

THE *Final Straw*

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



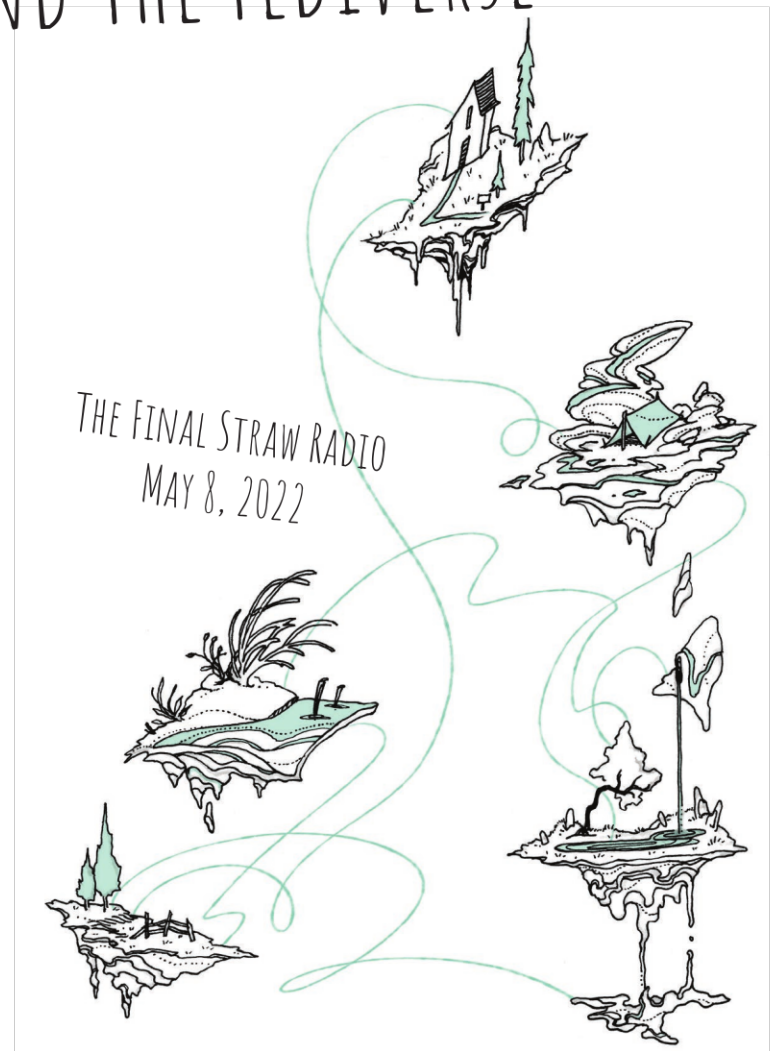
The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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AUTONOMOUS SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FEDIVERSE



TFSR: Your little island. Thanks a lot for taking the time to have this conversation. I really appreciate it and all that you had to share. So thanks.

L: Cool. Thank you so much for reaching out. It was great talking to you.

TFSR: You too.

This week, we spoke with Liaizon Wakest. Liaizon grew up in an anarchist commune in rural America. They can be found climbing into dumpsters from Mexico to Kazakhstan looking for trash to make art with. In recent years they have been focused on research into ethical technology and infrastructural anarchism. For the hour we speak about the interoperable, open source ensemble of federated online publishing servers and platforms known as the Fediverse and its most popular component, Mastodon. This conversation takes place in the context of media hullabaloo about Elon Musk seeking to purchase Twitter, the paradigm in which a rich egomaniac can own the addictive social media platforms over which so much social and political life is engaged and what positives we can draw from alternatives like Mastodon and the Fediverse.

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L: Oh, yeah, Kolektiva is an awesome project. I'm really excited to see that continue to grow. Shouting out some instances that are doing really cool stuff-

TFSR: What do they do? They seem to have their hands in a couple of different things, right?

L: Yeah. They're doing great stuff. Another instance in the Fediverse that's continually been doing really awesome stuff is Posts.Lurk.Org. They've been doing really cool stuff. Social.coop is another really good instance that's a cooperatively run ?? Merveilles.Town is a very small community of really incredible artists. That's invite-only and a lot of really inspiring people are working on stuff there. They've attracted a lot of interest into the Fediverse just by being a bunch of weirdos doing really awesome stuff.

