LESS

GOING TO THE MOON

'WE' ARE GOING back to the Moon. In 2023 and 2024 there will be the first woman, and the next man, on the Moon. These landings are planned as the next 'giant step for mankind' before creating Moon bases for mining purposes by 2028—which could be the launch pad to "enable human expansion across the solar system". Next stop Mars.
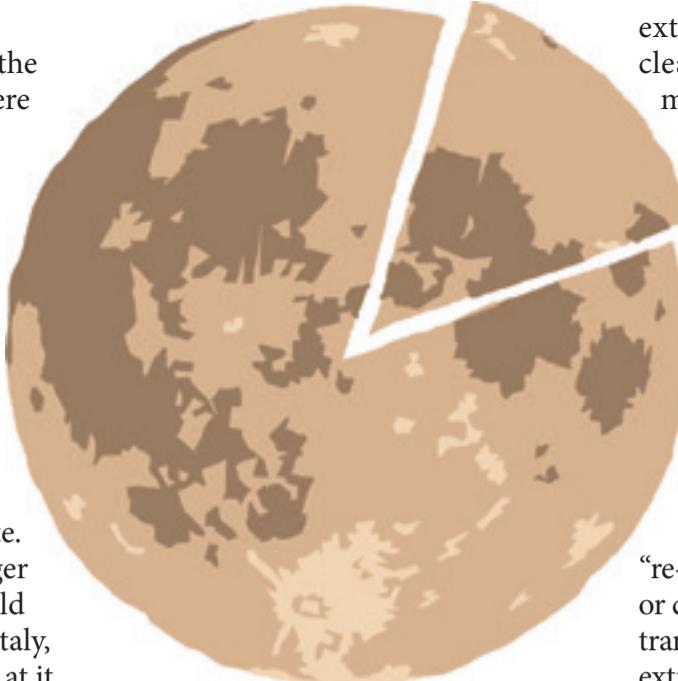
But already there's dispute. Space exploration is no longer the exclusive preserve of Cold War rivals. The UK, Japan, Italy, Canada and the UAE are all at it. So is Elon Musk—complete with Bolivian coup threats[1] to ensure the lithium keeps flowing.

Who governs space?

There's a document dated from 1967 called the "Outer Space Treaty" upon which governance of the use of space is based. It says "outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means".

But this is due to be replaced by the NASA-led "Artemis Accords"[2] agreed this month by the USA, UK, Italy, Canada, Australia, UAE and Japan, but not significantly Russia or China. These govern Moon exploration and extraction of its resources; but Russia and China suspect, probably with some validity, that the western powers are stitching the Moon up for themselves.

The Moon is being treated like a colony and our actions are in clear breach of the Prime Directive— enforced by the Trumpian formation of the US Space Force[3] as a vanity sci-fi pastiche, the weaponisation of the galaxy. The first thing we do when we strike out is begin mining: having eroded the basis of life on earth, where else is there to boldly go but off-world: taking imperialism into the cosmos?

Quebecois theatrical director Robert Lepage once wrote that while the Soviet space programme was about "exploring the cosmos" the American astronauts were "shooting for the stars". Today such romantic semantics are redundant. We're going to the Moon to mine.

The Space Shuttle programme served the same purpose of making us think we're going someplace. Get over it. This light balm of eye-wateringly expensive self-delusion might have been plausible whilst we talked of the 'white heat of technology', had J.T. Kirk and J.F.K. at the helm, but now that we're deep into climate chaos trauma, omnicide and trillions of pounds in hock, it's all looking a little less fun.

As Maciej Cegłowski puts it: "When the Cold War fizzled out towards the end of the eighties, NASA rebranded the Shuttle as a way of jump-starting the leap of capitalism from the Earth's surface to outer space, offering a variety of heavily subsidized research platforms for the private sector (which proved remarkably resistant to the allure of a manufacturing environment where raw materials cost \$40,000/kg)."[4]

We may not even be the only civilisation that has gone down this pathway. Avi Loeb, Harvard astronomer, discusses possible evidence for extraterrestrial civilisations with advanced technologies who have become extinct: "As soon as it becomes clear that there really have been many civilizations that have become extinct, I believe that people will learn the right lesson. And if we discover remnants of advanced technologies, they will prove to us that we are only at the start of the road; and that if we don't continue down that road, we will miss a great deal of what there is to see and experience in the universe."[5]

The task is not – we think – "re-industrialisation", "astropolitics" or conquering space. It is not to transpose our imperialist and extractivist ways outwards, but to create new systems from our failing ones and nurture new values from the ethics that have brought us to the brink of destruction.

This means re-inhabitation and decolonisation, creating a restorative practice and challenging the concept of endless growth.

