

The following is a full transcript of Episode 5 of the 2020 season of the Praxis Radio podcast. You can download it as a pdf [here](#) and listen/subscribe [here](#).

## **Praxis Radio 2020 Podcast**

### **Episode 5: Rachel Schragis, New York, NY**

*<orchestral music intro, “Praxis Theme” by Jason Cross continues to play under narration>*

**Taylor, the host of the show:** “Welcome listeners—to a new installment of the 2020 season of Praxis. If this is your first listen, I recommend checking out the trailer or previous episodes for more context on the season. The easiest way to find all of it, including show notes and full transcripts, is by subscribing. You can do that anywhere you listen to podcasts or by going directly to [praxisradio.com](http://praxisradio.com) and clicking on Praxis. This season is a time travel project—returning to a radio show road trip I took in the summer of 2015—on the surface, a simpler time, though in many ways it was a prelude to the tumultuous year we’re living in now.

Before we start, today is the day before election day here in the US. It’s actually four days before as I’m recording this introduction. I chose this conversation to be released this week because it focuses on so many things that I think are important to staying grounded during disorienting times like this election season—imagination, strategic thinking, embracing uncertainty and change. At the end of the show, I’ll have some more thoughts and resources to share, both from myself and from a few trusted friends, fellow organizers, past guests, and smart thinkers out there.

Anyway, back in episode two, we were briefly in Vermont at Bread and Puppet Theater. What I didn’t mention in that story was that I didn’t have a plan for camping... or traveling to my next stop and that right after the kitchen interview you heard with Elka Schumann, it started pouring rain.

*<music fades out>*

I got lucky and a friend of the puppeteers who had come to the circus too was planning to drive back to New York City that night, and she wanted someone to share the long drive. She ended up hosting me and introducing me to Rachel Schragis, with whom we’ll spend the rest of this episode.

I’m going to start with our first conversation. It’s August 14, 2015 in New York City and I’m sticky from walking to her place from the train. It’s been almost a year since the massive People’s Climate March in New York City.

*<radio static bursts>*

**Taylor Roseweeds (TRW):** “So if you could just start by introducing yourself and a little bit about who you are as a person and an artist and an activist?”

**Rachel Schragis (RS):** “My name is Rachel Schragis, I live in New York City, born and raised in New York City, I am an illustrator and a sculptor by training, but I also am an organizer. I was trained up doing organizing around domestic worker justice, here in New York, organizing employers of nannies and housekeepers. I’m also totally an Occupy generation activist, that’s really when I became a movement person, and now mostly I do work organizing cultural workers, a lot of it around climate change in the last year here in New York.

**TRW:** Great, so, yeah let’s dive a little more into that. So you got involved in Occupy Wall Street...

**RS:** Mmhmm

**TRW:** ...I imagine. And where did that lead you? Where were you before and where were you after?

**RS:** So I was, you know, a recently graduated college graduate in New York City making artwork. I was making these flowcharts and Occupy happened in New York City and I saw an opportunity to make the kind of work that I was making in a way that would be useful and did one for Occupy and saw immediately how much the image that I made was a tool for organizers to communicate the complexity and solidarity and unity of Occupy. And it was connected to a whole world of other illustrators and puppeteers and performers and sculptors who were making things for Zucotti Park, making things for occupations around the country, for Occupy sites around the country that were concretely useful and I think I learned a lot really quickly about how much power art has to offer social movements in that moment. And then, you know, so I ended up as an illustrator doing a lot of different kinds of projects, I got a couple commissions from 350.org which was the first time that I was doing climate work myself and then to kind of speed right to where I am now, I was reached out to by some folks at 350 about eight months before the People’s Climate March saying ‘hey, do you want to make art for this?’ And the more I learned about it the more I thought, ‘you don’t need an artist, one artist, for this giant march, you need an army of artists.’

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And I can see that this is an opportunity to build that network of people who want to make art about climate change that I want to be part of, so I stepped out of making completely and into a coordinating role to advocate for artists, to look for ways that artists could be involved, and to organize artists to participate and give them what they needed to participate in the People’s Climate March. And so then, kind of the vision all along was like, the march is just the beginning of that work. You don’t build a network for one day. So then that network has morphed into a group called People’s Climate Art Collective with eleven of us kind of sharing leadership and a much larger circle around

that. We have worked with Fight for \$15 here in New York City, we do a lot of work supporting a group in New York standing in solidarity with disappeared students in Ayotzinapa, we've done more climate justice work in New York City, we've done a little bit of work in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, at different points throughout the year and are experimenting with finding new ways of doing cross-movement arts building.

**TRW:** Wow, so what does it look like for you— I mean, there's obviously things like making an image like this Occupy flowchart that helped communicate for movements, but what are the ways that you think artists can and should best interact with 'the movement', for lack of a better term? What do you think the role is?

**RS:** I love this question. I could talk with you about this question all day and I think the biggest thing I've learned is that when I talk with organizers, I talk a lot about arts based tools, right? Like, an image is a tool, an outreach poster is a tool, right, a song that makes people feel the right way at the right time is a tool. And there... a puppet show that explains the whole scenario is a tool. And there are weirder tools that we haven't tried, too! And I think though, the role of artists is to make those tools, but even more-so to listen in, to participate in organizing, and to understand and hear what the needs are and be able to see— I think people that have experience making activist artwork or people who are creative storytellers can hear a situation and figure out what tools people need and reflect that or offer that to organizers. So it's a kind of push and pull I think, that there's two things that need to go on at once for successful arts organizing— one is like total integration in the organizing, being at the table doing really deep listening— and I can tell you more if you want about the ways we tried to do that for the People's Climate March— and also like, autonomous arts-led space, like to... or production that artists are at the center of, to make things.

**TRW:** And so is there a space? Now?

**RS:** We don't have a space right now, we're working on it. We had a space. We had a huge warehouse, three stories of arts production for a little more than a month before the People's Climate March, which was really out of control...

