just go back to the holler and grow food on your little plot of land and also have this large ecological base to draw from around, this forest and hills that everyone was using as a commons to graze their animals and hunt and things like that. And by the time of the company towns and the captured garden, a lot of that had been destroyed and taken from people. And so the captured

probably what you'd look like if you were sitting in a cabin by yourself for 20 years.

M: Exactly.

H: When we're talking about the pitfalls of the homesteader mentality or the back-to-the-land movement, I think what M said about self-sufficiency being this ahistorical myth that never existed on the household or family level, in any agrarian land-based society, I think that's a good place to start. And obviously, also, there are a lot of things that need to be addressed with settler nostalgia or the nostalgia for American settler culture that seems to be a part of the homesteading that some people are trying to do. Those things are very present and are a huge problem that needs to be addressed in the larger movement or the larger wave of new interest in growing food and getting more connected to the land.

But at the same time, I don't think that they're really new or surprising concerns for anarchists or people who listen to this show. We aren't trying to have just a bunch of self-sufficient nuclear families. We don't have any reverence for settler culture. In fact, for those of us who are white, if we find any inspiration or affinity with white people in early colonial history, it is only those people who were fully defecting from settler society and were welcomed into Native society *[ed. – see the companion piece to **Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation**]* or who were otherwise complicit in the struggle of Native people against colonization and were assisting that in really material ways.

And similarly, I don't think that we really suffer from the same strategic delusions or missteps of the back-to-the-land movement in the 60's and 70's, in which case, a lot of people were trying to just drop out, and their

movements in the '90s onwards. These days, his writings (while sharp on technological society – if very much suffering from focusing on that alone – always having contained conservative elements) have enough ambiguity that, despite his own protests, it is the radical right who are mobilising his ideas to their own ends.

it became known, really just got a ton of volunteers, so many people lined up for that. A number of us who were involved in starting also were gardening and doing weird stuff with mushrooms and whatever, just nerding out about plants and the logistics of what allows New Orleans to exist in its contemporary state. So we just started like "Oh, let's just do our own thing about focusing on food autonomy." Because we're clearly missing something.

If a pandemic hits or if some severe crisis hits, the experience of New Orleans tells us a lot about FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and that the state is really not coming. If the state does come it looks like huge lines, like a food bank like that, or just these poultry things. So how can we start to chip away? **What does experimentation look like in terms of really fundamentally relating to food and place differently than we are raised or taught to?** We've done a number of projects, and a lot of things have just not stayed the test of time, had failed. But we started with a plant delivery service, basically. So, when people were delivering groceries, we were delivering plant starts, then when we no longer felt as necessary to do the delivery thing – also, that was a ton of labor for no real reason – we basically just started promoting what we call the decentralized nursery, which is a newfangled name for something that people already do throughout the world. Basically, if you're starting some plants for your garden, just start a few extra and put them out in front of your house and give them out for free to your neighbors. So we tried to encourage people to do that a lot. A lot of people started meeting their neighbors and maybe a punk house, living in a Black neighborhood, some white punks who had never had good relationships with their neighbors for a number of reasons suddenly are talking to their neighbors. **And there's starting to be this breaking down of a colonial line over this meeting point of plants.**

And we went on to start a number of other projects, maybe one of which that's still going on is this mycology club which started as we call it the Mushroom Collaborative, but upcoming this week we're doing an inoculation. But the idea is basically just to learn with each other about how to produce mushrooms, learn how to identify mushrooms, and just do foraging walks. We meet every now and then and we're open to people joining. It's a very caring space, people bring coffee and doughnuts. Usually, someone brings some critical reading about mushrooms, or fungi generally. **It's been a great space and the project I'm most excited about within that group is to form what we're calling a mushroom commons and to basically inoculate logs with shiitake, or lion's mane or reishi, and basically hide them around some of the parks in the city, and that people could then start to forage in the urban setting.** Hadley, maybe you want to take it on?

