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[00:00:00] **Rob Hopkins:** There are many different futures, but there are some that result from us doing everything we could possibly have done. And actually, the reality is that all the elements of what that looks like already exist somewhere. Like William Gibson said, "The future's already here. It's just not evenly distributed."

[00:00:14] You can go to Utrecht in Holland and sit by the train station and 40,000 bicycles will cycle past you. It's insane. You go to Liège in Belgium, where they're building a food belt in a way that has just transformed the economy of that city. You know, everything that we need to know already exists somewhere, and there's a lot of research around how when people imagine the world in that way, it increases their sense of agency to create that world

[00:00:44] **Nate Hagens:** Today I'm joined by longtime friend and fellow systems analyst Rob Hopkins for a discussion about how the imagination can help us move from paralysis to action in the face of the complexity of the more than human predicament. Rob Hopkins is a co-founder of Transition Town Totnes and Transition Network, a global grassroots movement dedicated to building community resilience, especially to meet ecological energy and food needs.

[00:01:13] He is the author of many books, including most recently, How to Fall in Love with the Future: A Time Traveller's Guide to Changing the World, and also was the host of the now concluded podcast From What If to What Next. An Ashoka fellow and holder of a doctorate from the University of Plymouth, Rob's work has been featured in TED Global, BBC Radio, and the French film Demain, which means future.

[00:01:41] His collaborative music project with artist Mr. Kit, Field Recordings from the Future, is being developed as a live touring show. In today's conversation, Rob makes the case that we are facing a crisis of imagination, and that our collective inability to vividly envision radically different and better futures might inadvertently lead us down bleak or unrealistic paths.

[00:02:07] Drawing on neuroscience, storytelling, and a lifetime of grassroots work, he explores why creative visions of the future can be a causal force for change. He shares the tools and practices he uses to cultivate what he calls longing at scale, a deep felt sense of what we're building toward, not just running from.

[00:02:30] This includes the concept of evidence-based dreaming, where key events happening in the world are grounded within coherent sensory and emotionally alive pictures, showing us new possibilities. While Rob and I have diverging perspectives in some key areas, we share a commitment to explore the full range of responses to the unfolding more than human predicament.

[00:02:57] And actually, this might be one of the most important aspects of this episode and this channel more broadly. Even among the people that we are highly aligned with in terms of what we value for the future, there will always be pieces we disagree on, and listening to each other to find common ground is one of the best ways to build and expand relationships, which will ultimately form the foundation for any responses to the unfolding predicament around us.

[00:03:24] With that, please welcome Rob Hopkins. Rob Hopkins, welcome to the program

[00:03:31] **Rob Hopkins:** Nate, so lovely to see you again. Been far too long, my friend

[00:03:34] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it's at least since 2009, which I have incredible memories of when the former head of the CIA came up to me at that conference and shook my hand, and then he gave me a hug.

[00:03:46] He put his whiskey down and gave me a hug And I remember your, like, all these high-level f- intelligence and oil people, and then you get on the stage, and you were so soft-spoken, and you could've heard a pin drop, and I remember that. That was the first public talk I had ever given, actually. Oh,

[00:04:05] **Rob Hopkins:** wow Yeah And did, did- didn't you have a thing in the middle where you had, like a, sort of an animated thing that just screamed at everybody?

[00:04:12] **Nate Hagens:** Yes, the Jack Nicholson-like scream – I scared everyone. Yeah. That was 2009. Man, life, goes fast

[00:04:22] **Rob Hopkins:** It does. But then I saw you again in 2013 in a hotel lobby in Milwaukee. We hung out and had a catch-up

[00:04:28] **Nate Hagens:** I'm known to be in hotel lobbies in Milwaukee No, but yeah, that's right. So that was 13 years ago

[00:04:36] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah

[00:04:37] **Nate Hagens:** great to see you.

[00:04:38] As I said, off camera, you haven't aged a day in, in those years

[00:04:44] **Rob Hopkins:** I wish. Well, you're very kind

[00:04:47] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So you are, Probably one of the most active voices in the world of grassroots change-making, as well as, a longtime colleague of

mine. But for those who don't yet know your work, you co-founded the Transition Town Movement, now called Transition Network, which began in Totnes, England, and has since spread around the world.

[00:05:12] So maybe we start with you, briefly describing what the Transition Network concept is and talk about what you're specifically transitioning to.

[00:05:24] **Rob Hopkins:** Great question. So yeah. so the Transition Movement started in the small town that I live in the southwest of England, which you... th- whose name you pronounced correctly.

[00:05:35] Thank you very much. the town of Totnes. And we are a town of about 9,000 people in the southwest of England. And in 2005, 2006, a bunch of us came together. I had been living in Ireland before. I was a permaculture teacher. I'd set up the first two-year full-time permaculture course in the world, I think, at that point.

[00:05:56] And I moved to Totnes, and I met some people who were interested in similar things, who'd been thinking about, "Okay, we have a climate emergency. We have an energy security emergency. There are the things that we know we need to do as individuals. There are the things we're waiting for... we need governments to do.

[00:06:15] But what's the other bit? What's the bit that we could do if we organized with the people around us?" We had a saying, which I still see referenced all over the place, that said, "If we try and do this on our own, it'll be too little. If we wait for governments, it'll be too late. But if we get together with the people around us, it might just be enough, and it might just be in time."

[00:06:38] And initially, it was really something that was an experiment for our town. We had no expectation, no imagining even that it would be of any interest

to anywhere else at all. This was early kind of internet days, so then I had a blog called Transition Culture. We had a kind of a wiki page, if anyone can remember wikis, where we were sort of sharing early ideas as they evolved.

[00:07:00] And, and it kind of just took off, and we were doing stuff in Totnes, but it took off in that there were also, Within six months, we had so much interest from people all over the world. This was before there were any books published. We had people from Brazil and New Zealand and the US and wherever writing to us and saying, "What is this thing?

[00:07:21] How do we do it?" And so we had to create Transition Network, which is now called Transition Network International, as the support organization to support, network, inspire, and train that movement as it grew. And it really became a sort of self-organizing experiment around what's the bit that communities can do.

[00:07:42] So now it's spread to about 50 different countries. You'll find thousands of transition groups, and they do all sorts of different things from different local economy kind of projects through to community food stuff, community energy projects, community energy companies. Even now in, in Totnes after nearly 20 years, we have a project where the community is becoming its own housing developer, meeting the affordable housing gap that nobody else is, filling, so coming together as a community s- to, to do that.

[00:08:13] Somebody once called Transition hope with its sleeves rolled up, which I really loved. And one of the best things I ever read about the Transition movement was written by a guy called Luigi Russi, who came for a year as a student to Schumacher College, which used to be in Totnes until it sadly closed a couple of years ago.

[00:08:31] And he, he ba-- he came for a year, and he just got involved with everything. Every meeting you went to, Luigi was there. Every meeting, he was there helping put out the chairs and then washing up the teacups at the end. He just threw himself into everything. And then he wrote this beautiful little book called Everything Gardens reflecting on that.

[00:08:49] And one of the things that really... It's not often that I read things about Transition where I'm like, "God, that's..." Where I underline loads of stuff. You know? "Wow, that's really interesting." And he said that academics always love to look at the Transition movement like a thing that you can sort of pin to a board and then look at under a microscope.

[00:09:06] And he said what's far more interesting is the Transition moving, the way that Transition moves and absorbs new influences and changes and evolves and adapts over time. And for me, that's always been one of its real strengths, that it's always changing and adapting, and evolving.

[00:09:24] **Nate Hagens:** Well, when did you found it?

[00:09:25] 20 years ago, right? Almost?

[00:09:27] **Rob Hopkins:** 2006. September 2006 was the official launch, yeah.

[00:09:31] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So how has it changed?

[00:09:34] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, I think it's important to say that I-- so the last three or four years, I don't work for Transition Network anymore. I stepped out to focus on this work I'm doing now around imagination and time and different things, which we'll come on to talk about.

[00:09:47] So for a really up-to-date update on Transition, you need to get somebody on from Transition Network. But I would say that it's, What's been

fascinating to me was that when we started it, we were very clear that transition was something that communities did. It was a piece of social infrastructure building equipment for people working at the local scale who wanted to build resilience in the face of what we all saw coming.

[00:10:17] So when we started it, we were very clear this was a kind of a social design infrastructure tool for communities to, to take, and get on with. and that was the model. So in the Transition Handbook, the first book on it, it had these 12, what we called the 12 steps of transition, because just basically people said, "What are you doing?"

[00:10:36] And we said, "Well, we're doing this and we're doing some of that." And oh, there's 12 of them, and we quite liked the kind of metaphor of it being like a 12-step program for breaking our addiction to oil. But then I remember in about 2013, I got-- 2014, I got approached by a mayor in the northeast of France, in a little town called Ungersheim, called Jean-Claude Mensch.

[00:11:00] And Jean-Claude Mensch said, "Will you come to Ungersheim? We're doing something really interesting, and we'd love to see what you think of it." And so I traveled to Ungersheim, and he had seen the film, the film we had made about Transition called In Transition 2.0, which listeners can still find on YouTube.

[00:11:19] And he showed it to all of his team in this municipality in that part of France, and he said, "Let's do that, all of that." And so the municipality created these amazing 21 actions for the 21st century, and they were doing an amazing selection of things around energy and food and building, and it was-- absolutely blew my mind.

[00:11:42] And it-- but, this was... So was this transition or was this not a transition? Transition was something that communities did, and here was a mayor who would-- so 'cause in France, mayors, if mayors decide they're gonna do

something really ambitious, they can do really ambitious things, right? So he's like, "We're gonna do this."

[00:11:58] And, and it was the most extraordinary thing to see. So that's kind of started to shift then how we thought about it.

[00:12:05] **Nate Hagens:** Well, who cares really? I mean, that, that– Exactly. ... with my work on The Great Simplification, it's changing the initial conditions of the future. And whatever you label it or whatever, I, mean, who cares?