*<laughter>*

**RS:** It was a lot. I've lost the number, but there were hundreds, and at the end thousands of people working. Like banners and banners and banners and banners and silkscreens, right? And like rehearsal upstairs and like...

**TRW:** Wow

**RS:** And the area where the floats were getting made. It was really at a scale that I had never been able to work at before. But in addition to production, we thought of what we were doing as being like a lab for the event where we were calling meetings between activists and cultural workers to talk about messaging and craft imagery and then we

would take the messaging that people were coming up with in different sections and put it—we had a post-it note chart of what the march was gonna look like.

It was like, we know the indigenous contingent is making a parachute that says ‘stop colonialism’ and we know that the migrant justice group is making a hummingbird puppet, and corn, and images of farmers and like, putting them in order and we came up with this narrative or a proposal to sequence the march in kind of a story that kind of told in contingents— that told the story of the people’s climate movement in that moment. Of who was showing up and why that was based in what we knew each contingent was making and based in what we were hearing organizers from each section saying that they wanted to have understood about themselves, with like seven big headings of the different sections and those headings were crafted collaboratively between artists and organizers in each section. And so it was just, it was like moving between individual cultural production and like, mass-coordinated organizing that we couldn’t have done without having a space to generate it all in together.

**TRW:** Mmhmm and how did it turn out? From your perspective?

**RS:** I mean it was, making that narrative was one of the most interesting experiences I think I’ve ever had. Really getting to hear from people what their priorities were and what their struggles were with the internal tensions of what it means to actually attack climate change systemically, which means like both the most local and the most global. The places where there was a huge amount of alignment and the places where there is still deep divides between the people doing this work. And I think I got to bear witness to that fact and try to —try to find a way to tell that story and in that moment, it was a moment of really trying to tell a story about unity, like the People’s Climate March was about unity, about a big tent, but I learned a lot about what’s more complicated than that through that process. Which I think motivates me, a lot of why I feel personally motivated as an artist to work on climate change is because its so complicated...

*<laughter>*

**RS:** There’s— I’ve come to think of it as like, there’s two, there’s like two areas, two big like, wells of challenge in climate that are of course overlapping: one is people’s fear in talking about it and this is kind of the first one that I personally like, confronted. Like, the problem is so big and ambiguous that we’re actually—it’s not that people disagree that it’s a problem, like really there’s no debate *<laughs>* even though we continue to talk that way—but that people are afraid to step in to feeling like they could change anything and that’s something that artists can really... to keep moving people through fear, moving people through complexity into knowing what they already know in their gut, like that’s what artists are made to do.

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And the second I think equally huge overlapping struggle in the climate movement is the legacy of white supremacy in the climate movement, like the legacy of white

supremacy in the world. And the way that that has turned, that has led really directly to the cooptation of struggling with environmental justice issues to be a, like a perceived privileged problem and to be coopted into kind of a consumer identity. And it's people with white privilege, people with privilege, who have caused that shift. So the baggage of that means that a lot of the messaging that would be most obvious to talk about climate change is loaded. In ways that we need to heal from and move through. You can't say, like, 'save the world'

*<laughter>*

**RS:** ...right? You can't say, 'it's our earth'; you can't say, 'it belongs to everyone'; you can't say, 'everyone's going to be impacted by it'. Even though everyone agrees that everyone is going to be impacted by it, but because the impact will be so stratified along race and class lines we—saying 'this is everybody's issue' is deeply disrespectful. And like, say we were talking back and forth and people say, 'well climate is the issue that impacts everything' and uh, it's... by saying, 'climate is the issue for all of us' what we're saying is that the murder of black and brown men doesn't impact all of us? And so the ways that we like, cut through all of that baggage I think is a huge challenge that we need artists to work on.

**TRW:** Mmhmm and I think the more we can get away from that legacy, the more we can get to effective solutions that are at the scale that we need to address it and you know, the flowchart Occupy declaration actually says a lot it... in that like, we can't solve the climate problem without solving the capitalism problem, we can't solve it without solving the white supremacy problem...

**RS:** Yeah, I would say not just 'get away from', but that we can't solve climate change without confronting the legacy of colonialism. That constant...I'm working— right now my project for the summer is working on artist engagement for Flood the System. I don't know if you heard about this...

**TRW:** A little bit, but yeah explain it for listeners?

**RS:** So Flood the System is kind of an extension of Flood Wall Street, the action that happened the day after the People's Climate March. And it's an attempt to say like, what would it look like to protest climate change at the root causes? What would it look like to protest climate change as the symptom of colonialism it is— alongside a lot of other symptoms and try to shed some of the baggage of seeing climate as separate? And build relationships in community, build relationships in the street or that lead to—to being in the street together. Between people who are drawn to show up for racial justice, drawn to show up for economic justice, drawn to show up for environmental justice because nobody in any of those sectors doesn't understand that they're all the same fight.

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** We all understand. How do we learn to work together? So this isn't going to solve all of that problem, but it's a way— it's a project to try to build action councils locally across North America, primarily across the US and Canada, at this point, though we have some contacts in Mexico working on the project too, to build local relationships that get at the root causes of the climate crisis. So that's kind of the rap about Flood and that's a complex ask, right? So I'm working a lot to figure out what arts tools we could make to make Flood the System seem like the intuitive... like when I say Flood the System, you know what I mean, right? Because you know what I mean by the system? I say 'The', cause there's only one...

*<laughter>*

**RS:** ...and you know what I mean by flood, right? Like wash it away, just get rid of it. And that's why I'm really drawn to work on this project cause like, it's a water metaphor, right? So like, let's make imagery with water metaphors that gets at how people power is like water. People can, water can, erode stone. Water can make something that seems immovable disappear over time with persistence and we know that we can do the same.

**TRW:** Yeah, and it's also like, that's a good metaphor in terms of... you know, if there's a huge flood, some of it's coming from the rain and some of it's coming from the groundwater rising up...

