

Conversation Transcript: Cultural Reforesting Explores – Sustainable Actions

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Hi, I'm Liv Wood. Um, I'm a photography student at LCC. I have an interdisciplinary practice and I've

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been volunteering at Orleans House for a year. Hi, I am Vanessa Portugal. I am an art historian

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and I've been volunteering with Orleans House again for a year as well. We are part

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of this research group of Cultural Reforesting and trying to help discussing ecological topics

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at Orleans House together with other volunteers and here is the result of our conversations.

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Okay.

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Um, Liv, I was reading about, um, your part of the research, um, and there were some

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very interesting things that I would like to hear a bit more. Um. You, you were talking about

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the politics. What, what, what is it, um, that we can do to, to help the environment?

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Um, I think that's a pretty broad question.

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In the context of my research, I would say: so the Culture Declares Emergency movement is

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asking cultural institutions and individuals to declare that there's a climate emergency

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and ideally take some action towards that whatever that looks like for them, um, and that was born out

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of, uh, work with Extinction Rebellion as well - important for context - um, so I think politically

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what we can do is start to organise, it's the best thing. Um, but to say like what we can do

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in terms of action as a whole, um, it's very broad because all of the different inhabitants of this

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planet and all the different, um, people affected by climate change have different skills, resources, um,

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and ways of being, so I think the uniting factor and what we can do, um, especially shown by Culture

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Declares Emergency is get together and say something, take some collective action, um.

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Yeah, I think it's, um, there is a very important role on creativity.

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So it's, um, what can we do as a, as a person, uh, personal choice and, and also getting together with

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a group of people that share the interest. It's the same thing with, with enterprises, um, what can

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different companies do to take care of the environment, um, and I think, um, we can be like

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a very open road, you know, everybody can have a say and can give it a go and,

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um, towards this I was thinking on this topic have you, have you heard about it, um, the eco guilt. Do

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you know what that is? Oh yeah, like, um, consumer

guilt, kind of? Yeah. So basically because, um, I,

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I pollute a bit, but okay I will not eat meat, you know, so I like to travel, I cannot stop

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you know having my holidays abroad, but maybe I buy less meat this time.

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I don't know, all these things, um, for example, I was, um, I was thinking how can this actually, is not

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helping anything because nature is a living thing, right? So it's not like you sort of kill it little

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by little, but then you try to grow it back. I don't think it's, this is really working in a way and,

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um, I think it is all, it leads to the perspective of deep growth, do you know, um,

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how can we think of it, um, like really or is it, do you do you think it's, it's a bit, uh, utopian this,

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this area?

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I think when it comes to de-growing it's less utopian and more, um, utilitarian almost. It's

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like something that we have to do and if we don't it's going to happen anyways, um, at least

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in my perspective, um. When it comes to eco guilt, that's a really complex thing, isn't it? Because

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when you're not associated with other people who are aware or actively working

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with the climate emergency towards a

greater goal, um, approaching it from an

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individualistic perspective, it does get messy,
it, it becomes like, yeah, you lose a sense of

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why it's a problem, which is, of course,
because of all the species on this planet,

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um, when you look at it from an
individualistic perspective, I think,

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um. So going back to de-growing like, it is something
that we need to do on a personal level, but

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it's going to happen on a broader level no
matter what, um, what do you think? Yeah, I, I

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completely agree with you that sometimes, if we see
it personally, we just lose perspective and I think

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absolutely that, um, getting together, um, in
collective actions is the, the way forward, um.

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I think, not just to, to have different ideas and to
keep each other going, but also to join the efforts

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right? Um, of course, this will all start from a
personal interest, the personal objective, but then

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it gets strengthened by, by the group and
in the artistic practice, I, I'm thinking of,

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I don't know, all the challenges that this
employs to, to the artists right? Because

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they use materials and ideally materials
that become archives and you know,

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at the end, it will mean something about the time, and how to reuse these materials is that,

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I don't know, I, I don't know how is it going to be, the future, if it's going to be some, um,

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like nature kind of work or, um, high enduring material for like statues for, for art, um, I don't,

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I don't know. What, what do you think? Um, I think, in terms of material for artists,

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there are two ways of thinking about that right? So, um, one of the more basic principles

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of ecology is that nothing goes away, things move around, right? But they're always with us, so, um, as

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a practicing artist that's something I try and keep in my practice for sure and I would never

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say that other artists shouldn't be doing that, it's a good practice to have, but, um, as well, um,

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I think in such a time of emergency like now, as well, it's really important to zoom out and look at

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the macro. So yes art materials do have a carbon footprint, but the power of culture to shift, um,

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to shift how we act how, we think, is so strong and there's such a potential there that

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maybe it's worth it. Yeah, absolutely, you, you are saying something about, um, that it always stays and

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together, um, I'm joining it with the idea of the collective. We were talking earlier about gardening.

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How, how, how does this, um, can be a way to promote the, the social change the educat, educative

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way of looking at this change in our lifestyles. I think gardening is,

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on an individual level, so important for connecting to the land and to the processes that

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keep us going that have had us going for so long, um, and then on a collective level as well it's,

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it's such a reclamation of power, almost, to grow your own food or create your own apothecary. I, I

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think in North London, we'll have to link back to this, in North London there's a community apothecary,

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they grow all of their own medicinal herbs on a, on an allotment and that's amazing, you know,

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um, it's a real place of empowerment and it's also a strong metaphor for other actions as well. Maybe

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the garden can be, rather than just a plot of land, which is never just a plot of land, but it

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can also be a structure for how we work together in other places like the office or the art studio.