[00:12:17] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, exactly. And so I think that's then the w–where–– so we did a piece of work about four years ago in Transition Network where we tried to kind of map how this stuff is spreading and how this stuff is moving, and that's the interesting bit. So we have–– So now when I go to France, there are cities like Grenoble where they have had an ecological administration now for two terms, and they are really enthusiastic about transition, and they're doing transition at the city scale.

[00:12:44] And the mayor of Grenoble says to me, "Rob, we love transition. We're doing transition on the city scale. We don't have any transition groups in Grenoble. How could we start them?" And I'm like" Well, maybe you don't need them. You know, maybe if... They'll come if it's right." And then sometimes you just see where the idea has kind of gone.

[00:13:04] So, so for example, in France, I was watching a video that you made where you were talking about this idea that you had for a film that was about time travel, and you were saying, well, and you were talking about the day after or the horror–horrific nuclear war film, and you were saying, "Well, I don't think we could do this anymore."

[00:13:21] You couldn't make a film now that everybody would sit down and watch. In France, they kind of had a film that everybody sat down and watched. There was a film that came out in twenty fifteen called Demain, which means tomorrow, in which I was talking about local currencies. And it was a, and it was an extraordinary film because what it did was...

[00:13:40] Most films about climate change are like, you know, the inconvenient truth kind of model, where it's ninety-eight percent of how screwed we are, and then the little happy chapter on the end that goes, "But hey, we could drive slower," by which time everyone's left the cinema in tears, you know. That film flipped it, and they did the problem in the first two minutes, and the rest of the film was, "Let's go and see solutions.

[00:13:59] We'll go and see this, we'll go and see this." It was a phenomenon in a way that's impossible to imagine anywhere else. It was shown in mainstream cinemas for months and was full every night. It was shown in boardrooms. It was shown all over the place. It was kind of extraordinary. And I think that film had a huge impact because it was like-- it wasn't specifically about the transition model, but it was about this idea of, the idea of the ecological transition.

[00:14:26] And it started with them saying, "Let's go to Totnes and find out how to do it." And so sometimes these ideas find really interesting routes into society, I think.

[00:14:35] **Nate Hagens:** Does Totnes look considerably different today than it did in two thousand and six?

[00:14:42] **Rob Hopkins:** I think you need to know where to look, and I think that there are many projects that have come, and some of them were kind of short-term things.

[00:14:52] Some of them have left a real sort of legacy. As I said, there are now 39 affordable homes for people in housing need, very energy efficient homes that are now currently being built. First families will move in September. We have a community energy company which has, which has many, members and installed lots of renewable energy.

[00:15:11] We have an amazing event every year called the Local Entrepreneur Forum, where we've built a culture where people are happy to invest in innovative new ideas. Happens every year, five people pitch their ideas. There's many businesses that exist now because of that. lots of... I mean, there's many different projects.

[00:15:31] I always kind of think, you know, that actually also when you look back since we started the transition movement, in those years, 30% of all the CO2 ever released by humanity has been released during that time. So on one hand, you kind of think, well, we absolutely have not succeeded. But then I also think it's really important not to beat ourselves up about that.

[00:15:50] I always say, if you'd given us the amount of money that oil and gas companies have given disinformation campaigns over that time, it could have been kind of, we could have achieved a hell of a lot more doing stuff with virtually no resources. I think one of the things about transition is that it is an incredible body of learning and practices from all around the world in different contexts and settings.

[00:16:14] **Nate Hagens:** Was the impetus primarily a climate, one, or was it a post-growth, how do we prepare for the biophysical haircut that's ahead?

[00:16:26] **Rob Hopkins:** That's a great term, the biophysical haircut.

[00:16:28] **Nate Hagens:** I don't think I've ever used that term. I like that. It just came to mind.

[00:16:30] **Rob Hopkins:** I like

[00:16:31] **Nate Hagens:** that. 'Cause subconsciously I know that I need a haircut, so it's in the back of my mind.

[00:16:37] **Rob Hopkins:** I think when we started, we said that it was underpinned and driven by the twin drivers of climate change and peak oil. We were very-- we, very much were kind of emerging in parallel with the peak oil kind of movement and, you know, I, reading The Party's Over and watching The End of Suburbia were kind of a big kick up the backside for me in terms of starting that.

[00:16:58] But then as time went on, I think, you know, peak oil kind of fell away as a primary driver, and climate change became a lot more urgent and pressing. I think, I also think now if we were starting again, one of the focuses would also be on f- on the rise of fascism. There's, I like the connection with, fascism in this work as well.

[00:17:24] But it's very much in that kind of, I guess transition is very much rooted in the kind of response to a sort of limits to growth, post-growth kind of approach. Yeah.

[00:17:34] **Nate Hagens:** And, that this is starting to happen, and it wasn't... I guess it started to happen, in a dress rehearsal sort of way in 2008 and 2009, the financial crisis, and then again in COVID.

[00:17:46] And now the Strait of Hormuz – a lot of the things we've been talking about are- Yeah ... unfolding in real time. Yeah. And I know that the Transition Network is centralized in England and Europe, where there have been some

economic contractions and energy price increases in recent years and recent days. So how have geopolitical events been affecting Transition Network's goals and ability to accomplish change?

[00:18:13] is... Does it make people more receptive to hearing this different narrative about the future? Or, what has been your experience? Granted, you're no longer with Transition Network, but what do you think?

[00:18:28] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, I always remember that every time the oil price went above a certain amount, the phone would start ringing and journalists would start ringing up.

[00:18:36] You know, we were the kind of people to ring when the oil price went above $100 a barrel. Some journalist would be writing an article. "Ah, what if there were people out there who'd been thinking about this stuff in advance? What might that look like? Oh, let's ring the Transition Network." So, so we, you know, we had...

[00:18:51] There was a lot of that. I always remember... So when we wrote the Transition Handbook, we were ma- very much making the argument that our dependency on imported fossil fuels, our dependency on, long supply chains for food and other resources represented a key vulnerability and a key fragility, and that actually that, lack of resilience, one of the things that inspired us was that in the year 2000 in the UK, all the lorry drivers went on strike and it became very clear that we only had three days' worth of food in the supermarkets at, any time, and all the previous infrastructure that would've supported us, sort of local supply chains had largely been dismantled.

[00:19:30] And, so in the Transition Handbook, we set out all that stuff, you know. And sometimes I get-- I still do talks and people say, "Ah, Rob, you're very naive."

And it gets me because I always say, "Do you know, in 2008 we wrote a book, right? And we said that our dependency on fossil fuels was a key vulnerability."

[00:19:48] Across the European Union between 2008 and 2022, the European Union sent Russia 18 billion euros a month for natural gas. And all that time we were told there was no money to decarbonize, there was no money to build a re- a, kind of a renewable economy. There was no money to do the stuff that the transition movement was talking about.

[00:20:11] And then, oh, what a surprise. Well, we've sent all this money to Russia, and then we see what happens with it, you know. And so now we're seeing what, what's happening in, in, in the Strait of Hormuz and, it's like, oh, you know, in Ireland recently, the, they, had a load of farmers drove tractors into the center of Dublin to block the city to protest about high energy prices.

[00:20:30] I'm like, "How have you not seen this coming, really? you had a, big dry run in 2008, in 2022, and you're still saying like, 'Why did nobody tell us about this?'"

[00:20:43] **Nate Hagens:** That's, well, if you remember my presentation in Cork in 2009, which of course you don't,

[00:20:50] **Rob Hopkins:** Apart from the screaming bit

[00:20:52] **Nate Hagens:** Americans have two modes, complacency and panic.

[00:20:56] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah.

[00:20:57] **Nate Hagens:** And, you know, humans have two modes, complacency and panic. So you mentioned it earlier, but let me ask you, explicitly, knowing what you know now and seeing the Superorganism nearly doubling in size in the

last 20 years and all the things, is there anything you would've tried to do differently with Transition Network from the start if you were starting again today?

[00:21:19] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. I think what I would've done is I would have, and I've no idea how I would've done this, but I would've convened the smartest, richest people that I knew into a room, and I would've said Can you give me the ideas and some initial investment that means that this movement can be self-supporting and self-funding to the scale of ambition that it needs to be?

[00:21:51] You know, maybe, you know, maybe that they would've put some money in that would've been boo-- You know, th-th-there are smart people who can do that, you know, because we-- this is a ma-- We've always been sort of scrabbling around for bits here and bits there and bits here, and I think to be able to have an organization that can support itself and fund itself in that way would've been pretty transformative.

[00:22:11] **Nate Hagens:** Is it too late to start that now?

[00:22:13] **Rob Hopkins:** Never too late. It's never too late. You know, there's a, there's the thing that's frus- There, there's so much money out there, and it's all-- And, I mean, not all of it, you know, and, there are some, funders who are starting to get this stuff now, and we have a bit of funding for some of them from a project that I'm doing now that I will talk a bit more about later, but it's nowhere near where we need to be.

[00:22:35] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it's digital claims on biophysical and ecological reality, and this is it. You have to decide how to direct those claims towards life and towards a, world where your children and grandchildren-- I mean, yeah, you wanna keep your status and your convenience, but, if everything goes towards the Mordor economy, it's not gonna work for anyone d-d-- irrespective of how money digits you have in the bank.

[00:23:07] So yeah, I agree with you there.

[00:23:08] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah, this is the time. Now is the time. You know, anyone who's been sitting there thinking, "Well, there might come a day when actually this money's not gonna be much use, and I'm gonna f-- and I should..." This is- Yeah ... this is it. We're there now.

[00:23:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, with the exception of AI, we gotta invest and make more money, and then we can donate to the-

[00:23:25] saving ecological civilization.

[00:23:27] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah.

[00:23:27] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So, a major thread running through your early work and your more recent work is the idea that we are suffering from, yeah, the meta-crisis, but parallel to that, a failure of cultural imagination-

[00:23:45] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah ...

[00:23:45] **Nate Hagens:** that we as human beings and as groups of humans struggle to envision radically different and better futures.

[00:23:53] And I sensed that emanating from you even almost 20 years ago. So can you expand on this idea and explain the link between cultural ideas and actual action?

