

MATTEREUM

Pat Kane & Vinay Gupta – Transcript

Mattereum Event

Vinay: Pat, how are you sir?

Pat: I'm very well, Vinay – it's nice to see you in your unnatural habitat! Or is it natural habitat? I can't tell these days!

Vinay: Well, if you wear the camouflage long enough, eventually you begin to think you're a dinosaur...

Pat: [laughs] Or a gorilla...

Vinay: Yeah, absolutely. UR or OR? Gorilla or guerrilla?

Pat: Well, gorilla eternally, in terms of our mammalian inheritance. Guerrilla, as a tactic to get things done.

Vinay: Yeah, a way of life – yeah, absolutely. So, here we are, in the fifth or possibly sixth-circle hell... Do you remember which one the usurers are on?

Pat: I can't remember! [laughs] Where are the hedonists? That's the circle I want to be in!

Vinay: Extinction Rebellion possibly? I hear they throw a pretty good party!

Pat: Public hedonism, public expenditure of... "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," as Shakespeare once said, that's where we are: the expense of spirit in a waste of shame. But, with virtue as our goal. So, how are we doing virtuously?

Vinay: Here?

Pat: Mm.

Vinay: I saw some of the most beautifully-architected greenwashing I've ever seen this morning.

Pat: Congratulations!

Vinay: You know, statement one and statement two equalled bad thing equals good thing, but statement one sounded perfectly reasonable, and statement two sounded perfectly reasonable, and if you connect them together carelessly in your head, you wound up with something which is completely not true, even though the two independent components were true. And you can imagine that somebody with a PhD in logical philosophy had just mapped this thing out Bertrand Russell style to get to that conclusion, and I'm just looking at this, like "Best minds in science, you know, covering up the fact that these materials last forever, and we're deploying them to contain our cartons of orange juice."

Pat: Yeah. I mean, ~I'm setting, juggling~ my completion of the *Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson, which in terms of events like this is like a kind of giant wet dream of successful administration of an existential climate crisis. I mean, that's the joy: the joy of this is a piece of H.G. Wells-like science fiction rather than dystopian science fiction.

Vinay: Modernism!

Pat: Yes, it's modernistic, and it's also people that can execute plans, can go over-ground in terms of carbon coin, and underground in terms of targeted assassinations and inventing new religions, and somehow... So it's like a dream of holistic administration of a complex problem. Whereas I think what you're talking about, and what most people are talking about is how do we control our externalities so that a tipping-point change doesn't happen, and the time on that is getting shorter and shorter. So, I'm interested to know from you, because I know and love the ambition of Mattereum, in terms of the instrumentation of the carbon pathways of the world. Are you being heard? Are you being listened to?

Vinay: So, we tell people what they can cope with...

Pat: Yes, which is?

Vinay: Durable goods: that's your transportation vehicles, your furniture, your clothes and your consumer electronics, and you get the

highest-possible resale price, and you financialise that in such a way that whenever somebody buys something, they buy it with an intention to sell it. As a result they take care of it, and they prioritise buying the things which command highest resale price, which means durable goods.

Now, that as a story... I expect we'll get 5-10 years of running that story, and we might become quite large and muscular. Then we're going to hit super hardcore carbon rationing, the price of new things will go through the freaking roof, the price of the old things will be offset by all their previous users, and suddenly we are in an environment where you go to the second-hand markets because the carbon pricing is too high in the primary markets. You know, your carbon-compensated iPhone 14 costs \$8.4 million, but your carbon-compensated iPhone 11 that was issued before the carbon pricing really came in, these things are still recirculating. And that's our kind of medium-term plan.

And then the long-term plan is flat-out do we have enough water filters in Azerbaijan to cope with the refugee influx, and who's out there managing their solar panel deployments, and how do we know the solar panels aren't being stolen?

Pat: So, at what point does your sort of plutocratic expenditure items affect production design further up the stream, i.e. when do we start to get a mainstream consumer culture that's about designs for repair-ability and durability? At what point does the process that you're ~inciting~ pressure on production design, to the extent that we need it to be pressured?