H: Yeah. There are definitely a bunch of other little projects or initiatives that I could speak to that are more of the things I've been involved in. **Because one of the things that are really nice about Lobelia is we always intended it to be a very decentralized thing that doesn't feel tied to one particular space within the city, it's not tied to one particular activity or even gardening, specifically.** We want to imagine it being a much larger range of whatever people are excited about doing. For example, I haven't participated in as much as I'd like because I'm out of the city. I missed their public days sometimes, the Herb Commons group has been really cool, where it's a bunch of people with a lot of skills around herbalism, who gather different things, or they'll put the call to the larger group, and those of us who are growing herbs can contribute some of what we have or some of what we're harvesting wild and send it to the folks working on the Herb Commons stuff. And then they go and do a pop-up tent in a public park or along a walking path, and have informational materi-

very isolating, and it also feels in line with prepping or individualistic or the new version of having a nuclear family and moving to the suburbs where it's severed. So trying to reverse that severing, to continue those connections.

H: Yeah. Just to piggyback on that idea is that a distinction between food autonomy and isolated food production. And I think food autonomy is inherently a very social thing and something that's directed towards a communing or commoning or sharing that a lot of the back-to-the-land thing or this macho "I'm going to move to this cabin and produce everything that I need to sustain [myself]," which is just totally ahistorical, sounds extremely lonely and not at all what should be considered food autonomy. That's as a solo project.[2]

TFSR: Yeah. And I think it would probably have less inherent adherents, or followers online if it looked a little less like Tom of Finland[3] a little more like Ted Kaczynski[4] because that's

[2] ed. – "What we truly need in this war against civilization, this war for our lives, is not to break off relationships but to create more abundant relationships. We do not need communities with pretensions of self-sufficiency, living off the product of their own labor, hacking their means of subsistence out of the womb of an inert and passive earth with the sweat of their own brow. We need communities that ridicule the very ideas of labor and property by reviving reciprocity, cultivating the gift, and opening our eyes to the worldview that these practices create. […] Instead of a closed circle, the gift is a subversive invitation to abandon capitalism and the worldview it inculcates. This is true whether the gift is a basket of tomatoes from your garden, mushrooms or calendula you have gathered, a day spent measuring and cutting doorframes for a neighbor's new house, or an afternoon taking care of a friend's children. […] Rather than fleeing the cities, going back to the land in a mutiny destined to self-isolation and failure, the practice of the gift allows us to return to capitalism's terrain – and all the people held captive there – with forms of abundance and sharing that encourage further struggle" (Against Self-Sufficiency: the Gift).

[3] ed. – Touko Valio Laaksonen; iconic homoerotic artist.

[4] ed. – Imprisoned for the long series of letter-bomb attacks of the 'Freedom Club' against US technological enterprises and scientists, Ted Kaczynski's supposedly 'self-sufficient' solo lifestyle in a Montana cabin and writings were an important influence on radical ecological and green anarchist

doors on logs. There are molds everywhere, sometimes there are molds on our mushroom logs that we want in the soil, and the trees are growing. It's always contradictory. And the way out of that is through it, you need to promote diversity from the perspective of someone who is a fungal partisan is to, in some ways, increase contamination, different kinds of contamination, and create more fungal competition and more fungal communion. Again, not to come at these indoor mushroom facilities, we hope to one day also be able to have those kinds of facilities, because they definitely have their place. But there's a definite distinction between the laboratory and the home space, and the laboratory and the school and any other public space, and a lot of that policing has been gendered labor. That comes through with a lot of stuff that Hadley was talking about, in respect to that being very appealing towards a politics of purity or white supremacy, fascism, hetero-misogyny, and, on forth.

B: Yeah, I used to go back to some of what you're saying about the commodification of the image of nature. As it relates to back-to-the-land mentality, or cottagecore, whatever, homesteading aesthetic, and I guess something I'm noticing in this conversation is just the constant thread of connection and trying to break down the severing that happens when a commodity is created or is maintained in the public eye, through social media, as a representation of what it's supposed to be based on what is the most marketable.

It's difficult, right? Because if you're trying to run a mushroom farm as a way to sustain yourself, there isn't a certain element of having to play into that, where you still have to sell the mushrooms at the end of the day. So I think that we all have to still participate in these systems that exist. I'm new to Lobelia as a project, but I feel like part of what I'm seeing in Lobelia, and part of what I want to continue to see is a continued connection between the city and rural areas. That's what Lobelia seeks to do in a lot of ways, I guess, maybe that's one of the main pitfalls of the idea of back to the land is that it feels

als and lots of different herbs for people to try and take home and learn about, including fun activities. I went one day, and they were teaching people how to dye clothes with mulberry dye, and also just giving away all these herbs and everything. And that one's really cool, because it's also a nice way, if people don't want to go do the public herb commons thing, they can engage with it more on the level of being a gardener who grows many herbs and sends it to the Herb Commons. Or they can have that more active communal interaction with them.