[00:24:07] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. So in about tw- early 2018, there was a, there was about two months where I found that I read articles by George Monbiot, Naomi Klein, Amitav Ghosh, and a couple of other people, and in all of them, the same phrase appeared, where they said climate change is a failure of the imagination.

[00:24:26] And it kind of stayed with me. Like me, and then they would move on and talk, be talking about other things, and I was left there like the kid at the back of the class going, ooh, ooh," like, "What did you mean? What did you mean by that?" You know? And then I read this study that was written by a researcher in the US called Kyung Hee Kim.

[00:24:43] It was called The Creativity Crisis, where she looked at something called the Torrance Test for Creative Thinking, which is a kind of a, measure of divergent thinking that it's the closest thing we have to an imagination test, basically, which has been done with huge data sets of people all the way back till the 1950s.

[00:24:59] Her conclusion was that imagination and IQ had risen together until the mid-'90s, at which point IQ kept rising and imagination started to decline. When it was published, it made the front page of Newsweek magazine in 2010, and there was a big... It evoked a whole lot of soul-searching. People said, "What does this mean for economic growth?"

[00:25:18] And, "What does this mean for Hollywood?" Neither of which I give a shit about really, but actually then it was... But for me it was like, okay, well, climate change fundamentally demands that we reimagine everything. That's the challenge, and that's the gift that it brings, right?

[00:25:33] **Nate Hagens:** I'm sorry, I have to interrupt you there because number one, I'm wondering why that happened.

[00:25:38] Maybe she knew, and you can share it. Yeah. And number two, I wonder if

[00:25:47] throttling down one's imagination of negative imagination things like learning about climate change and a three-degree Celsius world where we lose

half the species and all the other possible colorful trajectories in our mind, that it's almost a self-preservation to shrink that, and when we shrink that, we shrink the positive imagination's, sort of, machinery as well.

[00:26:15] **Rob Hopkins:** Maybe. Maybe. I mean, so, so in her paper she attributed it to three things. She said it was due to the decline of free unstructured play in the lives of our children.

[00:26:26] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[00:26:26] **Rob Hopkins:** That makes sense. It was due to the rise of screens in our lives, and it was due to the rise of testing in schools. I then set out to write, From What If to What...

[00:26:35] From What Is to What If, and f- and I think there are n- a number of other things that adjoin that as well. I think we also would say that spending less and less time in the natural world is a key cause for that. I think also, there's a very clear link for me with, s- with stress and trauma and anxiety and the release of cortisol.

[00:26:58] That when we have more cortisol in our system, the hippocampus, the part of our brain where that comes from, shrinks by up to 20%, and when that happens, the future kind of contracts and starts to disappear.

[00:27:09] **Nate Hagens:** Why? Why? The hippocampus is responsible for imagination

[00:27:13] **Rob Hopkins:** of- Is where the imagination and the memory both fire from.

[00:27:16] Imagination and memory- Oh ... are largely the same process, right? And the hippocampus is the part of your brain that is especially vulnerable to

cortisol. So people, for example, who have post-traumatic stress disorder, can sometimes have a p- hippocampus about 20% smaller than average, and that means that the future, and the, future starts to disappear.

[00:27:36] People get stuck in the present and stuck in the past. And I feel like we've really created a kind of a cortisol economy right now, where so many people feel in a state of precariousness that actually that's one of the things that shuts down our ability to imagine the future.

[00:27:52] **Nate Hagens:** So is cortisol via the hic- hippocampus steepening our discount rates, like we only care about the present and the future is too hard to care about, or is it actually inhibiting our imagination?

[00:28:05] Because I can just sit outside, and look at the birds and the clouds and the trees, and my mind goes on a journey of imagining different things, and I always have my little recorder with me in case I have an idea for a Frankly. And yet I also have a steep discount rate that I'm thinking about at the present, so can you unpack the difference between those?

[00:28:28] Is it-

[00:28:28] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah, I mean, I would say firstly there's a recognition that you're sitting outside and looking at the birds and the trees and imagining is a real privilege these days. Like so many- Mm-hmm ... people never get the time to do that. Like that, the ability to live an imaginative life in that way is not evenly distributed at all.

[00:28:46] Albert Einstein always said he got his best ideas when he rode his bicycle in the forest. Yeah. But people spend less and less and less time in the natural world now. I think both of those things are true, actually, that actually we are, we are losing both of those things.

[00:29:01] **Nate Hagens:** I have so many questions on this.

[00:29:05] So I, I get that one of your core philosophies now is, and I actually agree with this, but I also have a parallel, construction as well, that if we have all the conversations about the future are all doom and gloom on all the things, we have short-circuited our biggest skill as humans, which is to imagine and converse and discuss and build, something creative to meet our challenges.

[00:29:37] I fully agree with you on that, and I'm moving more in that direction myself. However, big asterisk, we don't want that imagination to be fairy dust and unicorns from a biophysical perspective, so it has to be grounded in reality. But let me ask you this. When we're just discussing imagination, the ability of a human mind to be creative and imagine, and when we're talking about the future, there are a lot of scary things, about the future that is unfolding, you know, by the day.

[00:30:13] Tell me how Well, I'll just parse it as positive imagination and negative scary imagination. How do you rectify the difference between those two things?

[00:30:25] **Rob Hopkins:** I think it's really important to say when I, w- when I, when we talk about positive imagining, like you say, it's not unicorns and fairy dust. You know, there's a, there was a film that came out a few years ago that I'm sure many of your listeners will have seen called 2040, an Australian film about the future made by Damon Gameau, I can't remember what his surname

[00:30:44] **Nate Hagens:** was. Yeah. Damon's been on the program, yeah.

[00:30:47] **Rob Hopkins:** Okay. So when he wrote about that film, some of that film I loved, some of that film not quite so much, but I thought it was a really brave, brilliant thing to do. And, but I loved the way he talked about it. He said that it was an experiment in evidence-based dreaming.

[00:31:02] And so for me, I see what I do as evidence-based dreaming. It's not like, you know, oh, I'm r- I've all of a sudden I became really rich. Well, it wasn't because a dragon flew past and dropped gold coins down my chimney. It was because I went and at least I went and bought a lottery ticket.

[00:31:16] You know what I mean? So, for me, what I do is storytelling. I don't go that far into the future. I feel like, if I ask people to imagine 2090, everybody either goes to like Blade Runner or they go to Apocalypse.

[00:31:31] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah,

[00:31:32] **Rob Hopkins:** exactly. I take pe- I take people 10 years forward into the future because if we look at the Paris Agreement, which is the only thing we have as a roadmap for how we might actually find a way through this in a concerted way, that says that by 2036, those of us in the Global North need to have cut our emissions by like 60% or something, right?

[00:31:50] but that just stays as a figure. It's a figure. It's in reports. It's boring. No one cares. What does 60% mean? Well, how do we bring that alive? And actually, the reality is that all the elements of what that looks like already exist somewhere. Like William Gibson said, "The future's already here. It's just not evenly distributed."

[00:32:07] You can go to Utrecht in Holland and sit by the train station and 40,000 bicycles will cycle past you. It's insane. You can go to Germany, to the car-free neighborhoods in Germany, 3,000 people live in a neighborhood without any cars. You go to Liège in Belgium, where they're building a food belt around that city in a way that has just transformed the economy of that city.

[00:32:27] You know, everything that we need to know already exists somewhere. What I do is I try to pull all of those together into a kind of coherent story. Most

people never hear those stories, you know. And I always say when I do that work there are many different futures. You know, one of my great heroes, Rasheedah Phillips, who does the incredible Black Quantum Futurism project, whenever she writes the word future, she puts an S in brackets afterwards.

[00:32:50] You know, there are many different futures. We always say a lot of them are horrible. We've been to see them, they're horrible. But there are some that result from us doing everything we could possibly have done. When I do that work that I don't start by setting out all the horrible negative futures that we're going to, 'cause people already know them, Nate.

[00:33:07] They w- like, on some level, I think.

[00:33:10] **Nate Hagens:** Well, not only that, but you're priming... If you do that, you're, which I do all the time, you're priming the conversation with cortisol.

[00:33:20] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah, and also because what we know is that when people h- have a negative worldview, what happens then is that, you seek out stories that confirm your worldview.

[00:33:30] You just pull together all the grimmest news you can find and go, "Ta-da!" And it's, like, yeah, that's, just... Really? It's like, and then you just put people on a spiral where everywhere you look, you're finding stories that confirm this thing, and we just get on a spiral. It's much harder to get that spiral going the other way, and people feel like there are more possibilities in the world rather than less.

[00:33:52] **Nate Hagens:** So I wanna get to your particular views and work, and stories in a second. But tell me a little bit more about what you think the role is of storytelling in developing new cultural ideas, and what sort of future are we creating with our current global or national storytelling?

[00:34:16] **Rob Hopkins:** I mean, the c- the current global national storytelling is usually a kind of business-as-usual storytelling that doesn't address the challenges that we face, that is just that the future will be like it is today just with better phones and hoverboards.

[00:34:36] you know, it's that kind of stupid storytelling. I love-- So my friend Manda Scott, who does The Accidental Gods podcast.

[00:34:45] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I know Manda.

[00:34:46] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. So Manda, picked up on an idea that Rupert Read, initially came up with, which was that we don't need utopias. Utopias are too far out. We don't need stories that are utopias.

[00:34:56] They're usually like three or four hundred years in the future. They're ridiculous. They're not really that, that useful, and you're never gonna live in a utopia. That's just we're human beings. That's not how it is. And we also don't need dystopias. We are awash with dystopias. We can't move for dystopias, and they're so unhelpful.

[00:35:12] You turn on Netflix, and human beings are wiped out by zombies, aliens, gremlins, viruses, AI, whatever it is. So she talks about the need for through-topian stories, which I love, which are the stories that start now with somebody meeting somebody that led to something, and that built, and then that led to something.

[00:35:31] And that's the, kind of storytelling that, that kind of excites me is like the stories that are rooted in evidence-based dreaming, that have an audacity and a kind of imagination to them, that, that have some kind of joy and humor and playfulness in them. And that's what we're working on and trying to create at the moment, but also which tells stories about how we fitted into the world that

we needed to create in a way that's, not just about facts and figures and, sort of Long screeds about it.