TFSR: There's the Mastodon instance that Kolektiva is operating, but I think they're also doing— Since member projects such as SubMedia have had difficulties in the past with keeping their stuff up on YouTube, I guess the PeerTube instance, right?

So I guess if you're involved in a media project you could look at either creating— We don't have any hosting anywhere, we have a Mastodon account on chaos.social where we post our content, and is usually not very much more than that, but I guess if you're approaching-

L: What is your Mastodon account, if you want to just shout it?

TFSR: @thefinalstrawradio@chaos.social, I'm still not used to vocalizing the address in the way that a Twitter profile gets vocalized.

L: Yeah, that's just the learning curve of figuring out how to say and talk about these things is interesting.

TFSR: What about yours? What's the instance if people want to find your work?

L: My account is @liaizon@wake.st. That's just on my own instance of one.

Liaizon: My name is Liaizon Wakest. I'm involved in too many projects, I don't even know where to start in that space. But, I am from a commune in Wisconsin that I grew up on and was there for the first large part of my life. So, I'm a second-generation freak. The commune I grew up at was involved in a lot of— Our two main points were hypermedia and permaculture: the convergence of plant stuff and weird tech stuff, and thinking of life as performance art. I currently live in New Orleans. I've been out here for about eight years now. I'm currently working on building a treehouse, which is a very different type of thing than doing weird anarcho-tech stuff.

TFSR: What do you or the commune mean by hypermedia?

L: The H from HTML also is hyper. So... hypermedia was an early term that fell out of vogue in the 90s. But it's the idea that you break down all the walls between different types of creation. All art forms and all creation are one in the world of— When you start integrating new technologies that enable new types of creation, those walls start breaking down, and you can just think of life as art and life as creation. But especially hypertext and the idea of hypertext and of the internet came from some of the same rhetoric in the sense of breaking down the linearity of the different types of media.

TFSR: I guess, it means more than text in some ways, right? Because suddenly you can embed links to other texts and go down this weird rabbit hole that you wouldn't have been able to with a necessarily linear published pamphlet or book.

L: In the sense of hypertext, but then in hypermedia, it's everything. It's audio and video and interactive stuff, and a noise show. It's the term that is meant to embrace all creation.

TFSR: We were going to speak about anarchistic tech stuff. I guess social media is what I was hoping to speak with you about. Recently, a big thing in the news — and we've been talking about having this conversation well before this hit the news — but this is just one specific set of ripples in the pond... Elon Musk is talking about purchasing, getting control over, and going private with Twitter. There's a lot there: we can talk about the role that non-legacy media and, in particular, social media plays in the political landscape, in terms of government surveil-

lance, corporate surveillance... In terms of the way that government functioned in the last administration, quite literally, where presidential edicts were coming down via Twitter posts.

A thing that the media does is to focus on an individual like Musk and all the companies that he's owned, are the statements that he makes in the media or on social media, or whatever. And that becomes a story. The story that I want to get at and I'd love to hear your comments on is more about the fact that someone can decide to take this thing that has such big political consequences, insert their ego into it and control what happens in it in a way that's consequential to politics and sociality in our society. I wonder if you have any comments about the implications of that.

L: I have lots of thoughts on the matter for sure. I think that in the long run, this will probably be a good thing because it puts more of a spotlight on how weak this system is that we have, the system of all of the news sources and mainstream media sources and social media, and these internet companies, all being these trading blocks between a handful of billionaires. And the more people realize how messed up that is, maybe the more visibility the alternative ways of organizing this stuff can have.

After this happened, we've gotten about almost 200,000 new people signing up on the Fediverse in the last week, from people being "Oh, fuck, no, I don't want to be a pawn in Musk's game, I need to find an alternative." It seems anytime something this happens, it pushes more people to look for alternative infrastructure. And in a lot of ways, whether Twitter is owned by a bunch of venture capitalists, stakeholder companies, or some billionaires, it's still a giant ad machine either way, and there are still a few people who have all the power. In the long run, I don't think that Elon theoretically owning it really makes that much difference. Though, I guess that might be a little bit of the accelerationist take or something. It's okay for something to get slightly worse if it pushes the future probabilities closer to actualization or something.