The one that I put a lot of my time into maybe, as I already mentioned, is called the Front Yard Orchard Initiative. That is basically just the goal to propagate and, if we can fundraise, to buy cheaply as many fruit trees as possible and give them away to people, and help people plant them if they want that help. Ideally in the front yard, but we aren't actually strict about that, if people have a better spot for the tree in their backyard and we know that they're going to share it with their family and their neighbors. **It's still a contribution to the overall food commons that we're trying to create.** Through that, we've been propagating and giving away and planting well over 100 fig and mulberry trees. And then lots and lots of other trees that are a little easier to come by – banana, moringa, things like that. And also trees that we have to fundraise and buy, we've also been giving away a bunch of citrus and pecans. What's been also really nice about that has been just getting connected with other young farmers in the city who were excited to also help give stuff away. Because it's one thing to grow 200 trees, but then try to go out and find spots for them all… We've just been handing them off to people and they've planted well over 50 in neutral grounds. For folks who aren't familiar with New Orleans, the neutral ground is what you refer to as the green, grassy strip between two one-way streets, which are really common, they're all over the city. People are walking along them and a lot of time it's where you park your car if the water is going

to be high. We've just been planting a lot of fruit trees through that project.

The last one I'll mention right now is just a little informal, harvest crew or a harvest group where we just let each other know and keep track of different things that are just already growing in the city that don't get utilized. There are just so many fruit trees that are sometimes in wild and cramped spaces, or sometimes they are in front of businesses and they don't get utilized. So we just go out and pick a lot of figs and loquats, and mulberries and try to have some collective processing of those things, to save them or give them away in some way. That one has also just been really great to get people noticing the place that they're living in a little bit more and developing a relationship with the place.

There's this one particular park near the place I stay at in New Orleans that they just recently clear-cut all these beautiful elderberries and mulberries that we used to go harvest from. Now we're starting to think whether or not we need to start paying a little bit more attention to the local neighborhood association politics over other terrible stuff that is happening in that realm.

B: I wanted to bring up a project that we've been involved in, which is working with our friend who is a neighbor and a Black elder community member, she's a Black mama, her name's Miss Althea. Her roof and her house got very damaged in [Hurricane] Zeta and then continued to get pretty severely damaged during [Hurricane] Ida. We've just been working with her and MADR [Mutual Aid Disaster Relief] and NOMAG to get a roof on her house and to try to eventually get solar panels and just see how far we can go with getting her set up so that she continues to be able to support her community in the ways that she has been for many, many years. **We've just been talking about the cyclical nature of disaster relief, and how short-term it can be and spring up immediately**

sorts of people talk about how they're not going to get the vaccine, not that I would tell anybody to trust the vaccine or the pharmaceutical companies in particular, but saying they're not going to get the vaccine because it's going to make them sterile, and it's going to make their body impure. You hear that from a lot of the same hippie types, who would also say things like "Oh, we can't grow a garden in the city, the city is dirty, the city is contaminated. There's lead and all these toxins everywhere." It's true, there are a lot of toxins in the city. There are also a lot of toxins in rural areas, and people end up turning it into this moralizing thing, which is also obviously coming from a completely inaccurate place, whether you're talking about the vaccine, the soil, or anything, everything is contaminated. We are contaminated. Contamination is a good part of our lives, we're full of bacteria that are not ourselves, or they are ourselves *[ed. – see **Memory as a Weapon; An Attempt at Interdependence Storytelling/Worldmaking**].*

So obviously, the purity thing is a fantasy, but it is just scary, honestly, the way it's coming up to the surface in some ways now. I don't have a clear answer of how to address it but I do think that in some ways, the Almanac is intended as something that somebody who's in that mindset can pick up and not be immediately turned off to, but that can start to complicate and challenge some of those views.