[00:36:04] It's like, well, what would it smell like? There's a woman in, in, in Berlin called Wasema Labich who does amazing... A young woman who does work with, Muslim women in Berlin. She calls her work Muslim Futures. And she uses this term which I love, where she talks about sensual futuring, that this needs to be about sensual futuring.

[00:36:23] It's not just about imagining mental pictures. What would it smell like? What would it feel like on your skin? What would that world taste like? You know, like the poet Rilke said, "The future must enter into you a long time before it happens." Good storytelling around this future enables us to do that, I think.

[00:36:41] **Nate Hagens:** I love that quote. I've not heard that quote. and I like Rilke. So, what is the science of this? At a deeper level, why do you think storytelling and these visions of the future you're describing get people to engage and become motivated in ways that data and facts and ultimately fear can't?

[00:37:01] What's going on?

[00:37:02] **Rob Hopkins:** Because it allows us to create memories of the future. And, whe- if you are... I mentioned before that the hippocampus is where the imagination and the memory comes from, right? So it's-- 'cause it's the same process. If you ask somebody, when they put people in a scanner thing and they say, "Remember, i-ima- r-remember the past or imagine something from the future," exactly the same neural pathways kick in.

[00:37:26] It's the same process, right? So like if you'd never been to Italy before, Nate, and I said, "Nate, I'm taking you on a holiday next week to Italy," and you'd never been there, then your brain sends a message down to your memory and

says, "Send up the file with Italy written on it." And everything you'd ever heard or seen about Italy, your imagination would assemble into a picture of what it's like, right?

[00:37:46] So if we're trying to imagine a post-growth, post-carbon, more localized, more resilient, more abundant, joyful, equal future, and we just watch Fox News all day, that's a real struggle, 'cause you're going to those cupboards of your memory and there's nothing there, and it's impossible to then, to, then piece that together.

[00:38:06] Whereas if you can create, like I try and do in the trainings that I do, some-- an event where people come together with other people, they laugh, they have fun, it's colorful, it's an adventure. They get to imagine in that future in a way that they really... that, that cultivates a deep longing for that future, then what they do is they create a memory of the future, then the next time they try and imagine that future, they go to the cupboards of their memory and they've got this sparkly thing that they attach all these emotions.

[00:38:33] They laughed, they met new people. It was fun. You know, and, that's the bit. You know, we're, trying to create a kind of a nostalgia for the future in a sense, which is what becomes really powerful to me. And there's a lot of research around how when people imagine the world in that way, it increases their sense of agency to create that world.

[00:38:54] If you just read a kind of, tech fantasy book about how we'll all be living on hoverboards and we'll be going to Mars on holiday, that doesn't actually inspire us to do anything to make that happen 'cause there's nothing we can really do to bring that world around. Whereas the kind of world that we're talking about emerges through evidence-based dreaming, we're creating these kinds of memories of the future that create that longing on a deep level to experience that, and that's what builds the sense of agency, I think.

[00:39:23] **Nate Hagens:** Agency sounds like it's key in this prognosis.

[00:39:28] **Rob Hopkins:** You know, I guess on some level I kind of got bored of reading books by middle-aged white men about extinction and collapse. I've read a lot of those books, as I'm sure you have. And I actually became really inspired mostly by women of color in the US, Rashida Phillips, Adrienne Maree Brown, Walidah Imarisha, and one of my heroes with that, Ruha Benjamin, who are writing about imagination and time travel and in this beautiful way.

[00:39:57] And there's a woman called Mariame Kaba, who is a prison abolition activist in the US. Phenomenal. She wrote a book called We Do This Til We Free Us, which for me is one of the great works of the kind of radical imagination. And in that book she says, "We must imagine while we build. Always both." We must imagine while we build both.

[00:40:18] I'm not for a moment saying we all just need to kick back and just dream and imagine. It has to go hand in hand. And what I see is that actually, so, you know, my sense of agency, my sense of what's possible comes from going to see all of these different things happening in different places. It's rooted in the things that I've been involved in, the things that I've changed, the things I've seen other people change, and that's where my kind of sense that this is possible comes from.

[00:40:43] **Nate Hagens:** Is there a risk of going too far in this direction and it becoming a kind of toxic positivity? and second part question, what if there's someone new that really cares about the world and the natural world and the future in their 20s or 30s or whatever, and they don't know anything about climate or energy or geopolitics or fascism or any of these things?

[00:41:08] Would it be better for that person to just not know about these things and go right into positive visioning of the future and then b- backfill on the data, or what are your thoughts on that?

[00:41:20] **Rob Hopkins:** I don't see what I do at all as being around toxic positivity, and I think that-- I mean, that's very much a danger, and there are some things that you see that are a little bit like that sometimes.

[00:41:30] I would be as worried for the mental health of somebody who was optimistic all the time as for somebody who was pessimistic all the time. You know, neither of them have got much grounds to justify that position. You know, so I, I feel like, What I say to people is, "I'm not saying the future will be like this, I'm saying it could be like this."

[00:41:52] And if we shut down these possibilities, then that's it, then they're gone. But actually, there's enough places where we can see them to know that they're possible, and we're just stitching together a kind of a new tapestry from things that already exist. In terms of young people, I think it's really important that people understand the context of what's going on, you know.

[00:42:12] So the work that you're doing with your podcast and that other people are doing around giving people the information. It always st- it w- is really important. It always struck me when Greta Thunberg kickstarted the Fridays for Future school strikes, that her demand that schools should teach us about climate change was a really important demand.

[00:42:32] But if that's all you do, you're gonna be producing a really,

[00:42:36] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah ...

[00:42:37] **Rob Hopkins:** burnt out, frazzled generation of young people. It needs to be accompanied by the fact that you go to school every day in a school that is a model of what 2036 would look like. Yeah. So- your school is, like, powered by renewables, and you grow food around the school, and you know, these things kind of have to go together for me.

[00:42:52] It's-- I don't think it's... There's nothing to be gained from not knowing and not understanding. Then you just make stupid decisions like thinking, "Well, I'll just fly around the world and, sc- and sod it. I'm just gonna use up all the carbon," you know? In terms of young people, I would say do a permaculture course.

[00:43:10] You know, for me, I did a permaculture course when I was 22, and it kind of rewired my brain and meant the world- Mm-hmm ... meant I saw the world in possibilities. and it was a profound thing for me that I've then taken me off in lots of different directions.

[00:43:23] **Nate Hagens:** So, you've mentioned time travel a couple times, and I wanna dig in deeper to the relationship between our past, our present, and future.

[00:43:34] So how does our relationship to time, including whether we think negatively or positively, about the past and the future, actually alter how we behave and our decisions in the present?

[00:43:48] **Rob Hopkins:** So in about, in 2021, during COVID, I saw a ph- a photograph of a young woman at a Black Lives Matter protest somewhere in the US, and she had a T-shirt on that said, "I've been to the future.

[00:44:01] We won." And it was such a goosebumps moment for me. It was like I was at that point, you know, very much around and supportive of Extinction Rebellion with all its messaging around collapse and extinction, and here was this kind of unapologetically, sort of positive futurist message. And, it was just before I

was invited to go up to London by the Extinction Rebellion, who were organizing a big thing in London, called The Big One.

[00:44:32] They'd asked me to speak, and I thought, okay, sometimes... And I'm sure you've had the same experience, Nate, where you have, where you experience something and you say, "This, wants to change me, and I need to let it change me somehow. I don't quite know how, but I just need to kind of roll with it." And so they'd asked me to go and speak, so I went to my local hardware store and I bought a, like a white hazmat suit and a kind of silly space helmet, and I went and gave this talk as if I'd just come back from 2030, I think it was I talked about then, and I just parked my time machine around the corner.

[00:45:02] And I didn't have long 'cause, you know, the traffic wardens are very, very, good in, in London and like, so I don't have very long, but I just have to tell you what it was like there 'cause it was amazing. And I said, "We saw this and we saw that. Oh, the bicycle rush hours. Oh my God, they were amazing.

[00:45:15] And the urban agriculture and this and the post-growth and da." And then as I got near the end, I said something like, "And you know, having been there and having seen it, the fact that I can stand here and tell you about it makes me feel really, emotional." And I looked at the people who were closest to me.

[00:45:32] It was like hundreds of people standing right around, and there were tears on people's faces. And I thought, "This is interesting. Like, what's happening here?" And th- the way-- And so, so the book How to Fall in Love with the Future is really an exploration of what is happening when we do this. And, I came to think that there's a really important thing around what we, what I think of as temporal fluidity.

[00:46:00] Like in activist circles, so much of our work is in the present, right? Whether it's Gaza, whether it's climate change, we're like, there's a threat. It's right

in our face, and everything is like we go into cortisol mode, right? And so we're like, every demonstration you go on there, what do we want? When do we want it?

[00:46:16] Now. No one ever says, "When do we want it? About 110 years or 55 weeks ago." It's always now, And as I started looking around, I found people like Rashida Phillips with Black Quantum Futurism, who were starting to play with time and saying, "Actually, do you know what? This obsession with linear time, Newtonian time, is just one way of thinking about time."

[00:46:38] Like before colonialism happened, all around the world, there were incredibly different sophisticated understandings of time. There were traditional African understandings of time where time was actually running backwards. There was an indigenous Australian time, which was this incredibly deep time approach where we were in this-- that looked at time over s- on a scale that we couldn't even dream of, you know.

[00:47:00] And that she talked about how linear time was a colonial construct, that if you were a colonial power, you would arrive into those places from Europe or wherever with a, with absolutely no curiosity at all about these other sophisticated, amazing understandings of time. You put up a tower with a bell on the top that would ring every hour, and then you would start to structure people's lives around that different understanding of time.

[00:47:24] So she talks a lot about taking back time and looking at it in a very different way.

[00:47:30] **Nate Hagens:** And what would that infer if we did that?