Vinay: I think that's already happened half a dozen times. If you go back to Vespa motorbikes or scooters, the point was that you could repair it with a hammer, and because it was Italian you had to. Similarly, the great love of denim jackets, denim clothing, leather jackets was that these things were incredibly durable. You know, I have a leather jacket sitting back in my apartment here which is from the mid-1980s: completely serviceable, it's probably got another 30 years in it. And that as an approach... In the 1970s the hippies wore denim, because denim lasted forever. They didn't have a lot of money, they bought things that were durable, they're easy to wash... You know, old denim is just perennial.

So, I think that when we've gone through phases of this, we've done lots of rehearsal, we've done lots of prototyping... Your

spectacles: why don't they just etch in the tiny corner of the lens the prescription numbers, right? Two pixels high, you need a jewellers loupe be able to see them, suddenly the glasses all have circular value; without that one critical bit of information, it's lost... The changes are so minor for things like spectacles.

Pat: But the changes in terms of lifestyle attitudes, in terms of a sort of a philosophy of use amongst communities is going to aid and abet that. Now, at the moment we have that in ~Bobo, Waldorf, Strouds~ – bits of California, bits of Middle Europe – where they have decided that they are going to [~3] high-quality, high-expenditure lifestyle. “You don't own the watch; the watch owns you,” is the high end of it, but ~all of it, if you know what I mean~. So, that needs to break out of its bourgeois bohemian enclave. So, the scale of an enterprise and organisation and corporation that comes up to something like this, I'm wanting them to think... Well, who's going to help us get there? What's the communal proof of concept, or what's the community that helps the proof of concept for equal production design to happen?

Vinay: But we have the threads: the threads are eBay. I mean, if you think of eBay, that is your circular economy right there, or at least it was before they let new stuff on to the platform. Look at Etsy: Etsy was very, very, very close to the ground of manufacturing, until they opened up after mainstream retail. So I think that what happens is you get enclave after enclave after enclave where people with these values do gather, and then what happens is that somebody comes and starts flogging new production from China for four bucks cheaper than used, and then you get the fight away from quality into the garbage again.

I don't want to say I've lost hope for culture, but I've definitely come to quite ~Thatcherite~ conclusions about the role of incentives. If we can't find a way of making good-quality, vintage, cheaper-than-new for cars, for furniture... I mean, you know I moved household a while ago: I went to eBay, came out with two white Italian leather sofas, for 150 quid each! And it was just somebody had gotten jammed with them, they needed to get rid of them, they were in a hurry, I gave them what they asked for on eBay, and they sent me two Italian leather sofas. They'd taken a 90% value loss in that transaction, and they'd used the things for five years. And that is so typical of what happens when you sell things second hand that it's not surprising that people would rather buy cheap and throw it in the trash.

So, the way that I see this is if we just take the existing value-haemorrhaging in the second-hand markets, and put the bandage over that that says, “No-no-no; beautifully documented, you sell it six months before it’s going to move,” and we just take out all of the contingency in those markets... It sounds dumb, but eBay is doing \$100 billion/year of transactions. Mattereum might do \$500 million[/year?] of transactions and kind of consider itself well-healed. If you think of our margins and what our take is and the size of the team we might need when it’s all fully built out... you know, \$500 million of transactions for used things? We would be doing very nicely, thank you.

Pat: But your certification and authentication processes aid and abet the aesthetic shifts required, the consumer aesthetic required, which is that we live in the fragments of our accumulated past, and we are happy about that. We are not relentless neophytes, modernists looking for brand new; we’re looking to live not in the rooms of modernity, but certainly in the archive of modernity, reaching back for our white leather sofas, reaching back for our leather jackets, reaching back for our repairable machines. To me, that’s a massive brand marketing opportunity, but it’s... Or even a game world, make a game world out of it, make a metaverse out of... Maybe that’s what’s the metaverse does, is to kind of rehearse us for living in a cultural commodity world, of fragments and themes and strands from the past that we re-weave in the present in order to defend the future by not just buying new and new again. Do you see the sensibility as it’s required?