**RS:** Yeah!

**TRW:** ...and some of it's coming from rivers...

**RS:** So the first thing we did, I worked with a handful of artists most of whom had come through the Beehive Collective to make this slideshow that illustrates exactly that. Like, if a flood is an intersectional action in the streets, like, what's a river? What's a rapid? What's an aquifer? What's the muddy waters? What's in the clouds? Right? So we use water metaphors a lot to try to build up new vocabulary that makes this organizing feel different and unique and feel like it's not, like it's something we're building all together as opposed to like coming from the legacy of the climate movement saying like, 'y'all should do this', but like, 'hey, what would it look like for us to try this new experiment together?' It's an experiment!

**TRW:** Yeah... and how's it— uh how's that playing out so far? I mean it's pretty, its in an early stage still, literally?

**RS:** I mean, the actions are going to be primarily in October, November, some in September, and action councils have been forming all summer, you know it's slow work, especially in the summer, but there's a huge amount of enthusiasm about it. People want, you know, this is the way that people want to do their organizing.

**TRW:** And so how... how do those dynamics play out just in terms—I'm always very interested in this—like any organization that is at that scale, but that is also focused as I think it has to be on local communities having autonomy to do what works in their community?

**RS:** Mmhmm

**TRW:** How's that dynamic been for you, going from being based in the city— being based in one place— to doing this kind of broad national, international, work?

**RS:** That's a really good question. I think it's been a really humbling experience for me. You know for People's Climate March, we were organizing nationally and internationally, but for the most part it was like, if it's going to be in New York, New Yorkers are in leadership. And so it was clear who the frontline leadership was, it was people doing climate justice organizing in New York and as an arts organizer— who were the voices that I should lift up? It was finding artists who were working in those communities, or asking artists that I knew were working in those communities if they'd be able to come through and um, advocating for resources for them to do that. So this moment, it's connecting to people in different places and supporting them and I feel like I am learning so much about how much the tools and the stories need to be different in different places. That's a little daunting. But also it's really, you know people, we made this slideshow and different people, when I take it different places or when I have Skype calls with people in different places, they— what they get excited about is different!

*<laughter>*

**RS:** And that is like, pretty thrilling to like... when you like, encode something really big or... The team that I worked on that image with, someone was raised in Maine, someone was raised in Appalachia, someone was raised in Vermont, someone was raised in Utah, and me from New York City, right? And we used to joke actually and be like, as we were learning to brainstorm together, we spent like a week and a half building it, like, 'ok, do we want like... a like to-the-point quick meeting? Or do we want like a getting everybody's opinion, figuring out the whole picture meeting?' Do we want to have this meeting in New York City where like, Rachel will facilitate and it will be no bullshit? Or do we want to have this meeting in Appalachia where Erin will facilitate and it will be like...

*<laughter>*

**RS:** ...like the way that we do in Appalachia? So different people's styles have different strengths is something I've learned a lot in this work. And specifically around the climate crisis. Like, I was asked to come to California to train a bunch of people on how to use it and there— like in New York, the word 'flood' is really tricky right? Because like flood is, people have survived a flood because of Hurricane Sandy here and so using the word 'flood' to talk about our own power is like, hard cause it shows us how we're...what we're going to have to do is like, not 'nice'...

**TRW:** Hmm

**RS:** ...and there's a lot of anger in it, where— and that's a truth, right? We're not like, sweeping gently away *<laughs>*

**TRW:** sure...

**RS:** And in California...

**TRW:** ...just a gentle shower of changing everything about the oppressive systems that have been built...

**RS:** Right! Where, in California, where there's a drought you say 'flood' and they're like, 'we could use a holy flood around here'...

**TRW:** Uh huh

*<laughter>*

**RS:** And it— it feels really different.

**TRW:** Wow, which is... huh. Yeah, and that's a really good, you picked a great metaphor, it's good.

**RS:** I mean, I didn't, we didn't...

**TRW:** Y'all?

**RS:** Well, we had this moment early in the organizing where, I got involved with Flood because I saw someone present about Flood the System and I thought the proposal was really compelling, but the way they were telling me about the proposal didn't allow me to see myself in it. And so another artist, Emily Simons who was also there too, she was like, 'Rachel— you and I could do really interesting things with this .' And so we kind of built a team to do that and I was saying, 'we need to tell a story of why Flood the System. Like, we need to use pictures and metaphors and like get people'. I was like, 'I don't know what it is! We need to do some storytelling, clearly!' And Emily was like, 'it's right in front of us, it's a water metaphor, right?' Like, the group that started this project is Rising Tide North America and like, 'oh, it's all about water'. You know, it's right in front of us we just have to expand it.

**TRW:** Yeah, cool... that's really great. So, all these actions kind of spread out through the continent as you said in the fall what's the...it's such a tricky proposition because it's just like occupy, like 'what is our one demand?' It's that same kind of level of complexity and— but where do you see or hope to see the direction beyond that?



**RS:** Um, beyond those actions?

**TRW:** Beyond those actions, yeah.

**RS:** Well, I think this is a project to really figure out what it could look like to surface a lot of grassroots leadership and have it speak to each other right? Like, we have these every other week calls called the river council <laughs>— water flowing, lots of water flowing in the same direction even if it's not going the same place— where leadership from local action councils all talks to each other along with people who are doing like skill-based support like me. And we see that like, in the Pacific Northwest, there's a lot of interest in the relationship between prison abolition work and climate change and I bet that's gonna—with what's happening with the fires in California right now, half of the labor there is prison labor that's fighting the fires. I feel like that's going to grow there too. There's a lot of places in which we're talking about indigenous solidarity and climate change and about... in New York, it's like, how do we connect with the Black Lives Matter work that's really alive here? And it's a lot of the same organizers doing two different things— how do we make it one?