[00:47:34] **Rob Hopkins:** So she talks about how, she-- They, talk about local time, that actually in the eight-- early 1800s, if you traveled across America by train, you traveled through something like 200 time zones.

[00:47:46] And so she talks-- plays around with this idea of, well, maybe we need a more local kind of understanding of time that is more like, almost like bioregional, time in that sense, I guess.

[00:47:56] **Nate Hagens:** So in your time travel, ex- exercises that you've been traveling to the future, I understand a lot of the imagery and stories that you pull from are sourced from actual places enacting these ideas today. Could you maybe share a few of your favorite examples of people or communities who are already living the future in some way?

[00:48:17] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. So I mean, I mentioned Utrecht in Holland.

[00:48:20] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:48:21] **Rob Hopkins:** if you want to imagine what the future is like, go and sit by the train station at 8:00 a.m. and 40,000 bicycles will cycle past you. It's insane. And there's a place in the middle, just down the road from there, where there's a hotel where if you ask them very nicely on reception, they let you go up on the roof and look over the top onto a, junction in the middle of Utrecht where it's just trams and bicycles and it's just like, it's amazing.

[00:48:47] and in fact, I'm always adding new things. I'm speaking to you today from London. I'm up in London for the day and I've been teaching design students at University of Arts London all day. And outside here on the other side of the road, there's a building with a beautiful, living wall, a big building with plants growing out of the wall.

[00:49:06] And as I arrived there was a guy in a cherry picker up there, trimming the plants. And so I took a picture of that and I'm gonna add that to my collection. I think it's kind of a way of looking. I'm always looking and it's a really useful practice I think that listeners might like to adopt.

[00:49:21] If you've got your phone in your pocket like most of us sadly do, most of the time, as you walk around, look for things that look to you like what the future would look like. It's a really great practice.

[00:49:31] **Nate Hagens:** It's so funny that you say that. I had a board meeting in California last week and I was doing exactly that.

[00:49:38] Yes. There was like, a hiking trail in the Berkeley Hills that at the bottom of the trail there was a dog bowl and then there were three milk gallons full of water that someone just volunteered to give- Fantastic ... dogs at the end of a tr- And I just started taking pictures like that of things that were like pro-social examples of people that don't need to do it, but they're doing it for the greater good out of kindness or, whatever.

[00:50:03] It's a really good idea.

[00:50:04] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah It's great. And, it can be little details like a sign you see in a shop window or a sticker you see on a lamppost, or it can be a whole townscape, cityscape. And so basically these days my presentation is made up of those pictures that I've seen and taken in, all these different places.

[00:50:21] And, yeah, I mean, there's lots of... There's-- So in the book How to Fall in Love with the Future, there's lots of examples and, I guess one of, one of my favorites is, going-- There's a place near where I live where they've reintroduced beavers into the landscape, about 10 years ago, and they have completely transformed- In England?

[00:50:38] In England, yeah. There's a big kind of beaver revitalization. They were pretty much exterminated here, and there's a big kind of rewilding beaver movement going on here now. and, and so at that place, I take lots of photos to share with people 'cause it's just-- it's like going to a really nice version of Jurassic Park.

[00:50:57] Like you're in a landscape where you can sense there's a big creature here that I've not seen before, and it's just magical.

[00:51:03] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know if you watched my podcast on dark triad traits and the Frankly I did after that, which said humans are better than we think. Not humanity, because humanity has some small percentage of dark triad types that are pulling the rest of us in this cultural, institutional, direction.

[00:51:27] But the vast majority of humans, whether they're in Russia or Bangladesh or Lebanon or England or China or the United States, we like friendship and dogs and soup and music and flowers and nature. And so I think against the grain of the power structures of the existing superorganism, to just get people doing these things that are beautiful and helpful and-- I mean, the more that we exercise those muscles, the better we're going to be.

[00:52:03] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah, I think it's, I read a rev- a, I read a great quote the other day where a guy said, "If you spend all day pretending to be a dog, you don't turn into a dog. But if you spend all day pretending to be good and kind, then you will become good and kind." You know, and for me, this is like the fundamental, I think, to the transition movement since the beginning was a belief that actually most people want the best for where they live, and they want their kids to grow up in a place that's kind of flourishing and thriving.

[00:52:34] And, you know, one of the things that I, I-- so when I do my talks, I always do my time travel activity at the beginning, right? I tell them that I live in

Totnes, where we've developed this amazing time travel program, and I show them evidence that's the case, to overcome any doubts they might have that of course we have created a powerful quantum time travel tool, in Totnes.

[00:52:56] And then I ask them to close their eyes and I take them on a journey where we travel to the future. I don't lead it. I don't say, "Oh, it's a future where everyone's riding bicycles." I just say, "We're gonna travel to the future that turned out as a result of us doing everything that we could have possibly done."

[00:53:10] And, And then people, and I've done that activity, I reckon, Nate, probably in the last five or six years with about 15,000 people in different places. No one ever says, "Oh, Rob, we've got a new Ikea that's four times bigger than the one we used to have." You know, people talk about it, it's quieter, it's greener, people are happier, people are more connected, people are doing more meaningful work.

[00:53:33] And I read a while ago an article by Elise Boulding, who was one of the-- who was a Quaker, who was one of the founders of the idea of peace studies as an academic discipline. She was doing almost exactly the same activity that I've been doing. She does that. She was doing that activity in men's prisons in the US in the early '90s.

[00:53:53] She wrote a beautiful paper where she documented what they told her, exactly the same as what people are telling me now. Her con- one of her conclusions was that she thought that if you did that activity at any point back during human history, you would hear largely the same things. And also, she said, "I think we have many more coworkers for the work ahead than we might imagine."

[00:54:11] You know, when I strip out all the stuff that's like, in order to come and do this with me, you have to sign up to all these things, and you have to believe in

climate change, and you have to be a this, and you have to be a that, and you have to... Do you know? It's like just, we're just gonna do this. And what- wherever people are politically, I think it kind of resonates.

[00:54:27] We ha- we live in this toxic, polarizing world that convinces us all that we hate each other and that we're all so different. And when you really get down to it and you create a kind of a safe space and ask people to really imagine into the world they would most like to see, we have a lot more in common than we might think, I think.

[00:54:43] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I agree with that. so to, not to push back, but to go on the other side of this, as inspiring as these stories are, many of them are still rooted in and made possible by the same unsustainable economic and industrial substrate that they're advocating against, whether that be through six continent supply chains or fiat currency and debt or infrastructure.

[00:55:10] So from your perspective, Rob, how do you consider the increasing instability of our current biophysical system as you look at and take inspiration from these alternative ways of living? Like, what would happen to some of these ideas if the system were to suddenly contract?

[00:55:27] **Rob Hopkins:** I kind of, I feel like a lot of what I point to is the things that people are building that point to what comes next.

[00:55:36] they're prefigurative in that sense. So for example, in Liège in Belgium, one of the most ambitious things to come out of the transition movement is something called the, Liège Food Belt, the Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise, which came out of the transition group there in 2014 saying, "What if in a generation's time the majority of food eaten in Liège came from the land closest to Liège?"

[00:55:59] You know, talk about an idea that's ahead of its time. Really, why is every city not building a food belt around itself right now?

[00:56:05] **Nate Hagens:** We need goals, right? Like, th- there needs to be a... Like that, is a stated goal to have the food come from around our... 'cause if you just leave things in abstractions it, it doesn't happen.

[00:56:17] What's the importance of that have you discovered?

[00:56:20] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, I think, you know, there was that lovely story recently where... There was a very good thing I read recently about how actually Trump may end up being the president who does the most for clean energy and for addressing the climate emergency. In terms of, when he introduced his tariffs on China, for example, it meant that they had to basically...

[00:56:40] They couldn't sell solar panels into the US profitably, and so they dumped a whole load of solar panels into Pakistan. And then citizens organized and over about five or six weeks installed so much solar all across Pakistan that a huge LNG importation terminal that had been funded by the World Bank they now don't need to use anymore.

[00:57:02] You know, they're, they've been building this kind of new energy infrastructure by just getting on with it.

[00:57:08] **Nate Hagens:** But, that's not gonna be the long-term, climate benefit from Trump, I don't think. We're watching it unfold in the Persian Gulf.

[00:57:18] **Rob Hopkins:** We're watching that happening, but also at the same time, you know, all across Europe the, impetus around decarbonizing the economy is accelerating hugely now, in a way that actually before, like you said,

people just sort of are either in panic mode or whatever you said, complacency mode.

[00:57:35] People were very much in complacency mode again.

[00:57:38] **Nate Hagens:** But decarbonization in that case is gonna be, coupled with deindustrialization and, probably less aggregate throughput, which is inevitable anyways, I think so. Yeah. I think Europe is gonna be ahead of the curve in some ways.

[00:57:53] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, I think, you know, it's, why, you know, the Food Belt project in Liège is so fascinating to me because that was a project that started– was started by citizens with a question, what if?

[00:58:05] And then, after three years, the local council, the local municipality thought they were all mad, and then the municipality came to them and said, "This is fantastic. Can you tell us all the blockages to this, and we will get them out of the way?" The municipality has now invested three million euros.

[00:58:20] They produce three and a half thousand school meals every day. But they're building a new complex ecosystem in that city in a way that is thoroughly replicable.

[00:58:29] **Nate Hagens:** Is it an island, or are there other places around France that are aware of that and trying to replicate it maybe at a slower pace? They're behind.

[00:58:37] **Rob Hopkins:** So this is in Belgium, which is just north of France. All right. Okay. so this has already spread to six other cities in Belgium and is rapidly, I think, becoming the new normal. In France, there's a town called

Mouans-Sartoux where they produce 80% of all the school meals eaten in the town, on land grown by the municipality.

[00:58:56] That idea is very much becoming the new normal. And the thing that's fascinating to me about Mouans-Sartoux, where 80% of the school meals are orga- lo- grown locally, 100% organic, at the same price the French government gives for school meals for everybody, the thing that's most fascinating was they went back to everybody about seven years after they started this and interviewed people who were nothing to do with the school, people who had no kids in the school, just the wider population who were around this, and they found that people now ate 30% less ultra-processed food, 27% less meat.