Vinay: Absolutely. The unfortunate Warren Ellis called this atemporality.

Pat: Atemporality – yes, why not.

Vinay: This notion that we were seeing it in media... Remixing material from the 50s and the 70s was as easy as making it new, so ~we’re working the whole musical arch out~, all the genres were available... ~It can work on~ anything.

The same thing... So, one of the things that I’ve gotten very wary of over the past 20 years is the idea that cultural change precedes economic change. I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s mostly the other way around. The place where they went second-hand seriously... Do you remember that dreadful Macklemore song *Thrift Shop*?

Pat: Yes.

Vinay: So, that culture in America was broke America, and they started shopping in thrift stores. The ones that had some taste were the ones that were wearing 1970s brand T-shirts from Coca-Cola rather than 1980s brand T-shirts from Goldman Sachs. And so this whole hipster aesthetic was like “I’ve made my wardrobe look good, because I’m shopping in thrift stores but I’m buying the good stuff!” right? And that, that was really critical. So, that notion where they went back into the thrift store culture in America, they pulled out the best of the stuff that was there, they forged it into an aesthetic, and they were the hipsters.

The second thing that happened was that the people that had really a lot of money started to imitate that style, but they didn’t want to go to thrift stores, and then what you got was modern reproductions of vintage, which were sold by places like... Take your pick, right? What was that store that was really, really big on that stuff a few years ago? You know the one I mean.

Pat: I think I know the one you mean, yeah.

Vinay: Yeah, Modern-something, you know... And that sort of process where we remanufactured the past...

Pat: Yeah. Urban Outfitters did a bit of that as well.

Vinay: Urban Outfitters did a bunch of that – yeah, I think they’re probably the ones I’m thinking. So, all of that... You know, culture wants to think that it’s first, and we’ve been trying culture as a lead on climate for quite a while... It doesn’t seem to be having much impact, with the exception of freaking vegans, who are more like an occupying force. They’re more like an army, less like a cult...

Pat: Yeah, more like a cult than an army. But I know what you mean.

Vinay: Extremely effective, right?

Pat: Very effective: local, personal, communal, global – all connected on a string.

Vinay: 30 years of effort on it, maybe 40 years of effort on it...

Pat: But it shows you how long it takes to make a kind of practice-based cultural change. But you're right, yeah.

Vinay: And then vegetarianism mainstreamed, because they brought in the Overton window so much that teenagers that wanted to be vegetarian would say to their parents, "Well, at least I'm not going vegan!" and the parents were like "Oh my god, she's right! Okay, fine! Please, just eat some cheese!"

Pat: [laughs] Vegetarian ~is the hegemony option~ and veganism is the avant-garde – yep, okay.

Vinay: Yeah – the radicals were vegan, and the progressives were vegetarian.

Pat: Always like to find a role for the avant-garde, Vinay... But I get your point: veganism is our metaphor of change from idealism to world-saving practice, but you think that actually a kind of re-engineering of an economic contract or a social contract is going to be... and such that it's inescapable, in the way that HTTP or Linux was inescapable, and then it triggers a certain transactional civilisation that then is a support for imminent, everyday lifestyle change.

Vinay: And I think it's driven straight out by poverty, I think poverty is the driver.

Pat: Mm. Proper poverty, not Western poverty.

Vinay: No, no – individual, poor white boy poverty! The American meth belt... you know, they've lost, what , 50%, 80%, 100% of their wealth?

Pat: Deaths of despair, as Angus Deaton calls it.

Vinay: Deaths of despair... You know, they're flat broke, they felt they were entitled to better, they didn't get it, they've lost minimally 50% of their wealth since the 2008 collapse... The thing where Homer Simpson has become an aspirational figure... "Wow, he's got a stay-at-home wife, and a two-car garage!" And that shift, where Homer went from being the symbol of failure to "Actually, he's holding it together... Wow, he must make a lot of money at the nuke factory, look at this lifestyle!" right?

Pat: [laughs] Yeah, yeah.