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And so, like letting those connections become rhetorically obvious like in a local context and then seeing if it can be expanded. We know that it's like... Flood the System isn't going to like, do all of this, and it's really about building relationships, about imagining what it would be like to do the work? Like building an action council, trying out an action, seeing what works and what doesn't. What we've been saying in this slideshow I've been talking about is, 'we know there's going to be a flood. We don't know how big it's going to be. We know if we watch water that after a flood there's a low tide, and after a low tide there's a high tide. So we say to people, like, what we're doing is building more power, like tapping more water into our ecosystem so that the next high tide is stronger. And we can't know what it's going to be until we do it together.

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** Maybe there's gonna be another action proposal, maybe we're going to have a national gathering, maybe we're going to have all these regional gatherings. And we'll figure it out after December, you know?

**TRW:** Perfect and just in our last couple minutes that we have, is there anything else that you want to mention, to point out to people, to plug? Questions you have for other organizers or artists?

**RS:** Yeah, I mean I think the thing that I dream about that I want to state for like, whoever's listening and is interested in the question of the role of arts in activism—is how can artists be leaders in showing us that there's one movement that doesn't exist yet, right? All these movements for different pieces of justice...

*<cell phone chimes>*

**RS:** ...sorry

**TRW:** It's ok

**RS:** But we know that there— like this is all part of one vision for a just society and the movement that's pushing for that does not exist yet. Let's not kid ourselves. *<laughs>* Even though there's a lot of fierce pieces right now—like Fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter and the growing climate justice movement, right? There are a lot more people in the streets even than there were three years ago!

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And what is the role of artists to help us see where we all move together? And People's Climate Arts [Collective] in New York City is doing a lot of work to figure out how do we get people at the same place at the same time building art together? And use that to experiment with what it's like to build community together. And I think that as artists, we need to see ourselves as leaders in this area and get really smart about and get really embedded in all the different kinds of work that's already going on so we can help make what doesn't exist yet. Because that's what we know how to do."

**TRW:** Right on..."

*<music fades in under narration>*

**TRW:** As you'll hear Rachel share in a minute, from our conversation this summer when we reconnected, Flood the System didn't take off in a huge way, but I thought that we could all use a good metaphor to chew on in this moment. Here's what she's up to now and our reflections on the five long years since we last spoke.

*<radio static bursts>*

*<music fades out>*

**Rachel Schragis (RS):** "I wasn't able to listen to the whole interview, but I feel like the questions are familiar and I'll be able to speak to things.

**Taylor Roseweeds (TRW):** "Cool, right. I guess if you just want to dive in, do you want to just introduce yourself and talk about I don't know... everything that you've been doing since the summer of 2015?

*<laughter>*

**RS:** Wow, yeah...ok, well my name is Rachel Schragis. I am an artist and a cultural organizer born and raised in New York City and yeah, my... the path of my life work is about supporting organizing with the tools of visual— I've been increasingly using the

phrase visual strategy to talk about what I'm doing— in using visuality in an integrated strategic way in organizing. And that the fact that that is the path my work has taken me down and now—I think I talked to you right around when I was making the transition to that being my paid work— and that is totally wild and awesome and dreamy because it's at the intersection of things that so many people care about and grapple with—how to spend their lives doing.

And yeah, I was like kind of last, you were kind of reminding me when we spoke last about what was going on in my life because I was building up a collective called People's Climate Arts that then stopped being my primary political home and is now officially not existing anymore. We're in the process, even though the people I did it with are beloved, it reminded me that in 2015 I felt a sense of clarity and then in the last five years had a like... 'wow what do I do now?' You know? How do I continue to do this work? I thought that that was the vehicle for it and have been on like a whole journey of different vehicles that I can tell you about. And then now I'm in a moment of like, building with a new crew and kind of like, I've been thinking about actually about that moment a lot. Like how to..I call it the containers of belonging problem. Like, how do I belong to something just within myself? How do I do work in an accountable collaborative way when so many of the social pressures of the world, of people who have trained with the skills, who have cultivated the skills of an artist is to 'be your own brand' and to be about yourself and that's not actually how I think powerful work happens. And anyway...

**TRW:** Yeah, yeah there's so much there...

**RS:** Since we last spoke, I yeah, started working just because I know a lot of community organizers, I found myself to be a person who was like, painting banners for marches. I feel like that's like the baseline unit of what people who do visual things and work in movements do, is like, make the signs and the banners. And then I worked on a couple projects that got like bigger and bigger alongside another artist who I'm sure you'll hear me talk more about which is Josh Yoder. We found ourselves really involved in the fight against Amazon in New York City, making visuals for that, and then we found ourselves really involved in making visuals for Sunrise Movement, youth climate organizing I don't know if you're familiar with them...

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And then that, really as Sunrise became just a giant national project, Sunrise became my whole political world and I started working full time there and I did that for a couple of years and then I just left. Two months ago.

*<laughter>*

**RS:** So that's been the last couple years of my life, has been like going deep on a couple of big projects.

**TRW:** Those are pretty rad projects to have chosen though, just in terms of being across the country, those are both things that were highly visible to me...

**RS:** Yeah

**TRW:** ...from very far away so

**RS:** I feel very proud of the work that I got to be part of in both of those projects. I'd love to talk more about it in whatever way is helpful or relevant here.

**TRW:** I love...I remember, I don't know if you were part of this, but I remember with Amazon, all the boxes with the flipped...

**RS:** Yeah, that was...

**TRW:** ...with the flipped, with the frowning boxes? Yeah that was a great...

**RS:** Yeah, we made those!

**TRW:** ...a great meme, good job...

*<laughter>*

**TRW:** Yeah, those are still in my head! Yeah...

**RS:** Ahhh!

**TRW:** I'm still frowning at Amazon.

**RS:** That's what's so interesting, we made 200 of those boxes. And that's all, right? And most of the photos of them are just one or two people holding them and it's just, the flipping, we didn't have... the idea to flip the frown wasn't Josh or my idea it was first done by workers in Europe, but then we made a version of it where the eyes look angry...