TFSR: I definitely want to get into a bit about what the Fediverse is, and what are some of its constituents. Can you talk a little bit — before we go into the specifics of that — of what benefits do you think people are going to see crossing over to the Fediverse, for instance, over what they would be experiencing on Facebook or on Instagram or on Twitter?

and French and English militaries have all agreed to start using Matrix as their chat platforms into the future, which in some ways, looks good for Matrix because it's like "Oh, our security is strong enough that we have governments wanting to use it." But it also makes a lot of people really uncomfortable, when they're releasing a press release that they just signed a contract with the German military or the French military.

Another very interesting project that I've been following for a long time that is of similar nature, is Secure Scuttlebutt, a very similar in goal to the Fediverse, though a bit more utopian. And ways further off in the ability for it being a non-tech thing. Some people are not super technically minded using it, but there's a hill to climb for several reasons but the project is very awesome and it's being done by a lot of really great people. Your question was just related to social projects?

TFSR: Not even social. I guess social in terms of the aims and goals of the production of it, but just other alternative parallel infrastructure that you use, you're interested in, or you think people might find cool to check out on their own?

L: Delta Chat is another one that is mostly being created by anarchists and it's also a chat protocol built on top of the email standard, or not chat platform, chat protocol / server sort of thing built on email protocols. So you can use your already existing email ability and there's a layer on top of that that you can chat with using this open standard. It's also encrypted. So it's similar in security standards to something like Signal.

And then also, there's the world of XMPP and Jabber. There's a good amount of activity in that space. And that's one of the oldest and original federated chat protocols. And it has somewhat failed many times through many takeover attempts by different corporations. But it's another standard with a lot of people who are very excited about it, and there's been some renewed activity in that space in the last two years or so. That's pretty interesting to follow. And yeah, if you're a more security-minded person, it's worth looking into using XMPP.

TFSR: Cool, I didn't have any more questions, Wakest. Are there any other topics that you want to talk about? I may reach out to some folks that I know that are working and Kolektiva and just see if they have any-

been messing with Castapod a little bit and have a lot of difficulties. But partially, that's my lack of access to French and a lot of the developers are based in France, as far as I can tell.

If someone has a project in mind, where's a good place for them to look for support and getting started?

L: I would say, technical support wise, if you just start asking questions into the void of the Fediverse, there are a lot of very smart people who are very excited to answer technical questions. You need to have somewhat of a following to get responses. But I would say, as someone new on the Fediverse, it's a pretty open space. And if you just start talking to people, people want to help, even the main developers. In that sense, you have to be a little bit fearless to just be okay with asking basic questions, not being afraid that you're looking like a "newb" and just ask. Just go ask the person who wrote the software directly, publicly and say, "Hey, I can't figure this out? Will you help?" And if they're like "I'm too busy", if you ask the void a little bit more, you will get a good amount of response.

There are also a ton of Matrix rooms for all the different projects that are filled with people who want to help each other figure this out. And there's a ton of different groups that are like "We're trying to do this, or we're trying to help with this." And that's pretty active.

TFSR: You mentioned Matrix, I was gonna ask about outside of the Fediverse, which is pretty big if you could name some other interesting parallel infrastructure. Matrix, if I understand, is an end-to-end encrypted version of Discord that's open source. Is that a fair way to describe it?

L: I wouldn't liken it to Discord that much, but I have heard people say that. Matrix is an interesting project and it still has ways to go before it's really, honestly, ready for primetime. But it's usable now. I have a lot of mixed feelings about Matrix right now that I won't go into, but I am excited for following the development of Matrix. There are a bunch of communities that are using it as their main communication channel right now. And there are a lot of really smart, interesting people working on getting Matrix up to par for being more light. It's a very similar project to the Fediverse with a few different goals, I think they're trying to appeal to corporations and corporate backing a bit more than a lot of other open-source-y projects. They've gotten some VC money and the German

L: There are a lot of different angles to go at it to answer that question. The Fediverse is a lot of things. It's not one platform. So all of the other options or examples that you just laid out, other than the Fediverse, are companies owned by shareholders. Those companies decide exactly what happens and how it works and what it looks like and who's invited and have complete technical control over how their network functions and what kind of activities can happen on it, how those things work, and how to collect money, how to exploit the people who are using it, etc.