Vinay: So, in that settling of expectations comes used, right? Well, this charity shop thing: the charity shops were inefficient because nobody cared about that waste stream. If somebody cares about that waste stream... Vintage clothing prices are through the roof, right, and that's only because if you want to buy that stuff new, it's 800 quid. And, you know, now vintage is 125.

Pat: Yeah.

Vinay: So, what I see is this inevitable pressure where the former middle classes are being forced into the thrift store layer of reality, and at that point what you're going to get is the middle-classing of the second-hand market, and at that point one might be tempted to use the word gentrification.

Pat: [laughs]

Vinay: So, if you thought of Mattereum as being a gentrification of the thrift stores...

Pat: Well, it's interesting: it's an *aesthefication* or *aesthefisation* of the thrift store. And the interesting kink in that, I would suggest, is the quality of the production of the goods produced from certain eras. I mean, the stuff that's happening in the last 10 years coming through into TK Maxx and Primark is literally dissolving and disintegrating before your eyes. So there's a little bit of a gap there, ~at which point~ production for durability becomes tied into a whole new service offer. I mean, we have been waiting for the cradle-to-cradle model to exist. And do you know what? It's a massive non-turn-up! McDonough's thing didn't work. With a few carpet services, with a few other object services... But the idea that cradle-to-cradle circularity is part of everyday life at the moment is just purely not... It's absolutely not happened. I mean, is that to do with incumbent retail investment? "We've bought this megamall, we've paid money for this property, it's amortised over a certain amount of time. We have to execute it, otherwise our books don't work."

So to me, it seems like the opportunity for disruptive, genuinely, socio-politically, socio-technically disruptive business models is really wide. But you say that the culture thing is secondary to the economic thing. I would have suggested that there are brand

promises or brand narratives that probably could jump into that space between economics and culture, and say, “Here is the planet-friendly yet meaningful, not cluttered but beautifully-arranged object life for you.” ~And in the way that our whole worlds~, and the way that the metaverse is going to world your existence, someone is going to say, “I can world your life of objects,” each of which is a narrative, each of which is a story, and it’s a good story, it’s a story whether it’s either repairable, or it’s sustainable, or it comes from an ethical place, or an aesthetical place. But in any case, you live in this world, this is an attractive world.

Vinay: This Marie Kondo, right? The thing about Marie Kondo is she doesn’t tell you what to do with the things you got rid of. “Strip it down to 30 books, and no more. Does this give me joy?” and then there’s this kind of like *whoomp*, and the stuff just evaporates because it’s just no longer in our world.

So, imagine a universe which is of many, many, many, many little Marie Kondo cells. Everybody has their own little 30-book universe, and when you get rid of something, you toss it into the next box over. “Hey, does anyone want this copy of *Das Kapital*? I have read it,” and now I’m like... [laughs] *fling*, *whoomp*, and somebody catches it. Because then it’s new, it’s shiny, they have the experience, and then they go *whoomp*, and it goes to the next person.

Pat: But the throwing and the catching and the throwing and the catching implies a chain, a system, an integration, whatever you want to call it...

Vinay: Infrastructure, infrastructure.

Pat: It requires infrastructure that would make that happen beautifully and easefully, and in a way of the very action of it being completely pleasing, in the way that an App Store is a pleasing action, in the way that IKEA is beginning to take constructability from stuff that you buy seasonally to an ethos of life, you know.

Vinay: Yes, yes – absolutely. So, that part... This is the part where we need a genius or two. Because I’ve been putting this question... We’re working with Bruce Sterling, who wrote this book... Remember *Shaping Things*?

Pat: Oh, very – the *spimes*!

Vinay: Spimes! Spimes. So, we went to Bruce, and we were basically like “We are spime-soaked, we are saturated in spimey-ness. We’ve got about four and a half of the six points done, point five is coming along, point six is nearly there,” and Bruce is basically like... The initial Bruce Sterling thing is almost like “Why does anybody take me seriously? I’m a science fiction writer! What have you done?!” and we’re just kind of like “Hi!” So, Bruce has gradually, gradually kind of been like “Okay, these guys are kind of serious about this – I guess I better help!”