*<laughter>*

**RS:** ...and that kind of took off and the idea of putting it back on the box and making it look like an Amazon box that was frowning was our work and actually producing the boxes and the style that they looked. The way that I have come to say it, the cultural goal of the fight against Amazon is to make the frown more real than the smile.

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** Like, Amazon has this... people think it's so like, magic and awesome, but actually it's like... some bad shit. And when you see the frown, you're thinking about the smile,

but really what I want it to be is when you see the smile, you think about the frown. Like, that's the actual proper emotional response to Amazon.

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And this whole... I feel like my work in that fight is not over. We kicked Amazon out of Queens and that—I was working with that coalition before— it became about the fight in Queens, but because I was mostly working with New York groups, that was the last round of work I did. And I feel like the fight there is only just beginning and hopefully we'll get to, hopefully you'll see a lot more frowny boxes. <laughs> And we also made like, a version of the Amazon tape with the little icons that reframe all their like 'Streaming!', 'Shipping!', you know, 'Prime!' as really sinister actions that I think we should do a lot more with.

**TRW:** Yeah, so I guess something that I was reflecting on listening to our other interview, it was really helpful for me to listen to it because you talked a lot with the work that was happening with Flood the System and talking about organizing in general and like, movement building as a water metaphor and I kind of like... can't get that out of my head and I'm obsessed with that cause I like...

**RS:** Oh my gosh, yes.

**TRW:** I just like, love Bruce Lee and I think like a water metaphor is like, endlessly useful...

**RS:** Yeah

**TRW:** And uh, you know you said, I wish I had the exact quote I'll find it and play it with the magic of editing, but you said something to the effect of <the audio from Rachel repeating this same line, slightly off time, plays underneath> a flood, after a flood there's a low tide and then there's a new high tide and I wonder if you can reflect on that, given everything you said about the last five years and what we know, you know the disequilibrium you kind of described at the beginning of this conversation.

**RS:** Yeah, I think about that a lot, too. You know Flood the System <laughs> was not a wildly successful project, but... and I think the like, high tide low tide metaphor is one of the longest term kind of things that it brought into my life cause I really think about that all the time. And something that's happened for me in the last five years working with Sunrise is I had never worked with people who came out of the Momentum school of organizing practice and it's really... they use weather metaphors a lot. And they don't really say high tide low tide, but they do talk about like, moments in the whirlwind or like, organizing happens in really acute, intense, condensed periods and then there's periods of like, preparation and I'm... so I've had a couple high tides the last couple years and I am in a low tide right now.

And I've been thinking a lot about the cultural moment we're in of just like, deep anxiety about what's about to happen and like a feeling of helplessness and in some ways, like, the sausage is getting made right now about how the world is... the world is changing economically and culturally in this incredibly grim, scary way and also might be about to get a lot worse. There might be pivots depending upon how elections go, and I um...I feel like it's made me think about like, the anxiety of the low tide, in my own way.

**TRW:** Mmhmm, yeah and I think that's, I mean, I think something about that like, the moment when we first talked was really like... I think everyone had this feeling of like, some shit's about to go down

**RS:** Yeah

**TRW:** And it certainly has now, you know, so I'm curious too, not to linger on it, but what you said about Flood the System not being, I don't know what word you used just now, but maybe underwhelming what the expectation had been? I wonder if you can just like, reflect on that a little more as an artists and an organizer? Like, I think a lot of people who are brand new to organizing and to activism have emerged in the last five years in reaction to Trump, in reaction to just everything bad escalating at once, and maybe are burnt out and discouraged by the...

*<laughter>*

**TRW:** ...the fact that we haven't like, won yet. So, I'm curious about like, more of your reflection on that.

**RS:** You know, I feel scared about the ways in which I don't think that we're prepared to win yet. But I don't feel burnt out and discouraged at all. And I think that, you know, I'm 34 so I feel like I'm in a transition to being able to know that I'm a lifer, of an organizer and a cultural worker...

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** ...because I'm like, more in the middle of my life it doesn't feel new, and so thinking about myself like entering for the long haul, one way I find myself thinking a lot is that I don't have control over whether we win or lose. And we're heading into, in some ways, the world has gotten a lot worse in the last five years, these six months, and in some ways, that the status quo was not going to yield transformational change. So if I can be callous I can be like, 'that's great, shit's getting uncovered' and the thing that can bring me hope is more people participating in transformational change. And that's actually like, the only place I can place my exhilaration is like, yeah, wow so many more people ARE getting involved. So there's so many more... I think one thing I really believe is true is that no power is built alone and so more people belonging to more groups of people in motion is kind of the baseline of hope.

**TRW:** Mmhmm yeah. And do you think— I mean as— so talking about like the Amazon boxes as a microcosm of this, but the other work you've done with Sunrise, I think Sunrise has been amazing, it's been one of the most inspirational like, movements and groups for me to watch and be part of over the last few years? You know we're both going to age out [of Sunrise Movement] and get kicked out soon and that's ok.

*<laughter>*

**RS:** Well, I left partially because I was like, I'm going to leave staff before I turn 35. And you know, hand my work to young folks who I trained up through it...

**TRW:** Yeah

**RS:** Which is really a beautiful process.

**TRW:** Yeah, that's the deal, right? That's how it should be and yeah... but both of those, I mean all of that work, doing this visual work, I consider a lot of it to be storytelling work I don't know if you do?

**RS:** Yes, I use that word a lot, too.

**TRW:** Ok, yeah, what's... it's such a hard time and I feel like this topic is a little bit overwrought and the way that people are frantic about it I find annoying in a way I can't articulate, but...

*<laughter>*

**TRW:** ...this idea that we're like somehow quote unquote 'polarized'? I'm not really into that, but at the same time it's clear that we are not living in a shared reality with our family members, with our neighbors, in some senses and there is like, this big gulf it feels. So what do you think, just as a storyteller and someone who lives in that world, what's your— as a strategist too— what do you think about this moment in those terms?