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Um, I'm thinking about your research now with the digital gardener

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technology and I think that's really interesting that computer engineers, right, have

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come up with a way to spread gardening with what they do best. Maybe they're not very good

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at growing pumpkins, but they can help somebody else, um. Yeah, I was thinking on so many things

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that we can do about gardening, for example, um, I think there are always tutorials, how to grow

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potatoes or tomatoes or everyday things and how important they are for the economic organisation

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or the life without sustaining but, um, of course, these, uh, digital applications, um, measure the

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chemical levels of the earth and, and they sort of suggest in your lands which is the best product

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to, to plant and, you know, sort of help you with this science to,

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to improve them, yeah, the growing, um, and of your garden and to make it, um, can you say live all

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year long. So I think it's a good connection between this and, and

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it's of course not profit, not for profit now like, as you say, it just empowers.

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Definitely, um, and I think it's important that these things

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aren't for profit as well, because these systems that have created so much

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profit are also the systems that are causing this, um, this emergency, right? Um.

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Yeah, I think, I think there has to be a way to,

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to, to completely change the
the perspective, but also, um, to,

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to sort of sustain it economically like, um, you
know, it's not that easy that we can, not all land

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is so fertile for example. No and certainly, we, um,
it is a lot of us in this planet, um. So I think

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all the stress of the initial... looking for
initiatives, yeah, the personal level that, um,

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you know, um, sort of organisations, associations
and companies looking for different ways to,

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to go through this crisis, is,
it's a land of opportunities.

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I think before I used to think, like so what do
we do because there is not, um, enough being done

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but, um, I think after spending some time
talking with you guys and looking at your

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research, of course, all these laws that are,
um, passing through, um, the, the taxes for more

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polluting, um, companies or activities are a
way through but there is so much more to do, no?

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There's definitely a lot of work to do, yes,
and you do, you make a good point that it

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needs to be economically sustainable as
well as environmentally sustainable, right?

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Something that I'm thinking of, from

your research Vanessa that I wanted

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to ask you about is eco-social work and pedagogy

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and how how you think this could be implemented on a wider level maybe, or the different ways

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that we can start bringing this through our communities. Yeah, I think again community is

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a key word, usually it all starts with a school or a community centre and they get kids together to

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show them how to recycle materials, how to use those materials to, to, I don't know, to do some

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science project even, um, and also getting together to, to cook, you know, or employ the things that they

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grow in the garden, so, um I think it has to start at an early age. I, I do believe that, um, all the

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information and, um, and market of the of the summit now, for, for the, against the climate, uh, change is,

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is helping, um, future generations. I certainly see more people engaged with this, um, perspective

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even if, um, because it's on the news all the time because, um, as we were discussing before many of

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the people worldwide who are suffering the worst of this, um, do not have the economic resources to

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survive it in a way, you know, and, and, and always the pressure is on poorer countries. Um, so how can

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we open our scope and see the weather picture,

if, if we are really not suffering that much.

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Um, so I think all this marketing is a way to start all this but I think as, uh, as you mentioned,

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um, the eco-social work has to start early and we have to definitely keep thinking about it.

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Definitely, that's such a good point and you are so right it's so important that wealthier countries

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take action first. Um, I think that's been a huge point of COP this year, correct me if I'm wrong,

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um, the COP26, is that, um, wealthier countries, we need to be taking action now, or yesterday really.

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Yeah. It does, it definitely, coming back to eco-social work on a smaller

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community basis, it does really warm my heart to see, um, children so involved in

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environmentalism. I think there were some local murals recently in Richmond

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and also some some events I remember you sharing, some community events, uh, in the borough as well.

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Oh yes we have, uh, the murals from, um, an artist in, in Twickenham, um, and

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yeah, I think they will all keep, um, happening, um, again employ... um, children from, from

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I mean children from local schools are engaged in these activities I think it's very important

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and I'm happy, um, Orleans House is taking part of, of this transformation and these discussions

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as well. Definitely, I, I think these conversations that we've been having and also this research in

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this exhibition has been so beneficial and it's such a, it's such a positive first step.

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I do want to know though, um, maybe this isn't something that we've touched on before,

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how can we use our community, maybe as volunteers, or as people who frequent the gallery, um, to create

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meaningful change like in what ways can we dream about that. Maybe none of us in the

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room have the answers, but, um it's, it's so rich with opportunity as you said before isn't it?

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Yeah, I think that is a, that is a question, definitely. [Laughing] I, I heard somebody saying,

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well just identify the problem and then just try to tackle it and, um, I think, um,

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at least from, from, from Richmond Borough, Orleans House, the gardens, um, thinking of, of the area. I think

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it's, um, lovely to see all the families getting together and walking in the in the woods, uh, all

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the dogs, um, spending time as well because I think it's very popular for them, um, so at that point I,

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I wouldn't know [laughs] because to me it is a bit of a heaven there, just, just going there, so, um,

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yeah, I, I, I think maybe this is a
point to, to start looking, um, further.

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Yeah, no, I apologise that was pretty... No, [laughing]
no it is the question that we have to,

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to keep in our minds. Yeah, definitely and
I think that's why we're doing this isn't

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it and collectively having these meetings and
doing this work hopefully we'll find an answer.

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I think it's so great that, um, we're bringing all
these different skills and backgrounds, for example.

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I think in our meetings, just as
an example, of some people we have,

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we have gardeners, we have artists we have,
you're an art historian, um, so many different

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skill sets and perceptions of the world
really create such a valuable discourse and

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hopefully something valuable will come out of that
as well, something meaningful. Yeah, yeah, thank you

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for, for this conversation and for leaving some
thoughts to, to think, uh, afterwards and, of course,

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may they inspire future actions. Thank you so
much Vanessa, I, it's been a pleasure and I hope

0:19:15.200,0:19:23.360
we can do this again soon. Yeah me too. All right. So
until next time. See you soon, bye. See you, bye