But the thing that the spime world I think didn’t clearly foresee is the degree to which we love the accelerator of constant consumption. Constant consumption is perfectly okay, as long as it’s paired with constant passing on, right? You want the new dress, you wear the new dress. The new dress is only new to you, it’s had 130 previous owners, and then it goes out to the 131st previous owner. Consumption is known: it’s having a kid with a bicycle, take it out of the warehouse, drop it at your door, and then drive away.

So, what I see is that we run consumerism faster. You know exactly what size your body is, the app has a library of all the clothing that’s currently available that can be delivered to your house by 7:30 PM, you’ve got literally 13,500 possible outfits... tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-bing, and you order clothes like pizza. They turn up, you wear them, maybe you keep them around for a few weeks or a month or two, maybe you hand them back, they’re dry-cleaned, and they go out to the next user. That as an economy... If we’re renting in that economy, we’re slaves; if we’re buying and reselling, we’re tastemakers.

Pat: Sure. It’s interesting though... You say that one of your crisis has been “I don’t think cultural change leads to the changes required anymore.” My response to that crisis has been to go to neuroscience, and effective neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology. I’ve seen too much political, sociopolitical triggering of the mammalian emotion set.

Vinay: [growling] Absolutely.

Pat: Anger, fear and panic is twice as powerful, the neuroscientists tell us, as a reaction than care, play, love and hope. So, we’re in a situation where we’re triggerable for defensive mechanisms, most of the time.

Vinay: And people are getting dug-in.

Pat: And people are getting dug-in.

Vinay: Think of how 10 years ago... Do you remember how much more easy and fluid everything felt pre-Covid, emotionally?

Pat: Yeah.

Vinay: And now it's like there's sand in every single gear.

Pat: It's true. There's a guy called Peter Sterling, who's written a magnificent essay for the Great Transition, called *Why We Consume: Neural Design and Sustainability*. I mean, his argument is that we are easily up for depression and addiction as a result of consumerism, because compared to the various activities of our hunter-gatherer existence... This is what David Graeber and David Wengrow are saying in the *Dawn of Everything*, that we are not addictable if we are multiply active, if we are constantly challenged by all of the various multimodal challenges of our kind of tribal or mobile political existence, as opposed to us being statically doing jobs, statically consuming.

Vinay: This is the rat utopia thing, right? If you give the rats a nice environment, they stop drinking the water with the heroin in it? That thing, but for people.

Pat: Yeah – sure, sure. And play is an indicator that the rats are at their optimum health and organismic flexibility, you know.

Vinay: Yes, yes, yes.

Pat: So, it's just an area to explore, which is that something that's super-consumerist may well be locked into dopamine pathways that we don't want to be locked into, and so therefore we have to think... So I would want the activity that you're talking about, this reselling of a curatable consumer market, so it's curatable, it's treasurable, it's coming and on demand, but it's coming and on demand from retrievable objects. But that is seen to be not consumption, but in a sense a kind of one activity amongst many others. That actually helps us as organisms, if we're not locked into dopamine-inducing, consumerist activities, it gives us more autonomy, and if we have more autonomy... Well, if we have more

autonomy, brother Vinay, one would imagine that the human animal makes better decisions. But maybe we can have a little query about that!

Vinay: Maybe, maybe. I want to come back to this notion of consumerism. There is no denying that there is an enormous, yawning spiritual void in Western culture.

Pat: Nicely put, and correctly put – yes.

Vinay: The death of god, they had the funeral, and then nobody has figured out what to do next. It's like the hangover of the wake of the death of god.

Pat: [laughs] Long wake! [laughs]

Vinay: So, maybe space travel fills that gap.

Pat: For me, yes, also.

Vinay: If you get a whole bunch of... If the top 2,000 popstars and actors in the world get on one of these space planes...

Pat: And thank god it goes up...

Vinay: Right?

Pat: And thank god it blows, and then we have a lot of problems solved [~4]! [laughs]

Vinay: Ugh! Like, Shatner came back, and Shatner was just like... "My god... It's full of stars!"