**RS:** Um...I think... so, I'm in a moment of knowing what I don't know, right? Like, I think that Sunrise, I'm coming out of a phase where I was really all in with Sunrise and I learned so much from that experience because like, my strategy briefing and my political orientation to the world was like, through Sunrise and that was a new experience for me. Like, it doesn't really matter who I think should be president, what matters in my life is who Sunrise thinks should be president *<laughs>* you know? Or like, what Sunrise is doing. And I think the storytelling that happened there, that happens there, is very clear because there's clarity about who the audience is and how that audience communicates, what the voice is and what the platforms are.

So I'm in a...I guess the thing that I can say is that I think before, you know the solution, you have to be clear about what the problems are. And that I'm in a 'state the problem' moment around like, collective storytelling. Ok where we are, what is the problem? And

honestly one of the things that makes me most afraid in the world is like, the echo chamber of media. And the way that there are so many competing capitalist platforms for where people go to understand the world and each of them is programmed with like, the major social media platforms being where a lot of people get information— programmed to show you what you want to hear. And so the creation of a collective narrative is really stacked against us. It's like the odds are stacked against us for us to actually reconcile with each other's ideas of truth, right? And we can talk about kind of the right wing post-truth idea that kind of owns the world and the left isn't ready to play hardball with...

**TRW:** Mmhmm

**RS:** And I feel like, as a storyteller, it's time for me to understand what my practices have to be in that ecosystem, in that reality. And I have some, I could talk about like traces of ideas, but I don't have it totally figured out. I feel a lot less clear that like, beautifully made objects in the street are the whole equation than I did when I talked to you five years ago. It feels way more important to me that I understand the internet than five years ago, and media strategy than five years ago.

**TRW:** Mmhmm and the more, I definitely echo that. The more I learn about exactly what you just described with the social media landscape, the more I just long for like, can we just have beautiful objects in the street? Like, and then with covid, you know, of course that's further complicated, but yeah. Have you like, imagined a different way that we could all be using the internet outside of these companies? Is that in your purview?

**RS:** No, it's not and neither do I think it's in my control.

**TRW:** Yeah

**RS:** So I don't, I don't actually think that like alternative institutions— I think the work of building alternative institutions is incredibly, incredibly important— and in some ways just really not my lane. I'm more about like, strategic engagement of the horrible social institutions we have.

*<laughter>*

**TRW:** Mmhmm yeah, yeah. Well, so it sounds like you've remained in that... everything, if you're critiquing Amazon as, you know, a bad capitalist actor and the social media companies, it kind of all comes back, working with Sunrise, I'm making the assumption that you're still, that you've been very involved with climate as a...

**RS:** I have in some ways, like, cause I've done a lot of climate work, it continues to be something that I do, but I think that, I find my mind thinking more about the framework of crisis right now. And I think that working on the Green New Deal cracked open my imagination about how I think about climate change because the Green New Deal is so clearly a solution to covid?



And covid is, you know, a fact we are really not talking about is that shifting disease vectors is a symptom of global warming. And that in my, like, most fearful, can't-sleep kind of nights, I'm like, wow there's going to be...no one is calling this pandemic a climate problem, but when there's another one in three years we might, same way with hurricanes, you know? Same way with fires. But I like...it doesn't... we've entered into a world where the symptoms of ecological collapse are so multifaceted and intertwined with the economy— that it's not that... we can't just talk about the crisis of the world that we're in and it doesn't matter the facts of climate change matter less I think. In my own thinking.

**TRW:** Yeah

**RS:** So I don't totally think of myself as a climate organizer, I think of myself as a crisis organizer.

**TRW:** Hmm and it's, that makes sense because I think that, you know, it's the lobsters in the pot metaphor that gets used all the time, right? I feel like at some point in the last few years, in the US, we've been slower here as usual, um, to talking about the climate crisis in the present tense rather than this kind of... I think for a long time the climate movement—and you talked about this—was very, the public facing climate movement was very rooted in like the legacy of white supremacy, consumer identity. And it was sort of through the early 2000s when I got involved in it, in retrospect kind of a navel gazing space of like, 'someday these bad things are going to happen and YOU have to do something about it now' and now you know, as you said it's more of a crisis response

**RS:** Yes

**TRW:** Yeah, what does that look like to you? I mean, when you think of yourself as a crisis organizer now? Like what does that...

**RS:** I'm like, thinking aloud to you because I'm in such a moment of reckoning and learning, so I don't have a pre canned answer <laughs> Um...I think it's about reflectiveness that I— I think visual strategy is a component of strategy and that I do my best work when I am listening to a need from people who are looking at a more multifaceted picture and that my work is about tactics in a lot of ways. It's about what it looks like, how it, what the moving energy in the street, how people arrange themselves in space, how objects make people feel, how we communicate the story and that I, I get to work on lots of different types of projects and listen and be accountable to people and I have to be prepared for the focus of my work shifting a lot. I think a lot of people—I feel—and I think a lot of people feel a lot of anxiety about their role in, as organizers? Or like, their role in making change? And that's something we need to get used to is a really high level of uncertainty. Like, well, I'll just pitch in here if I can, you know?

**TRW:** Yeah. Yeah, I think that whole model of— which is really a very white, to speak broadly—it's like a very white, capitalist model

<laughter>

**TRW:** ...to be like, 'we have a ten year plan' and everyone has...

**RS:** Yes

**TRW:** ...a highly defined role and 'this is going to happen at this time'. Like that's... gone, it feels. And that's probably good right?

**RS:** Mmhmm

**TRW:** In terms of like, creating a functional human system but...

**RS:** Yes, yeah.

**TRW:** No, I appreciate that transparency that you're in the middle of it, I think we don't hear that enough from people who are organizers and people in general. So thanks. That said, I want to respect your time and I know you don't have a lot of time, but do you have any projects or people you want to shout out? Who you think are doing this work really well? Who are articulating the thing we need to move into?