[00:59:27] Because when- when institutions like that move with audacity and purpose, it can lead to all sorts of knock-on benefits that no one could have anticipated.

[00:59:36] **Nate Hagens:** Is there a clearing house or, a way to find these examples, like you mentioned Liège and the f- I mean, do, you have this organized somewhere that people can see all the progress being made and the f- the, pilots and the trials?

[00:59:50] **Rob Hopkins:** I mean, a lot of them are in the last two books that I wrote, How to Fall in Love with the Future and From What Is to What If. You'd find a lot of the stories on my website as well, actually.

[00:59:59] **Nate Hagens:** So one of the key points that I've heard you emphasize is the importance of making the future, tactilely real- Yeah

[01:00:07] by giving it a texture that you can feel through our six senses, I guess. So what, are some of the techniques, Rob, or practices that you recommend to help people feel the tactile reality?

[01:00:23] **Rob Hopkins:** So I guess there's a couple. One is an amazing activity developed by my friend and colleague Ruth Ben-Tovim, which is called Town Anywhere, which is a beautiful day-long activity that you can do with between 30 and 400 people where you start by ima- in your imagination time traveling to the future.

[01:00:42] But then the next step is that you literally build that world with cardboard and string and sticky tape as a three-dimensional thing that you then trade in and grieve in and celebrate in. It's extraordinary. And, she calls-- she says that part of the power of it is that it gives people an experience where afterwards they can say to people, "When I was in the future..."

[01:01:03] but the one thing that I do a lot in workshops is bring in the power of smell. Human beings can remember ten thousand smells, and we can attach memories and emotions to all of those smells. And so I do an activity that's called making scents of the future, but as in S-C-E-N-T-S. So I give everybody a cup and fifteen minutes, and I say, "Go outside and make in this cup a cocktail of smells that smell like the future that you imagined when we time traveled.

[01:01:29] What did it smell like?" And so people make... And you have to give it a good name because all good cocktails have good names, right? So everybody goes out and I say, "Bring your best sommelier's nose to this," you know, to really build a complex sort of smell scape, if that's a word, of, the future that you imagined.

[01:01:45] And then they all come back in, with these smells that they've made, and then I move the chairs around so that it's... I set out a small space and I say, "Imagine you're at a, you're at a very exclusive cocktail party in a small apartment." So you have to kind of go around saying, "Oh, excuse me, And you want to get around the room and smell as many of these as possible. You don't want to just focus on one. You want to work the room. And so then I put on some music, so it

feels like people are at a party, and it's just beautiful. And people go right, "What's this one called? Oh." and it comes back to that Rilke thing about the future must enter into you a long time before it happens.

[01:02:19] It starts to get into the fu- that, that future starts to seep into your bones, and that's the power of it.

[01:02:26] **Nate Hagens:** Give me some examples of the smells like, for instance.

[01:02:29] **Rob Hopkins:** Oh, God. you know, sometimes people pick out very kind of earthy sort of smells. Sometimes people go kind of quite floral. Sometimes people are just trying to make it like they imagine the world as being really green, so they try to make the freshest, greenest kind of smells they can find.

[01:02:48] Sometimes people actually go to the kitchen, and they kind of make some kind of bread and bring in the foods that they hope are still there in the future. Sometimes people who are addicted to coffee put coffee in. I'm like, well, we'll see about that." But, you know, it's like actually it's-- so they're all very, different and, incredibly...

[01:03:06] Often, you know, people are-- you, go out somewhere, even in the winter, you go outside, and it might not look like there's that much there. But when people are really wanting to do this, they find very different smells that they can tell a story around.

[01:03:20] **Nate Hagens:** So, switching from smell to sound, another example I've heard from you is your field recordings from the future where you and others experiment with these ideas we've been discussing via music.

[01:03:35] Can you maybe tell us a bit about that project and what you're hoping will become possible through music?

[01:03:41] **Rob Hopkins:** So I love ambient electronic music. I, f-- Most kinds of music I can't listen to while I'm working because, like, if there's lyrics or a beat, I'm, they, I'm distracted. Yeah. Ambient music is this whole beautiful genre of music that I kind of got into about six years ago.

[01:03:57] And- Yeah, me

[01:03:57] **Nate Hagens:** too.

[01:03:58] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. And there's some, there's an amazing, Norwegian artist called Biosphere. Have you come across the Biosphere?

[01:04:03] **Nate Hagens:** No. Biosphere.

[01:04:04] **Rob Hopkins:** So Biosphere does the most beautiful stuff using field recordings in really interesting ways. He did an album called Substrata, which is kind of his best album, I think.

[01:04:13] He uses field recordings in a way that's really evocative. And, I also came across a track by this guy, an artist called Mr. Kit, called Girl Walk, Girl Walking on a Beach Wearing a Skirt. And at the end of it, it sounds like a community on a beach watching a firework display with that kind of wonder and awe and magic that you get watching fireworks.

[01:04:32] And I loved this piece of music so much. It was so kind of evocative and I thought, what would it be like if the field recordings that you used came from the future And I found I was visiting places like Utrecht, like landscapes being rewilded by beavers, like car-free neighborhoods in Germany that all-- that sound like that.

[01:04:52] And I thought, "Well, maybe I could make recordings there and then make music with that Mr. Kit guy, but I'll bet he's impossibly cool and lives in LA or

Berlin and would never answer our emails." And I looked him up, and he lived in Totnes as well. And so we started this project, and I started going to places and making recordings and then sending them to him.

[01:05:11] And we made an album which came out last year, which listeners can hear on Bandcamp, and it takes people to all these different, a lot of the places that we've talked about today.

[01:05:20] **Nate Hagens:** So what you're effectively doing is creating a bridge for our nervous systems to live in two worlds, and in doing so activate our nervous systems, and our imaginations in a way that meets the future halfway.

[01:05:40] **Rob Hopkins:** Beautifully put. Yeah, And, well, what we're doing now is then we developed ma- we made videos for each of the tracks, and the last, and last year we did a couple of live shows. And later this year, so we're now reworking that show, with new video elements and much more theatrical.

[01:05:59] And we've been working with Manda Scott, who does the Accidental Gods podcast, and we got some funding from a foundation in Denmark. And later this year we're gonna be doing a tour in the UK of five different places, including the Globe Theatre in London, which is super exciting, where we are going to be taking our field recordings from the future time portal on the road, and we will pick people up in twenty twenty-six, take them to the twenty thirty-six that was a result of us doing everything that we could possibly do, have done in as multi-sensory a way as possible.

[01:06:29] And you were asking, well, what's the ambition with this? You know, at any one time in the world, there's probably at least 30 of those kinds of immersive Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo kind of light show Lumière things touring. We want this to be bigger than that. We want there to be, like, field recordings from the future time portals opening up all over the place, and for this to become, like, something

that then inspires Netflix series, and that everybody has the experience, where they, wherever they are, of stepping into the time portal so that nobody can say, "Well, I didn't know that was possible."

[01:07:01] You know, we wanna take them to a world where actually it turned out the biggest area of growth in the economy wasn't AI by twenty thirty-six, it was actually mycelium, and research into mycelium, and all the extraordinary things that mycelium could unlock. That we take people to visit whole shopping malls now where nothing is new, and everything is reclaimed and repurposed and recycled.

[01:07:22] We take people to regenerative farms. We take people to visit landscapes rewilded by beavers, and we walk them around in that world in a way that's deeply immersive, and it's one of the loveliest things I've ever been a part of, actually.

[01:07:34] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I'm not a doctor, Rob, but I can hypothesize that you have a very healthy hippocampus.

[01:07:43] So, as you are aware, a core theme of my work is the idea that we're entering a period where the biophysical constraints on our 19, almost 20 terawatt civilization are gonna force a contraction in energy material throughput and complexity. So my question to you is, do you think it's possible for humans, some or many, to genuinely love a future that involves less material stuff?

[01:08:16] And how do we paint that picture in a way that doesn't activate our loss aversion, machinery

[01:08:23] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. So in, in 2024, Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan wrote a paper which people can find online where they said that the world could provide decent, living standards for 8.5 billion people while consuming just 30%

of current global resources and energy while, leaving what they called, a substantial surplus for additional consumption, public luxury, scientific advancement, and other social investments.

[01:08:54] And in their paper, they set out how all of that can happen. And so for me, I kind of think, of course we can. Of course we can. You know, I'm going to visit Denmark, right? You go to Denmark where they have a high tax, and they have this concept of public luxury. You know, the cities are beautiful. Things are, things are-- we share things.

[01:09:12] It's not about, like, three or four people having amazing estates where they hoard everything. You walk around Copenhagen, it's amazing. You know, so I think it's entirely possible based on the research that he's got in there that we could absolutely do that. But if we're using-- But again, it remains stuck.

[01:09:29] 30% of current global resource and energy use leaving a substantial surplus. So what would that be like? That's the thing for me. You know, how do we bring that alive for people? Like, the fact that it's possible, I d- I don't, debate. The issue is how do we cultivate longing for it? You know, the big word that runs through my work right now is longing, which is this beautiful, powerful word that we have in the English language.

[01:09:53] I spend a lot of time doing talks in the French-speaking world, and I always have an interpreter with me 'cause my French is rubbish. And the interpreter, whenever it comes to the word longing, they t- they, they take the word désir and put loads of superlatives on the front. Désir très, profonde.

[01:10:10] But even, like, even désir très profonde is not the same as longing for me. Longing is- Right, right ... like a soul ache, right? How do we cultivate that kind of profound soul ache f-for what this future could be like? That's the skill that

we need right now. And Don DeLillo in his book Underworld, he said brilliantly, he said, "Longing on a large scale is what makes history."

[01:10:34] So I'm, I, I-- It doesn't, it-- The bit of whether it's possible isn't the bit that troubles me. The bit that troubles me is how do we cultivate longing at scale for that? Because we are up against a kind of a desire machine that is phenomenally powerful. Capitalism is astonishingly good at cultivating longing.