Pat: [laughs] [~4]! [laughs]

Vinay: So, if a lot of our cultural leadership have that experience, they used to call this the overview effect, maybe this will percolate down in a deeper way across all the rest of the people, maybe. But even before we get to that level of void-filling, I think that there are destructive and less-destructive ways of having people go through these dopamine loops which are so messy. If the dopamine loop is you go shopping, and you buy a bunch of stuff which is second hand, and you wear it until you're bored, and then you sell it on, and it costs you a couple of quid on the transaction charges and

delivery charges, and some things you sell for a little less and some things you sell for a little more... And if you're very, very fashionable, you buy things before they're fashionable, and they go up in price 20%, and then you sell them on for a wee bit more than you made, and suddenly there's a little world of tastemakers and... You sort of get this notion that we could gently take the existing social structure, tidy it up a little, but join the ends of the supply chain. And at that point, even if we have this hamster wheel mentality and hamster wheel behaviour... It's not that every revolution the wheel is taking new raw material out of the earth and destroying it; it's that we're taking the same toys that we've got, and we're just swapping them around.

Pat: Toys, you said the key word – it's a costume box.

Vinay: It's a costume box!

Pat: It's a costume box.

Vinay: Global costume box!

Pat: Or it's a Lego box, or it's a costume box. But from play theory, that's what the human animal is supposed to be good at, is costuming and legging and recombining. But to conceive of it as a costume box is probably quite a good metaphor – we've just invented a brand! There we go.

Vinay: Absolutely. Huge, remix culture: clothing, furniture, transportation vehicles, consumer electronics. I mean, *that* camera is amazing, it's a lovely thing. I don't know, after using it for three months, whether we're going to decide that dealing with the footage on the back end is too much of a pain in the butt, and go back to 2D. If we do, and we sell it on eBay, we'll get 40% of what we paid for it. And that gap... How much experimentation are we not doing? Because if I wanted to buy it on eBay for 40%, I wouldn't be sure if it worked until it arrived, and I don't have the time. I'm paying twice as much for certainty, and it's taking the fun out of the buying and the selling and the buying and the selling and the buying and the selling... I want it, I got it, I played with it, it was amazing! I got it 8th-hand, then I sold it 9th-hand, and the price hardly changed... There's a whole world of spontaneity there that we could re-enable, because we take the huge cost out of buying and selling toys, and most things are toys. I mean, you know... I think *that's* had four or five owners before I had it... And there is this weird symbolic value... It

wasn't until I put the stainless steel strap on that that people at city functions started treating me like a human being; when it had a black rubber strap on it, they just didn't quite click, nothing else in my appearance changed... I put the right strap on it, and suddenly I was a human in those experiences!

Pat: [laughs] This is plutocratic pathology, which I'm not sure we need ~to be treating with it~... But I take your point: play is also display. And that's a lovely idea, is that we have a particularly-architected dopamine loop, rather than a Friday, two-pounds-an-item, pre-marked [~2] approach to it, where you spend money that you don't quite have, to exploit people that you'll never see, in order to wear things that will only last for the mayfly equivalent of a few weeks or a month, yeah.

Vinay: And the exploitation side is very important... I will now plug my book... *This is The Future of Stuff*, it's really good!

Pat: It's a very good book – I read it, twice! [laughs]

Vinay: Thank you, that's nice to hear! It's quite a small book, I feel like I should maybe write a proper book at some time, because this one is more of a pamphlet...

Pat: Yeah. But I've read that twice, so maybe that's an argument against a proper book, you know.

Vinay: Yeah, it's short and sweet. 15,000 words is a good length for me.

Pat: Yeah.

Vinay: But the notion that we're also not exploiting factory workers in this condition... If we're buying things... I want to get away from a circular economy, because I think circular economy... I mean, we're going to continue to use the term commercially, but in terms of the philosophical I want to say spiral economy.

Pat: Spiral economy – okay.