**RS:** Oh, gosh. Well, the first thing that comes to my mind, I... this month I've been, I just left Minneapolis where I was living, supporting my partner who was an organizer in Minneapolis for a long time. And after George Floyd's murder, and the uprising, they went home to go support and so I get to bear a secondary witness to the reckoning happening on the ground there as like, a primary site of like, refusal of the status quo, that's happening in our country. And the place that is moving closest to defunding the police and... even though its a long slow process there. So I want to like, acknowledge the city of Minneapolis, and the ways I've gotten to like, witness the reckoning with what it means to change society. And do better. And actually embody community safety. That is happening in many places in the country, but it's happening there in a particular way. We already shouted out my folks at sunrise <laughs> and it's a very beloved world to me. And I also, as I said to you, feel like part of being slow is like reading and listening to more media and uh, like call me back in a month I'll...

**TRW:** <laughs> Yeah, just spam me with anything honestly, I'll find a way to work it in.

**RS:** Yeah...

**TRW:** Yeah, well um, that's great. Thank you so much for sharing all of that and about your own work and your journey and it's been useful for me to listen to the first one and to talk today, so I appreciate that. If people want to find your work, do you have any personal plugs you want to plug?

**RS:** Um, you can find out more about me *<laughs>* Rachel at [rachelschragis.com](http://rachelschragis.com) and I am like in the process of hatching a new formation with my collaborator Josh, which I'll shout out Josh Yoder too, the most brilliant visual strategist and illustrator I have ever worked with, you can find his work at [joshiyoder.com](http://joshiyoder.com) and we will...we'll have something soon and I'll share it with you when it comes to be, but its not where you can look at the work we do, but it's not real yet

**TRW:** It's incubating, it's coming, I have a lot of things doing that now, yeah...

*<laughter>*

**TRW:** Well, thank you so much for your time and for the work you do."

**RS:** Thanks and you too, thanks for listening it's a real honor."

*<music fades in under narration>*

**TRW:** Thank you so much to Rachel again for talking with me both of these times and for sharing your work. And thanks to you all for listening. Before I go, I want to share some messages for what I'm assuming now, like I said a few days ago for you, I guess, is a wild week.

Our political landscape here in the US has been an escalating mess and everyone I know is dealing with some level of anxiety around what will happen next. Something that always calms me down in moments like these is to remember the things that I, and we as a species or as a movement, have already survived and what lessons we have learned from those times. It also helps to imagine vividly the future that I actually want. I asked a few of my favorite organizers, artists, activists, and friends to leave me a short voicemail to share with all of you about their hopes for after this election. So here's what they had to say, in no particular order:

*<radio static bursts>*

*"Sisters, brothers. The nation is not broken, it is white supremacy that is coming apart, flaking like a scab off of a wound. Even though they have infiltrated police departments and will try to overthrow the government, they can't stop the future. Their violent, desperate resistance is driven by the awareness more and more hearts are joining us. The progressive movement is gaining momentum all over the world. We can only get stronger from here. You will know the truth when you hear it. It arouses a love reflex. And our love is stronger than their hate, anger, denial. So keep the faith. Stay engaged."*

"Hello, this is Naghmana. I've been a resident of Spokane County for over eight years now and I'm excited for this election since I know its propelled so many to vote who haven't voted before, or who haven't voted in years. We all want our voices to be heard and we know representation matters. So as a longtime activist for social justice who spent most of her career working with and for impacted populations and communities of color, I support candidates who listen to and understand the needs of those

populations. I also understand that everyone has their own priorities and reasons why they choose to vote the way they do, I respect their choices and that is what makes America great—we all get to have our say. The main thing to do after this election is over and once we are on the other side of covid 19, is to hug everybody in sight. Make sure, let everybody that you know, meet them, see how they are doing, and if you can't do that right now for a while, just reach out and see how people are doing because we can't live—we are social animals, we can't live in isolation so much. And it's really important to check up on those that you love. Thank you, have a good day. Bye bye.”

“Hey everyone, this is Ingrid Sub Cuc, I'm indigenous Mayan, I am—I guess, an advocate, and also a scholar, currently working on my Masters. But I wanted to send this message to everyone as we are anxiously anticipating the results of the 2020 election. I know that this is a really big decision for a lot of our communities and a lot of people are putting on hold life decisions to see what this will look like for many of us. But as we have all been hearing, the elections will not be decided until days after, probably, so I hope we can all unite as a community, that we will check in on each other, that we will call our friends, that we call our families, that we stand strong together. These four years have been difficult for many of us but we have really survived them, and we have thrived. So my hope is that post-election we are with the people we love the most and that we are checking in with the people that we care about and our communities. We are strong, let's stay together. *Permanezcamos juntos, estamos en esto juntos. Janila matyox chewa.*”

“Yes, this is David Brookbank. This post-election, well, I won't be celebrating post election regardless of who wins. The system will not be giving people any rest from the effects and consequences of capitalism and imperialism, it will just march on forward regardless of which candidate is elected. But throughout all that time, abuses, exploitation, specifically my biggest concern is our brothers and sisters in Latin America and around the world, but specifically in Latin America. Very brave people who our country has sat upon and disrupted and exploited and intervened in for the entire history of our country. Very extreme interventions at the current time and in recent decades resulting in deaths of large numbers of people. Personally, that's what my energy goes to. So, whether people do choose to celebrate um, or take a deep breath and relax for a moment, hopefully it will be just for a moment cause there's a lot of work to do. And typically what I've seen is that for lack of clarity and analysis, but also because of privilege, large numbers of people who are Democrats begin that long, Rip Van Winkle sleep that occurs after Democrats come to power. They only wake up for midterms and for the next presidential election in hopes of reelecting the Democrat. But that's how we end up at the end of an eight year administration with wars, and deportations, and continuing interventions around the world. So my hope is that all this energy that was generated when Donald Trump became elected, a lot of people who'd been asleep for eight years then woke up, and have been working hard, doing good work, that those same people continue to work as hard, and perhaps doubly hard, once the Democrat's in office because there will be a lot of attempts to convince people that, well, things are in good hands.”