DOWN TO EARTH

THIS DEEP CONNECTION between coloniality and extractivism is at the heart of our degrowth analysis. Fantasies of interplanetary ascension are inevitably caught in the gravitational pull of our fragile, complex embodiment on Earth. Scotland's contribution to all this is a lens in which to sum up the state of the nation. Glasgow manufactures more satellites than anywhere in the world outside California,[6] while the proposed space port in A'Mhòine Peninsula, Sutherland is opposed by those[7] who fear the impact on wildlife, ecosystems and habitats. Chief among the objectors is local landowner Anders Holch Povlsen,[8] an advocate for rewilding and reforestation.

The inconvenient truth is that Mr Holch Povlsen is Scotland's biggest landowner, claiming thousands in public cash for forestry and farming while contributing no tax to the common good on his Scottish property—except in Denmark, where tax he pays on his land in Scotland[9] pays for Danish kindergartens and health centres. Mr Holch Povlsen made his billions selling 'fast fashion'[10] garments cheaply through his companies such as Asos, designed to be worn a few times then disposed of, manufactured in the majority world by workers in inhumane conditions who have been known to go unpaid.[11] Meanwhile this contested 'wilderness' suitable for space travel is only devoid of population in the first place as a legacy of the Sutherland Clearances, during which settlements which were not considered to contribute to economic growth were cleared for more productive sheep farming, the inhabitants 'set adrift upon the world',[12] ending up in places like Canada where the recapitulation of cycles of violence continued as settler colonialism.

Let's reground ourselves. As the days of 2020 are shortening, we begin to reflect on a year that brought difficulties and grief to so many. As we grapple with the new realities of permanent crisis, it becomes clear that the old green narratives of sustainability transitions and reform no longer hold (or never held in the first place). The challenging path ahead needs to not only question the underlying economic principles that not only undermine our life support systems, but also had disastrous effects during the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. [13]

For many challenging growth is terrifying.

"Degrowth" is a provocation, a lifeline and a call to focus on what really matters. The idea is not to degrow everything. The pandemic has spotlighted the necessity of care work, which must be central to an economic recovery, as well as other workers that are essential for our physical, social and cultural flourishing. Meanwhile, we must shrink those sectors of the economy which threaten our survival.

"A world without teachers or dock-workers would soon be in trouble, and even one without science fiction writers or ska musicians would clearly be a lesser place. It's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs or legal consultants to similarly vanish. (Many suspect it might markedly improve.)"
– David Graeber (1961-2020)
from *Bullshit Jobs*

Notes

1 salon.com/2020/10/20/elon-musk-becomes-twitter-laughingstock-after-bolivian-socialist-movement-returns-to-power/
2 nasa.gov/specials/artemis-accords/
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WELCOME TO LESS

A warm welcome to the first issue of LESS, a journal on degrowth, radical sufficiency and decolonisation in Scotland.

IT'S IN THE context of this complexity, precarity and predicament that we offer you a warm welcome to the first issue of LESS, a journal on degrowth, radical sufficiency and decolonisation in Scotland.

LESS questions and challenges dominant narratives about what economic progress means in Scotland, and sketches out alternative visions. The focus is on collective and democratic solutions to sustaining livelihoods that meet people's needs while rising to the threats of climate change, ecocide and mass extinction, inequality, racism and the far right, and the interconnected oppressive and extractivist logic and mechanisms that feed all of those.

Our first issue grapples with the question, what does degrowth mean in Scotland during the pandemic and for plans for an economic recovery?

In 'Degrowth and Community' Gehan Macleod begins to take some of this mythology apart, writing: "The "right thing" to do, or the moral imperative is clearly apparent. The kind of wholescale restructuring of society necessitated by degrowth carries opportunities to right past wrongs, and crucially the means to redistribute wealth, resources, freedoms and security more equitably."

One of the key aims of this journal – and of the wider work of the Enough Collective – is to collapse the divide between 'brain work and hand work' between the abstract and the concrete. Each issue will be exploring key projects and communities that are demonstrating degrowth on the ground, here and now. In this issue we look at the work of food activists on Skye, tool and skill sharing in Edinburgh and the 're-makery' movement as examples of positive futures, and Lucy Conway from Eigg writes about the lessons to be learnt from their community renewables: "Eiggtricity".

We are delighted to publish an extract from Jason Hickel's new book *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. While many of us are stunned and confused, Hickel offers 'Pathways to a Post-Capitalist World'.

In "Culture beyond extractivism: What might a post-growth cinema look like?" Maria A Velez Serna explores a cultural aspect to degrowth and begins envisaging a future for cinema in a different economy.