If you're familiar with the Fediverse at all, you're familiar with Mastodon, which is the biggest piece of software that is a part of the Fediverse. But the Fediverse is much more than just that. Mastodon was made as an alternative to Twitter using an already existing protocol that has actually been around for about 13 years in various forms under various names. The Fediverse actually started about 13 years ago. And it originally started as an alternative to a very early Twitter, 13 years ago, Twitter was a very different thing than it is today. But there was an explosion of this idea of microblogging and Twitter was not the only one to do that. There were a bunch of projects and companies and people who realized that one of the stumbling blocks of blogging, which at the time was one of the biggest parts of the internet was that, it's so structured that people— there's this stumbling block in finishing something before you publish it. By removing the assumption that you need to publish articles, as opposed to snippets and thoughts and little blobs, you remove this thing to be scared by, which enables a lot more activity and a lot of different interactions that weren't intended in the blogging space when people were designing blogging software.

So, the Fediverse, in its current state, is many, many different pieces of software that all use a common protocol which is called ActivityPub. It basically just lays out how messages and data are shared between distinct servers. The Fediverse is made up of about 6,000 servers right now, all run by different individuals around the world, and all with their own codes of conduct, policies, ideologies, and politics. And all of those servers have the ability, through this protocol called ActivityPub to talk to each other. And all of the types of interactions that you would expect in social media can be related in a standard way that any developer can then implement in whatever code and stack that they want to use to be able to share the standard way of communicating packets of data between servers. Mastodon is the biggest one, or the biggest piece of software that is being used, but there are many, many other different pieces of software

that are also part of the Fediverse and are also using the same standard. There's PeerTube, which is probably the second biggest, for video sharing, as a project specifically to combat YouTube. It's also anarcho infrastructure-minded in its formulation. All of the Fediverse is open source and there are almost no companies involved in the Fediverse. Now there are a few little ones that people have started to support themselves working on it full-time. But in general, it's almost all individuals working on it out of passion and care for the future of communication. There's one called WriteFreely, which is for more long-form blogging. There's a new one that started pretty recently called BookWorm for logging and sharing what you're reading and updates about— Like GoodReads or LibraryThing.

But it's also federated. I guess I should explain what Federation is. All of the Fediverse and the Fedi part of Fediverse (federated universe) is a federated network. The analogy that most people use and are familiar with is email as a federated network design. Any email address can email any other email address, and the servers don't need to first know about each other. In an email, anyone can start a new server, like fluffycats@mouse.net. And that can, by default, using the protocol of email, send a message to any other already existing email account in the world. People don't even really think about that inherent difference between email and modern social media. The mainstream social media today is everyone existing on one server. Twitter is just one gigantic computer that is sharing messages on itself. Whereas email is millions of computers that have pads between them and can share messages using a federated protocol, which in the case of the email is SMTP. The Fediverse is basically that same model but updated for the kinds of interactions that we expect in modern social media. Things like liking and replying and boosting and sharing and following — are all activities that one would expect in the case of social media, but everyone has grown up accustomed to— If you're on Instagram, you can only follow other people on Instagram, whereas on the Fediverse, you can follow anyone using any different kind of platform and the data gets into your local stream of whatever you're using.

TFSR: I guess there's one potential benefit to draw out of that, because of the federated model there and anyone being able to start a server if they have the resources available to them, that leads to the creation of a lot of different potential spaces where it's allowable to have certain kinds of speech that maybe you would be excluded from Twitter or Instagram or Facebook for. So to continue as we do with the example

another user that uses that same email. But it's not a thing I ever think to use. But I think because Mastodon is such a flashy and friendly and welcoming platform, it makes me feel like "Oh, yeah, I'll interact with this, it's Instagram or it's Twitter or whatever else. I can message people, I can private message people, whatever else." It's pretty cool.