M: I think being on the mushroom farm, I think we probably have lots of thoughts about contamination. And a lot of the gourmet and medicinal mushrooms that you would buy at a grocery store or farmers' market are produced in these super sterile environments indoors. And definitely not going to knock them, since some people were involved in our project who grow like that, but there's this constant policing of the space and disciplining of the space that is absolutely related to aesthetics. Any disturbance is really noticed, there's a conflict anytime anything is entering that space, and our attitude here is quite a bit different because we produce mushrooms out-

B: Like bringing baskets of mushrooms into the city people are like "Yeah, that's what you are."

M: I guess we can address the question with respect to some back-to-the-land thing. I actually also don't exactly know what #cottagecore is.

B: Yeah.

TFSR: Me neither. I was hoping that someone else could describe it… [laughs]

Do you think that your project or that it's an interesting thing for your project to engage with the idea of going back to the land in the American imaginary of homesteading and independence and individuality, that gets reproduced in things that I've experienced as being part of cottagecore? If I look at the hashtag on Twitter.com, mostly, there are a lot of images there, and there's a lot of focus on aesthetics. And, again, aesthetics are not bad. But when people prioritize aesthetics over actual engagement and the relationship between themselves and the land, or their health, or their autonomy, or their neighbors, that falls into a trap that capitalism provides. How do you think food autonomy projects can sharpen their teeth? Because I think that food autonomy is a really important challenge to capitalism, as well as to the individualized alienation of capitalist existence.

H: Well, I do think that the aesthetic of cottagecore is definitely something that needs to be attacked. I have been thinking about it a lot recently, about the ways that this really polished, "everything must look beautiful," everything is presented for Instagram? It does tie into this weird obsession with purity and cleanliness, and this traditional whatever-the-fuck. I feel like there has always been this undercurrent in a lot of hippie counter-culture. But since the pandemic, I feel like its potentially fascist qualities of that obsession with purity are really becoming clear or clarified to me in a way.

I don't want to veer too much into talking about the pandemic instead of talking about food. But I'm hearing the same

after a disaster, but the longevity of that is just pretty short-lived. We are trying to sustain that because we're living in a disaster, and we're going to be constantly coming up against these things. So, creating situations and supporting people who are already doing the thing to be able to continue that so that we're not constantly one foot in one foot out, we're firmly facing each thing as it comes along. And we're prepared for it.

TFSR: Concerning that work that you're mentioning and also the example earlier that was given of the white punk house that started relating better to Black neighbors by sharing plants and having a thing in common and literally sharing the means of survival in a lot of ways… New Orleans, like a lot of other places around the country that particularly have large populations of color, have a lot of history of gentrification. And I've heard lots of stories of white punks, for instance, moving into… I grew up in the outer Bay Area, a lot of my friends decided to move to Oakland because housing costs were inexpensive. While they were not personally responsible, they definitely contributed to the displacement of Black and brown populations that have been living there generationally. Building those sorts of connections sounds really important. It's awesome that you all are working with that elder. And I guess another part of that, too. These are thoughts that will lead into a question…

I've seen and talked to people who have done mutual aid projects. And I don't know the ethnic and racial makeup of your group. But in a lot of instances, it's a lot of white folks who have some extra time and maybe a few resources and can do mutual aid, often distributing stuff into Black and brown communities and poor communities. And while it's a cool project that sustains people and takes off some of the pressure of racialized capitalism from folks, it isn't necessarily able to bridge the gap between charity and mutual aid. It doesn't bring folks in and also allows itself to be shaped by the people who these

folks are living beside, and who are taking advantage of the project.

You've already given one good example right now with your neighbor who you're helping with her roof, which is great. But I wonder how Lobelia deal with, for instance… Is it mostly white people that are coming and picking up the plants, are they putting them in their yards and increasing the property value of their neighborhood? And I don't know if y'all are from New Orleans, even. **Have you had any insights or experience of making that branch between moving from charity into a mutual aid project that can not only help sustain people but also contribute to an oppositional force, strengthening the communities against capitalism and gentrification?**