Vinay: Because in the centre of the spiral we have the rich, with this river of consumer goods that pours down into the centre of the spiral: Paris Hilton buys new shoes. And I want the rich to keep hyper-consuming, and I want every single thing that they're bored with to get sold to the upper middle class, who sell it to the middle

class, who sell it to the working class, who sell it to the middle class in developing countries, who sell it to the working class in developing countries, who sell it to villagers. And by the time those Louboutins go in the trash, 40 wearers, the last of whom was a rickshaw-driver's bride at a Bangladeshi wedding... And then shoes, they're finally done, the heel broke in the dancing afterwards, nobody knows how to fix them in that venue, they're worn out, and they go.

That notion, that the rich continue hyperconsumption, but we just make sure that the step-down, as this stuff radiates out, it just goes wider and wider in the cycle... Here's your 25-year-old digital camera, it takes two AA batteries, it takes one megapixel pictures, and it's now being used by primary-school children in Mexico. Why? Because it works almost like their dad's phone, but nobody cares that they break it. That as an approach... We could vastly fill a human need on the consumption that we're doing. We can even have the rich spend more money faster: better R&D, more technology development... Now the new iPhone is \$2,000, because you know you're going to sell the old one for \$1,985.

Pat: But this is an absence of political economy, this is presuming there is no such thing anymore as an achievable political economy. Because what a political economy would say is do you want to cascade an ecological civilisation, and ecological sensibilities down the class structure? And for fuck's sake, sort out your universal basic income and services, and sort out your three-day a week! Because what that then gives people is civic resource to make decisions about the style of their lives, and those decisions can be made temporally, they can be made staring at trees, they can be looking after kids, it can be made generating kids... The play box or the toy box in your life is not the whole of your life, but... I think it's interesting, we're here on the basis of COP26: the Westphalian nation state is not looking like the optimum decision space that we need to get us to a decent place.

Vinay: Oh yeah. It's like asking the Catholic Church to figure out what to do about space travel!

Pat: Yeah. You know, there's probably quite a few science fiction novels that think that's quite a great idea! [~3] Iain Banks, although his wasn't so much the Catholic Church as was something else.

So, the regulatory and institutionally-directive option, which is what old-fashioned social democrats with me would look for to get through Parliamentary democracy, the last gasp of it was the Corbyn project... It absolutely was destroyed, for various reasons.

So, I think many of us are looking for gadgets, processes, vital infrastructures that move the dial in some way towards an ecological civilisation on a planetary basis. And I think it's reasonable to assume that a brand-led eco-capitalism could create a few processes that start to get people into a different space and into a different sensibility. I mean, Coca-Cola has that level of ambition, to sugarify and toxify our planet... What's the other brand that comes along and says, "Here's how to live on this fragile Earth, here's where it's attractive, here's where it gives you a world of objects of gratifications and sensualities." But we need an infrastructure to make that happen.

Vinay: Yes. It's not that bad an infrastructure. To hop up this a level... Do you remember Las Indias? They were a sort of weird, Spanish corporate welfare state. They were old-school political radicals, they had a lot of material on the Web, they called their activity market activism... They ran businesses that directly addressed the global problem they wanted to solve, the businesses made a ton of money because they were very smart with what they did, and they were big IT guys, and they were smart at things, and then they had a sort of pact that you could sign into, and if you're a member of that pact, you had basically a welfare state that they were operating, and they had maybe 150-300 people inside of that hull.

Pat: Company welfare.

Vinay: Company welfare state, but it wasn't just for you the worker... You could sign your dependence into that system, and even if you got fired they were still in the system. This was extremely radical.

Pat: When was this, Vinay?

Vinay: They vanished from the Internet and deleted all of their stuff a few years ago, but they were running contemporary. They were always very hardcore and very secretive, they published a lot of stuff but they didn't tell you a lot, the publications described the theory but not the practice. So, that market activism model that they talked about was a big inspiration to me with Mattereum... Like, I've tried open source, I've tried politics and governance, I haven't tried being elected but I've sure talked to a lot of civil servants... traction not

very good. In that time, Elon Musk has gone out there and done like five big things. His method works, my method doesn't... Maybe I should be more Elon Musk. A bit late to try that, but it's not that late, I'll give it a shot. Let's try to build a company, let's try and not work against the architecture of capitalism; let's try and redirect the architecture of capitalism.