[01:10:53] All the people in our culture who are the most skilled in the dark arts of how you cultivate longing are on that side driving everything that is going to hell in a handcart. So for me, the question is how do we get some of those people over here? How do we create things like field recordings from the future, like the film, kind of ideas that, that you play around with, that I'm playing around with?

[01:11:12] You know, we have to get so much better, not just at giving people information about how awful things could be. We need to do that as well, but we also have to give people things. We have to get better. We have to get so much better at giving people things to, things to run towards rather than just things to run screaming in the opposite direction from.

[01:11:29] **Nate Hagens:** I agree with that. a bookend question. What do you think we would most urgently need to grieve about modernity and the present world in order to effectively leave it behind in the past, psychologically at least? And how might we replace those things with other things to be excited about in the future?

[01:11:51] Or am I framing it in terms of grief, a- against the grain of the language?

[01:11:59] **Rob Hopkins:** No, I think, grief is a really important part of this, and I think, you know, organizations like the Good Grief Network and Healthy Human Culture and people in there, and Joanna Macy's work on grief are really fundamentally important to this.

[01:12:12] I think, I think I guess, I don't know, because I, because I'm not somebody who fixates on modernity and maybe flying. I don't know. Maybe, this idea that you can be in Bangkok on Thursday and Singapore on Friday and Los Angeles on Saturday and New Zealand on Sunday. Maybe we have to s- but we have to accept that, that moving more slowly is a wonderful thing.

[01:12:37] I gave up flying in 2013. I haven't flown since. I only travel on the train. I have to get the train in June from London to Malmo in Norway. It'll take me a day and a half, and it'll be an absolute joy. I'll get my best work done. I see all those landscapes changing. You know, it's about replacing-

[01:12:58] **Nate Hagens:** There's an ostensible ecological reason for doing that, but have you found that it actually helps the cadence of your life slowing down in that way?

[01:13:08] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah, absolutely. It means that I arrive in places. I've caught up with myself when I arrive. It means I've written lots of things. It means I have arrived... Well, if the trains are on time, I arrive calm. If I've gone through German trains, which currently are a mess, and one train has meant I've missed the next one, missed the next one, then I arrive a bit frazzled.

[01:13:32] But it's different, it's a different quality of experience, I think. Traveling on night sleeper trains is such a joy. You meet the most amazing people on night sleeper trains. It's just a shift. When Dr. Seuss wrote "A Cat in the Hat," Dr. Seuss wrote a book where he gave himself a palette of 50 words to write a whole book and a whole story with.

[01:13:53] He always said that was the best exercise his imagination ever had. The beautiful thing about limits is that the imagination loves limits. The imagination flourishes with limits. When you study improv and the improv instructor gives you something to do, they don't say, "Hey, guys, make up a story."

[01:14:11] You'd be, ooh. You know, they- he'll say, "Right, you are a bus driver. You're really tired and grumpy. You just wanna get home. You've had a long day. You've had enough. You are getting onto the bus with an enormous musical instrument. Go." And then that kind of... That, the limits allow you to be so much more creative, right?

[01:14:26] So it's like when I shut down a certain thing, I'm not gonna do that. I haven't eaten meat since I was 13. I stopped eating meat because of punk when I was 13. I've never missed that. I've explored a whole other amazing w- world of different things and different foods. You know, actually limits make us more curious and more creative and open up more possibilities if we're happy to go with that, I think.

[01:14:49] **Nate Hagens:** So in an upcoming... I had part one out, but I'm planning a eight to 10 part series and the frankly, called Staying Human, and it's what I think is ground zero for approaching, the more than human predicament is our internal grounding and, agency and awareness to the present moment and removing addictions and finding the others and all those things.

[01:15:18] **Rob Hopkins:** Right.

[01:15:19] **Nate Hagens:** Because I think that if we know all the facts and say all the best narratives and have the biophysical story nailed, if we can't function as a psychologically ecological adult, it's not gonna, it's not gonna really matter. So my question to you is, do you have a daily practice of connecting to the future, some things you do personally to maintain the sense of longing that you mentioned and imagination for what could be, in the future and which viewers could also do at home?

[01:15:53] **Rob Hopkins:** I read books from people like Adrienne Maree Brown, like Walidah Imarisha, the people that I've been talking about. I have the practice of

looking for things I can take photographs of that look like the future. I'd love to say I have a daily meditation practice, and I did for many years, but then I had kids and it rather, rather knocked it on the head.

[01:16:16] I do yoga every morning, which I guess is a kind of meditation practice in a sense. I guess I'm also always-- I'm involved in projects like Field Recordings from the Future, like a comic book that I'm working on with an amazing Belgian cartoonist called Thomas Liheira, which is about how we built a time machine and used it to travel to the future.

[01:16:40] So I'm always in that s- thinking about, okay, what, do we see there? What's the detail there? The more you do it, the more it sort of comes into focus. You know, we're thinking, okay, what do you see in the shop windows as you walk past? What do you-- what are the adverts in the new-- what are the newspaper headlines in that future?

[01:16:55] The more you can populate it with detail, and the more you do it, the more that it becomes a reality, I think. It's been really lovely, with Field Recordings from the Future, so Kit, who I've been doing-- Mr. Kit, who I've been doing that project with, he said, you know, when he started that project, he was very kind of confused about the future and very-- and he didn't know any of these stories of these projects that we've been doing, but it's been very profound experience for him, actually, being part of that.

[01:17:23] **Nate Hagens:** So when we imagine the future, which is the core of your work now, can you tell me the difference between just an average human based on our physiolo- physiology and evolutionary path to today, which is more motivating, averting of futures that we don't want or longing for futures that we do, and why?

[01:17:46] **Rob Hopkins:** Which is most motivating?

[01:17:48] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Because when I think about the future, a lot of what populates in my mind is oceans with far less, life, and, forests and ecosystems moving not fast enough to track climate change and, things like that, and they're things that I want to avoid Yeah ... but I think i-i-if I could imagine, which I guess is your work, is painting the f- the future that we do want, that might be more motivating, but I just want your professional opinion on that.

[01:18:23] **Rob Hopkins:** Professional. So, I mean, I think the honest answer is we're all different, right? That actually for some of us, you know, we can read IPCC reports, we can read horrific things and they mo-motivate us. That's-- I've been motivated by that stuff kind of all my life, you know, and like, "Okay, shit, what are we gonna do about this?"

[01:18:40] And so, and so that's... But, I think, you know, when we look at, when we look at the climate emergency, that kind of messaging that the Extinction Rebellion had about extinction and collapse- Mm-hmm ... it really mo-mobilized maybe 5% of the population.

[01:18:56] **Nate Hagens:** Mm-hmm.

[01:18:57] **Rob Hopkins:** Didn't mobilize everybody else. A while ago, on my podcast, "From What If to What Next," I interviewed Solitaire Townsend, who's an amazing sustainability climate activist person, who sh- who's also an expert on Shakespearean theater.

[01:19:12] She said in Shakespearean terms, the climate movement has done a brilliant act. We set out the drama, the tensions, the bad guys, the kind of what's the thing that's wrong and, why, you know. We're brilliant at that, and then we just go round and round doing that one over and over again.

[01:19:32] Act two is then when you set off on a journey and you meet people who the world rises up to help you. You fall in love. You find skills and resources you never thought we have. We don't do that bit. We just keep doing the act one bit round and round again. So for me it's like, yes, there are some of us who are really, motivated by horrific reports and data and the kind of things you're talking about.

[01:19:53] But we would be kidding ourselves if we imagined that's what's gonna mobilize everybody. And I'm not saying that there is one way to do everything– Yeah ... at all. There's lots of different things, but it feels to me like that's often the missing piece. If you look back to the civil rights movement– as people in the climate movement love to do, looking back to the 1960s, and often that debate gets stuck in should we be more like Malcolm X or more like Martin Luther King?

[01:20:20] 'Cause Malcolm X, the kind of equivalent of Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, then made the kind of more moderate climate movement seem more kind of mainstream, right? We get stuck in that debate. What we often miss out on is the fact that also in the civil rights movement at the time, you had the Black Panthers who were setting up free school meals and free schools and running ambulances into neighborhoods nobody else would, kind of that mutual aid equivalent of maybe what some transition group's doing.

[01:20:43] But you also had Sun Ra, Parliament–Funkadelic, Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, people who were writing what we now think of as Afrofuturist Black utopian writers who were filling that space with stories and futures in which Black culture and Black people were thriving. I think we need all of those things.

[01:21:01] We need the people who are pointing at what's coming and going, "Oh, look, But also at the same time, we need the equivalent of a kind of Afrofuturist Black utopian filling that story with... filling that future with, what's possible. And then we might find out that if we do that well, and if we're able to cultivate

longing at scale, that might be the thing that engages more people, than just pointing at the...

[01:21:25] pointing what's coming down the pipes towards us.

[01:21:28] **Nate Hagens:** You and I have been doing this work for 20 years now. and since I started, I know that I've changed my mind, about quite a few things, and I'm wondering, what are some of the biggest shifts in thinking, or things that you've changed your mind about since starting this work 20-odd years ago?

[01:21:49] **Rob Hopkins:** I think maybe one thing is, the-- and, for this I'm deeply, grateful to, a few extraordinary women like Sophie Banks and Hilary Prentice who got involved in the transition movement quite early on, who said, "This is not just about... This is not just a kind of outward process that's about solar panels and organic carrots, that actually this is as much about how we do things as what we do."

[01:22:16] And they called-- they said, they coined this term inner transition, that actually the groups having the skills to do this in a way that they can have a culture of supporting each other and a culture where we try to minimize the risk of burnout in our groups. We run meetings people enjoy.

[01:22:34] We have ways of managing conflicts, all that kind of stuff. That inner aspect of this is just as important as what we do. I think that's one thing that at the beginning I didn't think of at all until they took me to one side and said, "You know, Rob, if this is gonna last, it really needs to be that." Also, I think for me, I went to art school when I was 18.