So with this surge of new users to Mastodon that you mentioned and that's been written about — PC Mag has a big article about it with Musk's announcement of purchasing Twitter shares — this seems to happen actually, frequently, when major corporate platforms are involved in the news cycle. Like when CrimethInc and ItsGoingDown were kicked off of Facebook a few years back as alongside a lot of other anti-fascist sites, a bunch of people migrated to some degree over to Mastodon or to other social media. But in a lot of these cases, people will be there and then they'll cycle back. They'll put their account on hibernate for a little bit, try the other thing, and then when it doesn't hit the same part of their brain, they may move back. Do you have any ideas about what may be some keys to keeping people wanting to stay with this alternative?

L: Honestly, I think a lot of that is there are no addiction mechanisms built-in to keep you. You log in and maybe everyone's just talking about what they ate for breakfast, and there's no exciting drama that is being shoved in your face and you're like, "Oh, this is boring, everyone's just talking about eggs right now." Drama and news and horror are really addictive. There's an intrinsic reason right there why people go back to this thing that they hate because it has, as these mechanisms built-in, that keep them hooked. The Fediverse doesn't have that, so unless you're actively deciding what kind of people you're interacting with and taking an active role in that gardening, you might just drop off. And I think that's okay, I think that's actually fine.. I think that it probably makes the interactions that end up happening on the Fediverse a lot nicer too because the people who are there are there because they want to be there, not because they got a notification that some celebrity just punched some other celebrity on their phone, or whatever.

TFSR: Getting involved in technical projects often takes a sharp learning curve. Can you talk a little bit about troubleshooting in the community and creating instances and how to get assistance, if someone decides that they want to set up a PeerTube where they want to— I've

posts go viral randomly if the right person interacts with them. But in general, anyone who's not trying to be a social media influencer doesn't actually have that much visibility and is by default silo-ed to just the people who have explicitly gone out of their way to find them on mainstream social media. In this new dynamic, in the Fediverse, people are explicitly finding you, or finding you through a chain of friends posting something, or friends of friends posting something in this natural way, as opposed to the algorithmic boosting of content that you can play with in the Instagrams and Twitters of the world.

TFSR: One instance or one punk show made me think of the conversation that happened on From Embers a couple of months ago, which is another podcast that I listen to, and that are friends in the Channel Zero Network. And the person that was the guest hosts an instance for their small anarchist and punk community in the city that they live in. And the way that they explained what they were expecting to get out of it as in they create this instance, a server, they allow friends that they know to sign up to it, they assume that all the interactions are going to be transparent to the rest of the internet. But as you said, with an Instagram post about a punk show, you may get to some of the people that are on Instagram and that are in your community or whatever. But there's suddenly this microblog opportunity for anyone on the internet to just say, "I'm in X city, I wonder what punk stuff is going on, I'm going to find this publicly available RSS feed coming off of that instance that says when the upcoming punk shows that they want everyone to know about is." Approaching it in this way makes a lot of sense in some ways. It's also kind of weird — we've gone back to the time when people just ran websites for their scenes, going through the eye of the needle and back through the other side.

L: Yeah, that's a great way of looking at the Fediverse. It's a self-hosted indie website, but with the dynamics that we expect in the modern space of more levels of interaction.

TFSR: It seems that's the thing that a lot of blogging sites have always had is this element of it's not just about you as the poster, but there are ways to interact with other posters on that same platform. Like with Noblogs, we can chat with or follow or friend other people, we can send private messages through encrypted email through the servers to

of anarchists, anarchists can talk about radical alternatives to the state, attacks that occur against infrastructure, or prison breaks without a fear that they're going to get shut down directly necessarily by the host of their specific platform on the Fediverse. Unless it counters the terms of service that are agreed to or the social contract or whatever that thing is. That can be a positive, right?