The process of getting us where we're going is as simple as having a 2D barcode sown inside of a garment, one number per garment, one number by bicycle. You can use digital tags for that, I think I've got one in my bag... The little passel of chips on there... *That* you beep it with your phone, and it's a unique identifier. At that point you sow those, stick those, glue those into whatever it is you have going on, and what you get out of that is this radically transparent hook to which you can then tie the rest of these stories.

Pat: To what extent, Vinay, is that gameable, hackable, fakeable, shakeable?

Vinay: They're as secure as crypto wallets. You can detach it from the clothing and stick it on something else, but the thing itself is as secure as a crypto wallet. And we're about to start handing those out to kids in Central Saint Martins, to say, "Hey, what would you do if you had this technology?" and see what happens.

Pat: Yeah, yeah. It's interesting, the great nemesis, Dominic Cummings, is about to announce a kind of micro sovereign program for the UK, based...

Vinay: Is this this Singapore ~on temps~ thing?

Pat: It's Singapore ~on temps~, but it's more down-level than that is. It's... These institutions are broken, this political class is broken. You have the meso-infrastructures and available technologies to create viable localities, measuring resources...

Vinay: Oh , so he's really pushing for decentralisation ~of community governance~?

Pat: Very pushing for decentralisation at a level that makes the sovereignty in a territory variable.

Vinay: Whoa!

Pat: Now, that's the idea coming from the guy that said to a population "Take back control, take back... You have a deep angst for self-determination and sovereignty, I perceive it. We're going to give you a chance to vote for it," an action that happened, and it has caused major infrastructural and regulatory destabilisation.

Vinay: A commitment was made.

Pat: A commitment was made. Now, that is an interesting process that goes alongside, and somewhat cuts into the universality presumed by your system. Are we in a situation where radicals – and I mean radical in the non-partisan, non-left-right sense, who simply want to kind of disrupt for energy – ~will avail themselves not just the~ technology, but also the kind of political openness of a particular moment. And you could call it techno-libertarianism if you want, you can call it ~techno-commu-materialism~ if you want... But I think there's an appetite out there which isn't just about consumption; it's also about sovereignty, it's also about a sense of agency and purpose. And I think we would be making a mistake, if we didn't think that that was just as appealing to, which is "That I feel that I can act in a world that doesn't necessarily recognise my actions. Otherwise, give me a framework within which I can act," is as attractive as "Give me the objects that make me feel happy." We'd be fools if we didn't think that was a competing impulse.

Vinay: Absolutely. I mean, the politics is going to continue to run. I mean, we are not at the end of the political change.

Pat: No, not remotely.

Vinay: But the solvable problems, the things I could get my hands on, they're close-up. You know, I'm now in a world where mostly I worry about how do we get the tag sown into the jacket in a way that it actually lasts through washings...

Pat: It's a tailoring problem! [laughs]

Vinay: It's a tailoring problem! And those individual micro-steps piled on top of each other in the context of a company... The thing that you get is you get traction. Cultural engineering is you keep working on it, you keep working on it, you keep working on it, and then it suddenly there's a breakthrough and everything changes... But it's always longshots when you start on that.

Pat: Yeah, but when you get that iteration going, and then have a conversation with someone that wants to give you a free zone, or a sovereign space, or a sandbox next to Birmingham, within which certain rules pertain that do not pertain beyond those ~rules~... You may be closer to proof of concept than waiting for the UN to apply it, as Kim Stanley Robinson suggests in *The Ministry for the Future*, the idea that there's some kind of massive UN think tank box is going to create a carbon coin...

Vinay: Not happening tomorrow, not happening tomorrow.

Pat: You may well have to have a relationship with this decomposition of traditional sovereignty.

Vinay: On this, unfortunately... I can't tell you anything about our plans for [~3]. [laughter]

Pat: You know, I haven't heard you say anything less ~white-cat-strokey~... I don't think I've heard anything less ~white-cat-strokey~ than what you just said!

Vinay: Pat – amazing!

Pat: Darling...

Vinay: Lovely to see you!