“Hi, my name is Lu, um some people might identify me as an activist, but I like to think of myself as someone who genuinely cares about humanity and specifically cares about the humanity in my community, in the community that I live in. Post election, the most important thing we can remember is that democracy is important, that our voices are important, and that representation of our identities is even more important right now. And unfortunately we live in a time where we don’t have the representation that we need in a way that moves humanity forward. And after this election what we need to do is come together. And we might disagree on policy and we might disagree on how we get to an objective which I believe we all should share, which is a healthy, happy community with people that can work together to care for ourselves and each other. And so as this—as this time passes, my hope is that we remember that democracy matters and those who threaten our democracy need to be removed. And that we don’t always have the representation that we need or we want, but we always have to keep in mind that to get that, we have to be thoughtful of what democracy means and how we continue to engage in it and improve it and love each other while we do it. So, that’s my message.”

“Hey, this is Joan Medina with Brigid’s Cloak homeless outreach. No matter what happens with the election, I hope that we will remember to watch out for each other and to be kind. People are suffering and afraid, whether it’s politics, pandemic, or simply struggling to exist. There’s still work to be done to protect those that are unfairly targeted and abused by our overzealous and indifferent police and politicians. There’s still a system of oppression and white supremacy to dismantle. We need you and your dreams and hopes to bring about much needed change and build a better world. We need the artists and the activists, the gardeners and the builders, the teachers and first responders, the leaders and the quiet dreamers. Young and old, from all cultures and ethnicities and economic backgrounds. We need all of us working at what we do best to create beloved community. We can build a world where everyone fed and sheltered and feels respected and valued. Be safe. Be kind. And remember, you’re not alone. We are in this together. I love you.”

“Hi, this is Tim Connor— I’m a writer and photographer in Spokane. I think I can answer this question two ways, I think there’s a couple things that we really need to take into account with what we’ve been through. One is that we need to fix what Steve Bannon, Trump’s media advisor and campaign director for a while in 2016 called, ‘flooding the zone with shit’. That was their idea of how to deal with the media. And the media’s been overwhelmed with, as you know, tens of thousands of outright lies by the president and a full-blown misinformation campaign about everything from soup to nuts. You know the other thing that I think we really need to work on is the penchant for authoritarianism that’s really frightening in this country now. Where we’ve got roughly a third to half of the country believing that an authoritarian movement is somehow necessary to um, put us on the right path. I guess that’s a pun. And that is so— the idea of using the tools of democracy including the Supreme Court and voter suppression to install you know, a permanent, corporate, fascist state to me is just the scariest thing that we’ve got to get past. Hopefully we can get past it with this election, but my feeling is that it could take longer than that. Thanks.”

“Hey...it’s me. No matter what the outcome is of this year’s chaotic election, we must always continue to show up with love. That means that we don’t go back to normal even if we defeat the fascist presence in our national leadership. Nor do we destroy ourselves the fight if we don’t. Our time here is precious and planet Earth is always holding us, even as she faces an uncertain future in our care. Integrity means to honor the gravity of our struggle for a more equitable and sane world in all of the ways that are sacred to us, in all of the ways that work. To acknowledge the resilience innate in us even when despairing at the headlines and the ground we lose when the world has us stuck in the regressive maws of its growth. Through every single human being, hope lives on. If we can hold ourselves and hold each other and bravely move forward with ferocious consideration of our gifts and limitations, then we can face whatever fights come. And if we go down with it, then we do so nobly. I really do believe that through the violent nature of human history, the seeds that are always planted and that always bloom, even if not in the timing that we think or desperately hope for, is hope in that it carries through generations, and it carries through lifetimes, and it carries through moments in every single person, even if we can’t always see it. So no matter what happens with the election, that’s what we have to go on and that’s what we have to hold space for each other and share with each other. Cause, pretty much that’s all we’ve got at this point, in a lot of ways. Ok! Bye.”

*<radio static bursts>*

*<music fades in under narration>*

**TRW:** Again, thanks for listening and thanks to all my comrades who recorded messages on short notice this week. I hope these interviews and thoughts were helpful for you. As always, you can find me most easily by going to [praxisradio.com](http://praxisradio.com) that’s p-r-a-x-i-s-r-a-d-i-o dot com and clicking on Praxis. I’ll be back next week, in California. See you then.

*<music continues and fades out>*

*<radio static bursts>*

**Joan Medina, reading part of her poem, “The Dreaming Tree”:**

Dream, child, dream. Envision a new world without suffering, without hunger, without intentional cruelty. Dream, child, dream, And while you grow gardens of plenty, not just of roots and stems or leaves and fruit, but sow fields of books and grow acres of stories, sung in great halls, told around campfires, and shared snuggled under blankets. Dream, child, dream. Not just of heroes who climb mountains or run races or who leap tall buildings with a single bound, but of heroes who grow and prepare food so that the rest of us may be nourished. Of heroes who help carry stones and buckets of mud to build homes, so that the rest of us may be sheltered. Of heroes who share skills and experience across generations, so that the rest of us may learn and expand on their ideas. Of heroes who with their hands and bodies and voice create beauty—woven with colors and form, rhythm and tone, so that the rest of us may listen with wonder and smile with joy. Of heroes who hold space, gently allowing our hearts to

grieve or vent or be silent, so that the rest of us may be safe to express our deepest feelings. Of heroes who protect their children like mother bears, who let the wind whisper in their children's ears all the wisdom of the ancestors, so that we may continue as a people, living in harmony with all of our relations on this planet we call home. Of heroes who lay down their swords and dance with dragons, who bring our hearts to overflowing, so that peace and tranquility are the laws of the land. Dream, child, dream, of all these things and more. For your village, for your people, for your world. And when you wake, return to your origins to find that all of your dreams have come true. For this is the power of creation. This is the magic of the dreaming tree.

I love you. Be well, be kind. We will get through this together.

*<radio static bursts>*

**END**