M: Yeah, I think there's a lot of obviously really good stuff there. Lobelia itself was definitely started by people who fit that description, largely white, younger, mostly transplant and have a little bit of extra time because almost all the projects were funded basically with unemployment and stuff. So that definitely fits that bill. And I think that where we've put our focus is moving away from that charity thing. A lot of people say this and don't actually mean it. Probably everyone who's been in Lobelia, it's a "funny thing" because people come and go all the time, so there's not really a membership per se. But the people who do stuff that gets called Lobelia, we've all probably done mutual aid that is effectively charity. And we all know that that feels terrible. It's super draining. **Honestly, most people that are involved with doing Lobelia activities are pretty generally over activism *[ed. – see What is Insurgency?],* or at least critical of activism in some way.**

So most of our energy is localized, it's where we are pretty much. The decentralized nursery is an example, that's something that just relates to your neighbors, we're not meeting up and being like "Okay, where's the most marginalized group that we can go support?". If there's a group that reaches out to

in all sorts of different forms. **To pretend like we have some excellent idea that you see in some more permaculture circles, for example, that we need to proselytize or bring to the poor people who can't figure it out. It's just a totally backward way of thinking.** Just being innocuous in a way, or doing your thing quietly. And then when it's time to show up and support – if you're a settler – Indigenous comrades, or Black comrades or worker comrades, or just your neighbors or your friends, show up with the capacities that you've built. Because there's nothing that you can do that will make you not a settler, but your relationship with the land can change based on how you choose to live in relation to it.

H: Also, just while we're on this topic, I wanted to clarify that our collective at Indian Bayou includes several Indigenous people, it's a combination of Black and Indigenous and white folks here.

TFSR: Cool. Those are all really good answers. I appreciate you responding.

Living in Asheville, as I do, over the years I've seen a lot of little shops pop up that are homestead-themed, they play with this settler concept of going back to the land: I am wondering if you have any ideas about how projects like yours can contribute to a countering to things like cottage core,[1] or another niche, capitalist re-visioning of what it means to live in relation to the land?

H: We are definitely very anti-cottagecore. There's a lot there. I'm not sure quite where to start.

M: We were just laughing about it a second ago, because I feel like we go back into the city and we're constantly labeled cottagecore.

[1] ed. – Born on the internet (and largely existing there, rather than in the complexity of actual rural life), an aesthetic heavily leaning into traditionally-patriarchal historical settler-colonial family life on the farm.

collapse, especially in the form of levees and floodgates. So, I think with respect to food autonomy and its relationship with those infrastructural projects, it's just completely necessary. It's absolutely critical to the functioning of those projects, to the point that it's no longer an activisty activity. It's the lifeblood and provides many avenues for imagination and experimentation inside those projects.

B: I feel like, in some ways, it relates to your question about "mutual aid" or what is often charity in certain capacities, but I guess, for someone who's a white settler to know the answer to that question, I feel like is problematic. **For myself, in these projects, there needs to be an acknowledgment of not knowing and not decide that this is like the way it needs to be. Or [not] in this position where we're isolated and we're going out into these areas, and we know what's best, and this is how we're going to plug in, but being in community, I think, is one of the best ways to dissolve that, or to challenge that and to challenge oneself. Because you're opening yourself up to asking people "What is it? What is it the community needs? Are the ways that we're able to plug in?"** Based on, for example, asking Miss Althea what she needs or what she wants, rather than deciding for her. That extends itself to indigenous communities where it's like "okay, there's no way that I could know if I'm not in a community with indigenous comrades." I think the first step is to be connected and also to be receptive to criticism and change. Being open to that, I think, is the biggest part of that.

M: Yeah. I'd add a little bit that being guided by humbleness and willingness to learn is critical, because a lot of the stuff that we're doing, say, here in southwestern Mississippi, we're largely producing mushrooms, raising tree crops, and have a prep plant nursery. And these aren't novel ideas by any means. We're just doing the means of both subsistence and survival for countless people for basically since humanity has been around,

us that's maybe doing that work and wants a bunch of plants for whatever reason, wants a garden – that has happened in the past, and the Louisiana Seafood Worker Alliance, the past two years, we've given them between 50 and 200 Roselle hibiscus plants, but we're not like organizing in that way. **We need to eat and our neighbors need to eat. And we want to talk to our neighbors and have strong connections with our neighbors. That comes from not this idealistic or selfless thing. In some ways, it's "I want to have fun when I'm doing this."** And oftentimes, it's very joyless to just seek out how we can do the most good. That's largely why we've been rooted in specifically where we are. The relationship with Althea is probably the greatest articulation. Some of us have known Althea for seven or eight years. Some of us were eventually pushed out of that neighborhood. But they still keep up very strong relationships with a lot of people that continue to live there, or were forced out of that neighborhood as well.

