

HEAT



Thresholds Fifty One

What's

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Hot.

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Goblin modernism combined the abject side of closed-loop biosystems thinking with the basic functionalism of modernist thought. This was the architecture associated with 1970s environmentalism, which came with a rigid moral aesthetic of individual autonomy and a solutionist mindset. However right-hearted in rejecting the warmongering and pollution of industrialized capitalism, the architecture of 1970s environmentalism did not have a vision for the future of society apart from off-grid life. This movement idolized individual dropout from mass culture, self-reliance, and distrust of government. The New Alchemists compared their fish tank poop-cycling greenhouses to Gothic churches in section drawings, and *The Whole Earth Catalog* enabled DIY survivalist fantasies with consumer convenience as a prerequisite

that hypocritically rejected consumer culture and pop. It left a legacy of survivors who are, at best, obscure hermit gurus and, at worst, neo-plantationists.

The 2020s Goblincore lifestyle aesthetic represents a new fascination with things that are growing, decaying, living, dirty, moist, smelly, leaky, and ugly. The aesthetic presents itself as an offshoot of Cottagecore, looking beyond pastoral visions of the simple life to the slimy dark side.

Both could be simply harmless fantasies of choice, safe worlds to escape to in the face of real-world systemic failure. Is the new goblin an aesthetic without an ethic? Conversely, in an earnestly post-capitalist 2020s, degrowth is an ethic without an aesthetic—yet. “Degrowth is a planned reduction of energy and resource use designed to bring the econ-

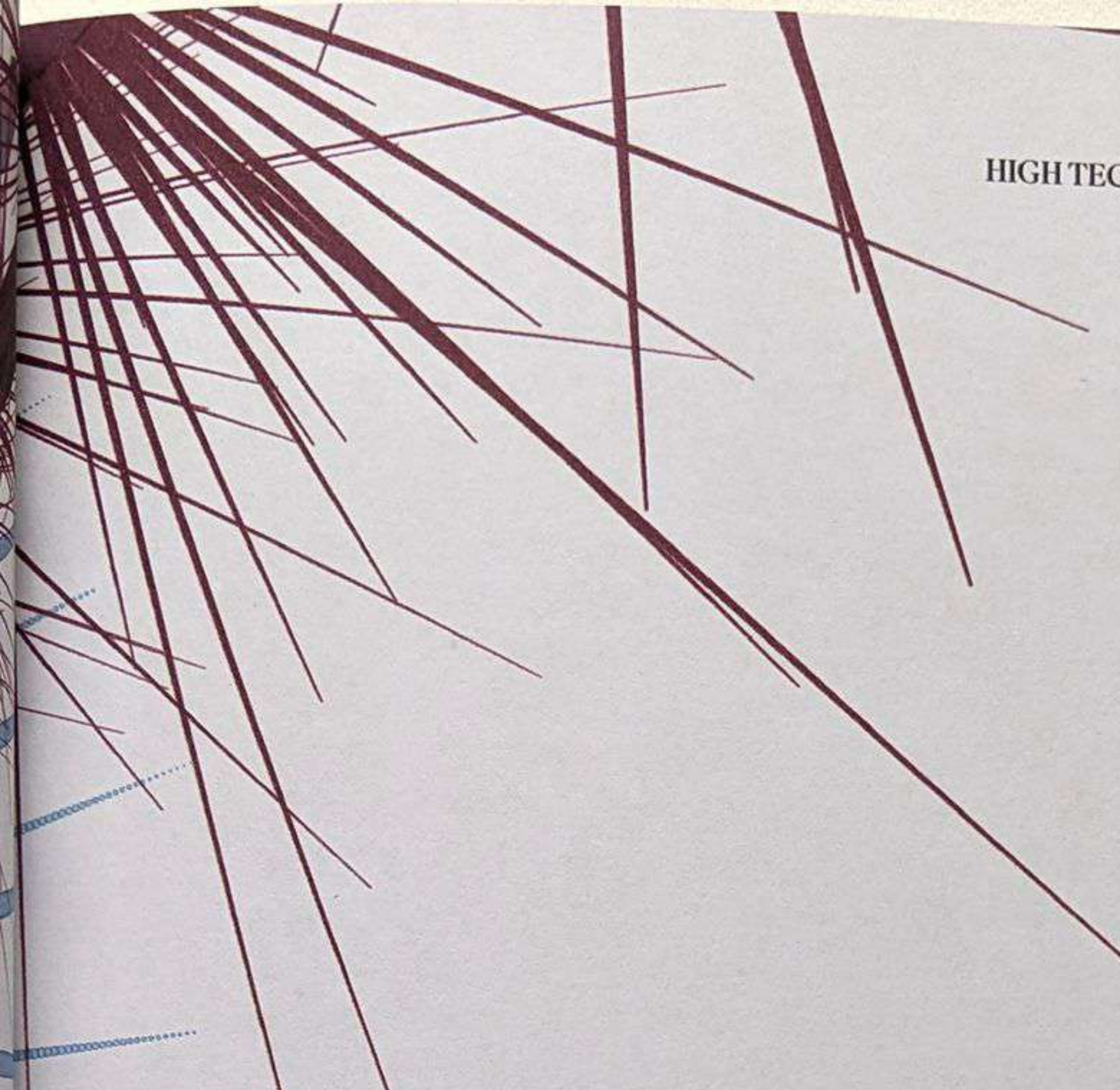
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High Tech Nu-Goblin Modernism

Gabriel Ciria

HOT TAKE





omy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves our collective well-being.”¹ Degrowth advocates for spending time on self, family, friends, mutual care, trust, and growing networks of community resilience. Unlike 1970s goblin modernism, degrowth is a cultural and economic mode that rejects gimmick solutions—“charmingly miniaturized machines”—to societal problems.²

To further their degrowth mission of plant education and food sovereignty at the neighborhood scale, Eastie Farm in Boston wanted a classroom grow space that was usable through the cold seasons, when most of their outdoor activities stop. They wanted an avoidance of fossil fuels, responsible rainwater capture, and groundwater replenishment methods, and they wanted to tuck this mission into a “secret garden” space of relief from the city, within the city. A closed loop of glycol (fuchsia in the rendering at left) circulates heat from three 450-foot deep wells to the twin geothermal heat exchangers. The center openable roof pitch provides natural ventilation and cooling. The four

longitudinal gutters channel rainwater (turquoise) to a 530-gallon holding tank with a subterranean infiltration system for overflow. Grant funding (not shown) enabled these charming machines. Furniture and fencing (green) is a fiberglass grate product to trellis vining edibles and flowers. Sunlight is filtered with clear glass, corrugated polycarbonate, and dual retractable shades (white) which can also lock to retain heat during the coldest winter nights. The foundation is insulated with polystyrene foam (pink) so the thermal mass of the ground directly beneath the greenhouse contributes to temperature stability. The image of a quiet hidden community space on abandoned city land behind looming billboards seems like a suitable figure of cooperative common infrastructure for degrowth. 🔥

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Notes

- 1 Boston Ujima Project, “June is Degrowth Month at Ujima,” email newsletter, June 8, 2022.
- 2 Sianne Ngai, “Theory of the Gimmick,” *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Winter 2017), 472.