Finally we have Luke Devlin in conversation with Benjamin Zachariah, a scholar of global fascism and international co-operation among the far-right. They discuss the interplay between fascism, the Covid-19 pandemic experience and Brexit.

We are indebted to our poets and artists – to Tawona Sitholé, Andy Arthur, Marta Adamowicz, Deborah Mullen, Calum Carr, and Stewart Bremner. LESS will be a space for art, not just words, for poems, not just analysis.

We were initially to launch LESS earlier in the year and had much of the copy already written before the virus struck. We stopped, paused, collapsed, re-thought it all, re-wrote and re-commissioned. We present it to you with some pride and more exhaustion. We hope you will read it, share it, correspond with us and come towards us as we try to create conversation, discussion and learning in an hour of chaos.

Arundhati Roy has written that the virus is a portal: "…a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

We'd suggest it is a bealach (a way and the pass that leads through or over that way). The task is not to escape to the moon, but to imagine another world right here on earth.

– The LESS Editorial Collective: Luke Devlin, Mairi McFadyen, Mike Small & Svenja Meyerricks

comic book art. He has worked in various fields of design, from creating animations to magazine Illustration. *calumcarr.com*

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CONTENTS

GROUNDING DEGROWTH IN COMMUNITY

Gehan Macleod explores what degrowth means in a time of pandemic where community shifts from being an abstract ideal to an urgent necessity. Illustration by Deborah Mullen.

AS WE ENTER the second half of the year 2020, communities around the world are reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic. Unprecedented worldwide distribution of this new strain of coronavirus was aided and abetted by global networks and flightpaths in a hyper-connected world where markets supplant other forms of relationship. This virus has triggered – is triggering – repercussions at every level of human society, some yet unseen. Along with the quiet streets and long queues outside supermarkets obvious at the beginning of the lockdown – more subtle shifts are visible in mainstream discourse.

The lens offered by the virus has dramatically sharpened our collective focus on a number of themes closely connected to degrowth. In a shaken world, graffiti declares that *capitalism is the virus*, while the *Financial Times* has carried ideas in the distinctive salmon pink that would have been previously more obvious by their absence. We find ourselves in a world where the newly-naked fragility of our just-in-time supply chains is shattering illusions of economic solidity. Illusions which prop up the view that "there is no alternative" to an economy based on capitalism and endless growth. Illich said the world is built on assumptions we've not yet found names for. The current pandemic is in many senses beginning to language these assumptions and reveal the precarious foundations of our economic system and world.

This context lends new relevance to considerations of *degrowth* – to date a movement that could be understood to largely inhabit the world of ideas, academic discourse or reframing pre-existing activity. A concept that had not previously found much ground, particularly in community contexts, except perhaps in small pockets of mainland Europe. How we might *ground degrowth in community* – the title of this article – is lent a new importance by this context of crisis. But first, it is necessary to explore two implications this phrase would seem to encompass: that this is somehow inherently the 'right thing' to do – that there is a moral imperative to do so; and further unpacking the assumptions about the meaning and nature of community. Below are some perspectives informed by experiences gleaned from communities of protest and communities of place including twenty-five years of living and working within the Govan community.

The "right thing" to do, or the moral imperative is clearly apparent. The kind of wholescale restructuring of society necessitated by degrowth carries opportunities to right past wrongs, *and* crucially the means to redistribute wealth, resources, freedoms and security more equitably. This constitutes effectively 'doing right' by those communities who have least benefited from economic growth and its technological advances – often the very communities who've been subjected to the most damaging extractive processes. That said, I want to explore not what 'degrowth might do for community' but rather what community might do for degrowth. To do that, it's

> *"The kind of wholescale restructuring of society necessitated by degrowth carries opportunities to right past wrongs, and crucially the means to redistribute wealth, resources, freedoms and security more equitably"*

necessary to start sketching out what has happened to communities over the preceding centuries.

COMMUNITY COMMODIFIED

TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES HAVE suffered from the same exploitation that has fuelled economic growth at the cost of both human and non-human life. The strong social ties that once made up communities have been chronically weakened by a pervasive individualism, the global labour market and rampant consumerism.

Community has come to mean many things; broad and vague or bounded and niche. Long before the distinction 'community of interest' was necessary, community described relationships of place. The etymological origins of the word *community* date to the late 14th century, and meant explicitly "a number of people associated together by the fact of residence in the same locality". It's easy to imagine how community formed around shared resources, customs and practices.

But a lot has happened to communities in the intervening centuries. If there ever was a tight-knit sense of this word, it has long since been stretched and pulled out of shape. Communities have been successively dispossessed of resources, most notably of common lands, corroding the capacity for self determination. In Scotland, the collapse of traditional industries such as kelp, the insufficiency of subsistence practices to support growing populations, famines and the economic brutality of the Highland Clearances all contributed to intergenerational repercussions for historic communities – dispersing some to the new colonies as the colonisers and others to new urban centres of population, coal-fired by the industrial revolution.