TFSR: This isn't so much meaning to be directed at you all individually. Because I know there's a decolonial lens that shows up frequently in the book. And I think that it's important to talk about that and the difficulty of navigating being a part of a settler-colonial society and that settler colonialism is an ongoing project and not one that's passed, which is the thing that the book points to. So I am wondering when people talk about infrastructure projects, if you have thoughts about how that relates to settler-colonial society?

H: Yeah, I might have a rambly answer to it.

TFSR: It'll match my rambly questions.

H: I think there are a lot of different aspects to how to approach it. A big part of it just has to do with history and getting acquainted with the history of the places that we're in and making sure we keep those things present in a way. Here at Ndn Bayou, we grow some sugarcane. And I feel like there's no way to grow sugarcane and have people here and give them the tour here and talk to them about the sugar cane that we grow, we

have it as a visual barrier. But you can't grow sugarcane without talking about the history of slavery and the way that plant was so integral to the whole colonial project in so many ways in this region, and sometimes people talk about New Orleans as the northernmost Caribbean city. We're very close to all of that history. So when I talk about growing sugarcane, I try to teach people, if they don't know about it already, people who are visiting the farm, talk about the Haitian Revolution and talk about CLR James' *The Black Jacobins*, which I try to recommend to people, we have it in the library here. **And I tried to get people to read from it or talk about the history of the way James describes the enslaved people in the northern plains of Haiti at that time, who were, in some sense, one of the earliest industrial proletariats in the world, because they lived in these huge camps with hundreds of people working these huge body-destroying mills. As soon as they had the opportunity, they chased all the slave owners into the cane fields and lit the cane fields alight, and burned them alive there.** I think we need to come at it from a sense of we are coming from a settler-colonial society, some of us, but we just need to be clear about which side we're on to some extent, and in this space, in particular, because of our having been rooted in this struggle against this pipeline that was led by indigenous people, we have a bunch of very direct relationships. So we can actually very easily be sending stuff here to our friends on the rez in the southwest, not to be specific about that place.

There are various forms of support that we can give having this place, and just as a refuge for people to come through lots of different things like that. It's definitely not that easy for people who are just trying to have a relationship to land and a land project or inside a city like that. They don't already have those connections. It can feel weird to be "Okay, well, I don't want to be a settler here doing my garden project. So I need to go out and find the most public-facing, Indigenous organization to go

meet those people." It just has a top-down looking at the world, like a map-colonial viewpoint almost even to just approaching things from that way sometimes. So I don't have clear answers for people in other contexts.

M: I think that's why our focus on the connection between these rural farms in the city is so important, because, aside from obviously just doing an isolated thing, having that connection is what literally makes, say, a farm in the rural south or anywhere, for that matter. **That's what makes it having that connection is what makes it actually become counter-infrastructure, something that can be used more widely and for partisan ends.** So, having those places and the connections and having it be social is what allows for establishing these flows. I think it's important to encourage familiarity with the place as people come and visit these various farm or rural spaces from the city and vice versa, to encourage familiarity while maintaining an openness to potential discomfort that could come there.

And there's actually a piece in the Almanac called "Beyond the Levee". It talks a lot about this historical counter infrastructure or maybe infrastructure against the state in the colony. That obviously took place in the form of maroons most famously *[ed. – see **'All That Wildness Names'**; maroons existed not just in Jamaica but across the so-called 'New World']*, but also in other forms of desertion and fugitivicity and at times insurrection. **The piece ends with this imagining of a not-so-distant future where state infrastructure has collapsed to a further degree than we already currently experience and how those histories can be honored and lived as a means of survival and preserving dignity.** I think it's important to consider the potentials that developing these types of counter-infrastructure and the social world that they create and are a part of can aid and abet some future fugitivity and other types of movement that might become necessary as the state infrastructure continues to literally