L: On the Fediverse, you can host everything yourself. So if you're running an anarchist instance, and you want to host 100% of your instance, you can get a used server for \$100 on Craigslist and plug it into the wall in a basement and run a Fediverse server with 1,000 people on it, with really not that much. It's definitely working. But it's not that complicated. And there's a lot of people who are actually able and willing and currently doing things like that, which hasn't been possible in previous times for what we expect. It's been possible in the sense of collectives running email or chat servers in the past, but this is a new leaf in that ability because you could have a very public presence and a very interactive presence through infrastructure that you entirely manage yourself if you do have— There's definitely technical know-how, but there are enough people around who do have that know-how and the excitement to do that. There's an anarchist collective in Italy, I can't think of their name off the top of my head right now.

TFSR: Autistici, who hosts Noblogs?

L: They're connected, but that's not who I was thinking of. But they run a bunch of Fediverse stuff out of a squat, using all found and collected infrastructure. They probably have about 1,000 people using their server. It's not just an analogy, the ability to do that is currently there.

TFSR: That's definitely a positive— If that is something that you are seeking is to have the ability to have a space that is dedicated to the kind of interactions that you want to have, you can run it yourself, and you can look at the code or have someone you trust, hopefully, running the code and keeping up on it. But then also, there's another side to a benefit that someone as a user could have of being one of these because it's open-source, you basically know the information that's being collected about the users, and there's a lot more transparency than there would be, and it's easier to find out, than, for instance, with

Twitter or with Instagram or with Facebook. And with that data being collected, it seems easier to release information that people had the presumption of being private or didn't even know that was being collected about them when those companies get hacked, or if they sell that data to someone else. Is that a fear that people engaging with the Fediverse should have about their data if they're starting accounts on things like Mastodon, or is it just a thing that they'll be more aware of because there's no profit motive there?

L: That's a whole discussion in itself. The Fediverse is mostly public, with people posting stuff publicly. There are different modes you can post, there are private messages and there are limited visibility messages. But in general, data collection on a large scale— If we're using advanced encryption, your data is probably getting collected, nonetheless, somewhere down the pipeline, whether or not it's in a format that's usable by anyone. A lot of it just gets hoarded. But I think if something is publicly visible on the internet, someone's collecting it, no matter what. So the Fediverse is very different than something like Signal in the sense that most of the stuff on the Fediverse is people talking to each other publicly. Though it doesn't intrinsically need to be that, and there's a bunch of people working on building advanced encryption into the Fediverse right now, but that has been somewhat of an afterthought and something very difficult to tack on later, because the Fediverse was entirely designed around public-facing content, and the security privacy part of it came later. But thinking about what you mean when you say security and privacy, the ability to control that your data is available is a separate issue, and control who can silence you and who can limit your visibility. They're very connected topics to privacy and security, but they're not the first things that people think about.

TFSR: Another thing that I could see as being a benefit to something that is parallel or autonomous infrastructure like the Fediverse is that these privately held social media corporations have designed algorithms for the way that people interact with their platforms that are meant to draw people and keep people, not just based on them wanting to read the content or look at the picture in and of itself, but increasing...

L: Making it addictive...

and my server or not. That ability, someone using the same software can then make one for themselves, and also invite all of their friends and have one that has 10 people on it, or 100 people or 1,000 people. I think the biggest server on the Fediverse has 700,000 people on it, it's one out of Japan, pawoo.net that's been around for a really long time. And actually, it's all in Japanese, so it almost exists like a tiny centralized platform, because its users are all writing in Japanese. And it's the biggest congregation of Japanese users on the Fediverse. Most of the rest of the Fediverse doesn't speak Japanese. So they're mostly just talking with themselves. But every now and then, I'll make a post that suddenly blows up on Pawoo and has hundreds of Japanese people talking about it. And that post exists over in that world openly. So there are a lot of very interesting dynamics that exist in this space that just have never been really explored before. And there are a lot of things to try and to experiment with.