[01:22:53] I did foundation art. I learned to draw, and then I went off and did other things, and I had a family and, and I always then spent 20 or 30 years thinking of those a-artist Rob over here and activist Rob over here, and all the stuff that I did

in transition was all about transition, and occasionally if I went on holiday with the kids, I might get a few hours to go and draw one day, and that was how it was.

[01:23:14] Then I did a course with Ruth Bentovim, who I mentioned before, called, The Art of Invitation, all about-- which was about bringing those things back together again. It made me think, actually, I could look at a lot of what we've done in transition as just as much an art project. The Totnes pound local currency we had in Totnes for 11 years.

[01:23:32] You could say, "Yeah, that's a local economic experiment." You could also say, "Wow, that's an amazing art project." You got people using notes you'd printed for 11 years in 80 shops in a town. That's phenomenal. So I now increasingly, with field recordings from the future, with these projects that I'm doing, feel like I'm bringing those two sides of myself back together again, and that's been liberating as hell.

[01:23:54] **Nate Hagens:** I fully agree. And somewhere along my journey, I realized that we're gonna need the artists and the storytellers to lead the way and then also have the engineers and architects and-

[01:24:06] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah ...

[01:24:06] **Nate Hagens:** you know, that type of stuff. I mean, it-- we're gonna need both.

[01:24:09] **Rob Hopkins:** They're the professional cultivators of longing. That's what they do.

[01:24:12] Street artists, poets, rappers- Yeah. Yeah ... they cultivate longing at scale in a way that... I spoke to a guy who was a climate scientist in the UK. He said, "Yeah, we're basically like English people on holiday that, nobody can

understand us, so we just keep saying the same thing over and over louder and louder–

[01:24:27] and wondering why no one understands us." Like, but then you bring in the artist, that's what they do.

[01:24:32] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So what can someone listening to this episode do now, today, this week, or this month to help address the things discussed in this podcast? Or, is it mostly up to politicians and leaders?

[01:24:47] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, one thing I would say is that this is very much a kind of an ongoing journey of exploration that I'm part of that didn't end when "How to Fall in Love with the Future" came out.

[01:24:56] So I do a newsletter every month called "The Time Traveler's Gazette," which people might like to sign up to. Just go to my website, robhopkins.net, put your email address in the email newsletter box, and then accompany me on that journey. And share-- if you find any of these ideas useful and you try them out, share them back with me.

[01:25:12] This is a kind of an emerging community of practice around these ideas. But yeah, I would say, one thing that you could do t-today is to look at your social media feed and where it comes from, and that often we set up this thing that just kind of pours into our ears through a funnel every day, kind of all these horrific...

[01:25:32] And it's important that we know about it, right? But it's like we-- that's often that's all we give ourselves. So there are people like Positive News magazine in the UK, Imagine 5, which is a Dutch magazine about solutions, the transition movement. I try to share as much of that stuff as I can. There's an organization called We Are Possible.

[01:25:49] There's many people who are posting this stuff, so give your imagination a treat and seek out some of those stories and allow those to have equal kind of a- equal access to your imagination.

[01:26:02] **Nate Hagens:** So I know you're at UAL in London now, doing exercises with students. What, general recommendations do you have for young humans in their teens and twenties who become aware of all this, economic, environmental constraints to the global economy?

[01:26:19] **Rob Hopkins:** I would say, there was a guy who, last summer who wa-- just before How to Fall in Love with the Future came out, he got hold of an early copy, and he designed his whole summer holiday around the book, and he went to visit all the different places that are in the book. He took the train to Utrecht.

[01:26:38] He went to the Vauban in Freiburg. He went to all the different places, and I met him afterwards. He said, "Rob, I went to 2030 on holiday." You know? And I would say maybe give yourself a treat of a trip to the future. When I was 25 and at university, near the end of the sustainability degree that I was doing at the time, they put us all on a bus and took us to Denmark, to Copenhagen and Odense.

[01:27:04] And we spent a week and a half there, and we went to see offshore wind farms, bicycle lanes, district heating schemes, co-housing projects, and ecological architecture. Blew our minds, and then they drove us back to the UK, and we arrived back going, "We've got a lot of work to do here, but we know that it's possible."

[01:27:23] And so give yourself an experience like that. You know, step... Allow yourself to step out of the present and into as many different places that em- that embody the future as possible. Do a permaculture course so you understand

what's going on underneath the surface. What's the-- Rewire your brain so that you see possibilities everywhere rather than probabilities.

[01:27:43] But I would say go and visit some of those places. It-- that's one of the best gifts you could give yourself.

[01:27:48] **Nate Hagens:** What do you care most about in the world, Rob Hopkins?

[01:27:52] **Rob Hopkins:** life

[01:27:57] Life and life's ability to create more life and the astonishing mind-blowing diversity of life that we have the awesome privilege to live around and to be part of and to live alongside that we hardly even understand at all. Life.

[01:28:19] **Nate Hagens:** If I had to answer the question, I think I would use those exact words.

[01:28:22] I mean, that, that's exactly what I care most about. You may know this question is coming next 'cause I'm still asking it, but if you could wave a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing you would do to improve human and planetary futures?

[01:28:40] **Rob Hopkins:** I would collapse all oil and gas companies instantly.

[01:28:44] It is now blindingly obvious to anybody anywhere in the world that oil and gas companies are now the most wicked, malevolent, antisocial, anti-life institutions anywhere on the planet. They don't even pretend to care anymore. And, so I think that the demise of oil and gas companies really can't come soon enough.

[01:29:07] **Nate Hagens:** But that would be the demise of billions of people if that happened overnight or on any short-term horizon.

[01:29:14] **Rob Hopkins:** Well, maybe they would go and then maybe we'd have to nationalize. We would nationalize them.

[01:29:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, most of them are national already. 88% are already national.

[01:29:23] **Rob Hopkins:** I would put a kind of a thought bomb into the minds of people who run oil and gas companies so that they set out to design their demise as rapidly as fits with climate targets, but is way more ambitious than they're currently thinking.

[01:29:46] I would put a worm into those guys' brains that would basically be like, "We need to dismantle this as soon as possible. With the le- causing the least amount of suffering possible, we need to dismantle this in the most ambitious way feasible."

[01:29:59] **Nate Hagens:** But that's really the worm that needs to be in the institutions of the world that are based on extraction and more power and more GDP, 'cause they're just providing what the world is using.

[01:30:15] **Rob Hopkins:** But you said one thing, so I'm just trying to stick to the spirit of your exercise. Yeah.

[01:30:18] **Nate Hagens:** S- so, well, it's, yeah, that's a conversation that is just so nuanced and complex and important. But- Yeah ... but thank you for speaking that, your truth. Do you have any closing comments for people watching, listening who understand and agree with what you've laid out here today?

[01:30:40] you're still so eloquent and, looking two or three steps ahead at what really needs to happen, on these issues, what sort of closing words do you have for our viewers?

[01:30:52] **Rob Hopkins:** I think there's, a... I spent-- About two weeks ago, I was in the north of France visiting an amazing young woman called Annaïg Plassard, who has really embraced this kind of time travel as a tool for activists stuff, and she has started a transition group in her town.

[01:31:09] She made a film for French TV where she brings this kind of time travel character to all of this. And last year in France, they had the press- they had parliamentary elections, and after they... In France, the elections go in two rounds, and after the first round, the far right were in the lead and everybody panicked.

[01:31:29] Well, not everybody, who wasn't far right panicked and organized for the first time since the 1930s, the left finally managed to agree about something enough to, f- group under one banner. They called it the Front Populaire. And, and then she went to a big demonstration in Nantes in favor of the Front Populaire, and she was photographed in the French-- for one of the French newspapers holding her "I've been to the future.

[01:31:55] We won" sign in French in her time travel costume. That photograph got in all the French newspapers. It went viral on French social media. It got on French TV. And I said to her, "Why do you think that was?" She said, "Because I think when things look really dark and uncertain, to have somebody open the fabric of time and step through from the future and say, 'It's gonna be all right,' is really powerful."

[01:32:17] And I like to kind of operate in that sense of that there are so many people listening to this who'll be working so hard doing amazing projects in their neighborhood, in their community, in their city, feeling like they're the only ones who care, like they're exhausted, it's grueling, the world is going in the opposite direction.

[01:32:34] And I like to have that role of being the person who steps back and through and says, "This is amazing. Thank you so much. I've just come back from the future, and they all want me to come and thank you so much." In the same way that I always imagine if you could travel back in time and sit next to Rosa Parks, sitting on that bus, scared of what's gonna happen, but with a fire in her belly that this is the right thing to be doing, and you could say, "In ten years from now, there's gonna be a civil rights act passed in this country that'll be linked, attributed back to what you're doing today.

[01:33:04] Thank you so much." You know, it's like I feel like in the work that we're doing, we need to feel the kind of small hand of, the future in the small of our back kind of saying, "Yep, yeah. yep, You're doing the right thing." And that's what I like to bring, I think.

[01:33:20] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, we are time travelers, and we're alive at the, largesse and magic of the carbon pulse, and so we–

[01:33:27] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah.

[01:33:27] **Nate Hagens:** We really are. The people watching this show are, in many ways, actual time travelers.

[01:33:33] **Rob Hopkins:** Yeah. What an incredible time to be alive. We get the honor to live at a time when everything hopefully is profoundly reimagined. That only happens once every couple of hundred years, and we're here.

[01:33:44] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Rob Hopkins, thank you so much for your continued work, robhopkins.net, and we'll share resources, to your other links and such.

[01:33:54] Good to see you, my friend.

[01:33:55] **Rob Hopkins:** Nice to see you. This is an enormous honor to have been invited on, Nate, and thank you so much for all that you do. On behalf of the people in the future, just to say they all asked me to say thank you, Nate, so much. Your podcast– ... really was one of the big things that people look back to and celebrate, so thank you.

[01:34:11] **Nate Hagens:** Thanks, Rob. If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit thegreatsimplification.com for references and show notes. From there, you can also join our Hilo community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzy Sirianni.

[01:34:35] Our production team also includes Leslie Batt-Lutz, Brady Heyen, Julia Maxwell, Gabriella Sleiman, and Grace Brunfelt. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.