TFSR: Do you feel like Mastodon or are these alternative parallel— There are lots of reasons that people would choose to come on to these other social media environments, maybe because they don't like what's going on in the other ones, maybe because of the open-source arguments, or what kind of data is getting collected, or what kind of stuff's getting shoved in their face from the platform, like how many times can you be asked if you want to follow Elon Musk. But does shifting over to these platforms create a silo-ing effect or is there a danger there where we just go into an environment where we're just hearing from people that are similar to ourselves, and not really getting in touch with newer ideas from that. Because I know that we, for instance... I don't like going on Facebook, I'll do a post on Facebook every week that we have an episode for the show and hope that someone will find the content and then start engaging with it on their own separately, but it seems like an opportunity for overlap where people are going to first try the things that are most available to them and then maybe explore out from there.

L: I want to say that that silo-ing is happening already, everywhere. If you have an Instagram account, and you're posting your events to your Instagram account, if you're posting punk shows to a small Instagram account, Instagram will limit the fuck out of you. And you're not actually getting this global audience that you think you are unless you pay to promote each post that you make at this point. You have the potential to have your

There's a lot more depth and dynamic-ness in the types of interactions possible, and I feel it's a lot closer to human interaction in physical space than what we're used to in the "everyone's in the same mall under the same mall rules" of the Facebooks and Twitters of the world.

TFSR: I wonder if you could speak about how autonomous infrastructure can actually be, like you've mentioned squats in Italy that are hosting instances and connected to Noblogs, or I know of a radio station, comrades of ours in Athens that have a squatted radio station that's been running for two decades and stealing, sorry, re-socializing electricity. (They're very particular about that) That is so autonomous. When you're not paying the state regulators for the electricity that you're using and you don't own the building that you're in, you're taking it from a public institution. And the airwaves, literally it is a pirate station. There're limitations in different places around the legality of that activity. In Berlin, friends of ours have told stories about how you can't really operate a pirate radio station for very long without a bunch of police coming in with guns drawn and raiding the space to take the transmitter.

L: Yeah, and there are still lots of pirate radio stations that keep popping up in Berlin even despite that...

TFSR: So I wonder, with the way that web hosting works, when we talked about the moment of Gab being forced to be withdrawn from these different platforms that allowed them to pass their information along, including infrastructure like CloudFlare, for instance, stopping DDoS attacks... How autonomous can these instances actually be? Is that a useful question?

L: I think, in something like what Gab was trying to do, they were trying to build a large platform-size— They were basically trying to use decentralized infrastructure to build a centralized place on top of it. One of the interesting things about the Fediverse is you can build a server. For instance, I run a server that's just for me, and I'm the only user on that server, I make my own code of conduct every time I write something in my head because it's just me deciding what I think is appropriate and morally righteous. No other admin is deciding what I can say, though everyone following me gets to decide whether they want to interact with me

TFSR: Yeah. Refresh rates or populating certain kinds of content at different times. Is that a thing that people could expect to engage with at this point in Fediverse platforms?

L: Right now, on the Fediverse, there is no sorting whatsoever, and no algorithmic decision-making of what you see. Everything is chronological. Every different piece of software on the Fediverse is currently chronological. Mastodon just launched an Explore tab, which uses some ranking of popularity of posts in a specific timeframe. But, I think, each individual server that's running the software gets to decide how their posts are being ranked, or whether to turn that on locally. And the algorithm, everything is open source, so you can see exactly what those ranking algorithms would be doing. That's just a way of discovering content because in the Fediverse, when nothing is being pushed at you when you sign up for an account, you basically start fresh and everything is blank. It's not like "Here, follow Elon Musk". Fucking Twitter, even today, I get a notification, if I open Twitter on an account, like "Would you like to follow Elon Musk?" I've had the same account reminded five times if I want to follow. It's really bizarre.

TFSR: It's like Tom from MySpace.

L: Yeah, it's just a popularity game, if someone's getting a lot of interaction, then the system just keeps pushing that. That kind of interaction isn't on the Fediverse at all now, but there are some very valid reasons for some algorithmic sorting of posts that you want to see, in the sense that if you're following a lot of people, it gets overwhelming very fast. And your ability to look at everything becomes less and less, the more stuff you're trying to consume. Eventually, there will be the need and the willingness to build in some mechanisms for that in the Fediverse. And the main difference being that it will be entirely open and customizable by the person who's getting that. Probably in a couple years, we'll start to see that thing happening in the Fediverse. And the conversations that I've seen people have are as long as it's entirely opt-in, and you get to know exactly what those algorithms are doing and decide which ones you want to use, and you're able to turn them on and off personally. That changes most of the negative dynamic around it.

TFSR: You had mentioned that these protocols are interoperable be-

tween different platforms and instances in the Fediverse, different servers that are running and have their own guidelines. I wonder if you have thoughts about how tools get used in unintended ways. That's a part of hacking, playing with the thing, trying to break it in different ways or make it do things you didn't expect it to do. But then open source and free software, for instance, also gets used... After Gab, I might be wrong, but there was some far-right platform that was taken, Cloudflare stopped protecting-

L: You're talking about the Gab situation? This story got so over-reported that I'm somewhat bored by it, but I can give a quick synopsis. Gab being the first big far-right social media platform, they got a bunch of investment money early on, millions of dollars, they did a very shitty job of building a modern social media website. They built it with a lot of assumptions that turned out to not be true.

When it started getting a lot of attraction, early on, there were rumors that Trump was gonna move there and there was a bunch of prominent far-right figureheads, who were over there going on about some racist bullshit or something. The main thing is first they got kicked off of their main hosting, and they were able to move on to alternative hosting. But their app was kicked off of the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store and that put a new media spotlight on them. They started growing more because they were getting silenced by "big tech" with its "Californian neoliberal stance." So what they did, which was an interesting move, was they basically scrapped all of the platform that they had built ready and had spent over a million dollars on and took a software that is open-source and free to use... They took Mastodon, forked it and rebranded it, and just launched their own Mastodon instance on their original domain and imported all of the old user accounts from their previous software as new users into their Mastodon instance. But they did a lot of things wrong, and that didn't work very well.

Mastodon is made entirely by leftist and anarchists and queer and trans people and people on that side of the political spectrum. So the developers working on Gab, who took Mastodon and tried to change it into their own thing, basically just got squirted at every attempt by most of the people working on Mastodon. They didn't really succeed in utilizing that base very well. The reasons for doing that were quickly squirted because the vast majority of other servers on the Fediverse just instantly blocked and muted and restricted any interaction between Gab and the rest of the

Fediverse. Each server gets to decide that and of course, there are some servers on the Fediverse who are also run by other far-right folks and trolls, and people who just like shitty content. There were a couple pools of servers that were continuing to federate with them, but they ended up not that long after changing their mind again, and they're [the far right] actually still running a strange fork of Mastodon with some of the original Mastodon code, but they turned off all federation and are not part of the Fediverse at all now.

TFSR: A little white ethnostate on the internet.

Even if over overblown in the media, I think it's interesting though that there are baked into these opportunities for not just having to have whatever come across your way, because of the interoperability of the servers with each other, that there are ways to decide to block content from certain directions. Because if it is free and open-source and anyone can participate in it, there's also the right to not have to engage with certain types of content. So the fact that it is technically interoperable between that Nazi server and Kolektiva or something that, the fact that they can burn that bridge between them and say, "You go play over there by yourself, you've got your own sandbox, you do that," I think that says a lot about the potentials of the platform. You don't necessarily have to deal with— If you want to run an instance that specifically follows Juche [ideology] or something that, you can do that. And when enough users on another instance find that obnoxious enough that they talk to the mods there. They can say, "Can you just stop them from being able to interact with us from that instance?"

L: Yep, so for instance, the Fediverse is built in a very modular way, so there are lots of different levels of different types of walls you can put up between different instances and individuals. There's every different type of wall. So on an individual level, you can block any other account, or you can block a server from interacting with you. And then on a server level, each server gets to decide on... you can exist on the allow-list or deny-list model. So you can say, "by default, I talk to everyone," or "By default, I only talk to these servers, and then I need to add who I talk to later on." Or you can say, "I'm open to everyone." And then if some server has too many bad actors on it, you can silence that server, which is slightly different than blocking, it basically says, "None of the content from that remote server shows up publicly unless explicitly requested or explicitly shared."