I write this from Govan, where the population increased more than tenfold over forty years in the late 19th century; from 9,000 in 1864 to 95,000 by 1907. Some street names still carry traces of the places people left behind; Uist Street, Orkney Street. And yet the shipbuilding industry built new expressions of community; in tenements and 'closes'. Or rather it was people, crowded into 'single ends', who rewove community around the hard edges of industry and urban realities so as to render hard lives more bearable. Interdependence was still essential for people's physical and emotional well-being; where community made up a significant part of the social protection you could rely on at a time predating the welfare state.

Post-industrial capitalism and the rise of neoliberal policies have delivered repeated blows to once proud communities such as Govan or Linwood or Clydebank – communities stripped of yards, factories and jobs but also of their identity. Not helped by planning and political decisions linked to excess mortality[1], community as it continued to be expressed, began to lose the visceral quality of its social ties; held together no longer by interdependence, instead defined by geography and social theories of Popple and Tönnies. Progressively communities became collections of individuals or nuclear family units however dysfunctional; consumer entities increasingly dependent on the market, employers and the welfare state to meet their needs rather than each other. Negative identities began to define neighbourhoods, quite apart from the numerous slurs found in neoliberal narratives that painted communities as restricting social mobility that might otherwise compel us to "get on a bike"[2] and get on in the world.

In professional circles, I've experienced community as a word that often accompanies institutionalised *othering*; as health workers and 'care professionals' describe *the* community or communities in ways that sound suitably distinct or distant. ≫

Not me and you, not us, but *them*. Professional boundaries separate lives where we have normalised our deep segregation from our proximity to others. So for example, while I might be working in an adjacent community, my community sits in someone else's 'remit', my neighbours are someone else's 'caseload' or 'service users', someone else is paid to care for my toddler or my elderly parent. All grist to the mill of gross domestic product, but real community – and families – are unquestionably ground down in the process.

In the 'poverty industry', where the wheels have been heavily oiled by austerity policies, disadvantaged communities are commodities where "value is added" as part of efforts to render them economically productive sections of society. I've heard the phrase 'stock in the system' used in a meeting in Govan to refer to people who fit the criteria for an impending employability programme. In this industry, people are stock and communities have been commodified; capitalist logic has polluted even our most intimate social relationships.

Even before this pandemic, we were living in perverse times. Times where there were more communities of interest arising, more transport networks forming, more connectivity supporting online communities fuelled by growing social media channels. Yet conversely, times where we also tracked statistics to measure loneliness[3] and devised strategies to tackle social isolation.[4] A devastating reality dramatically worsened by the 'epidemic of loneliness' brought about by Covid-19 lockdown measures.[5]

Even prior to the lockdown, we have long longed for connection in an age of individualism that does not always easily translate into communities of place. Instead dysfunctional behaviours, cultivated by superficial interactions taking place in the aspic of social media, de-skill us massively for the realness of community. So, we live on in this tragic gap. Feeling the lack, we consume more. Lockdown

consumption lined the pockets of the obscenely wealthy, like Amazon's Bezos. Thankfully, impressive mutual aid efforts arising in response to the pandemic demonstrated power at rolling back some of this degradation.

Hyper capitalism with social distancing measures in full force is about as dystopian a reality as you could conceive. Where going out and earning a living puts you and your family at risk in radically new social divides. Where keeping the economy purring is constantly offset against managing the R number. Where restrictions intervene more in our private than public spaces while we're encouraged to "eat out to help out". Where proximity is mediated by perspex screens, touch by hand sanitiser and smiles by face coverings and hugs reduced to bumping elbows. Yet the pandemic is helping to re-center the necessity of exploring saner responses to otherwise intolerable futures.

The impressive rise in mutual aid groups and other forms of community response that erupted to support individuals isolating and sheltering through the lockdown go a long way in offering hopeful glimpses of what these kind of saner response might look like in practice and served to spread a wider appreciation of the overlooked potential of community power.[6]

Drawing this sketch of community to a close, it's worth noting that the word community has often appeared in public in recent times accompanied by saccharin-sweet notions of charity or doing-good within a perception of reality that is increasingly compartmentalised into binary silos that separate the deserving from

"We exercise the emaciated muscle of the collective. Something we can only do from embeddedness in communities of place – up to the elbows in the messiness of relationship."

the undeserving; a toxic fiction to obscure structural realities. In the media, community also pops up alongside nostalgia – drenched in notions of a 'better time', when you knew your neighbours more than your soap characters, when villages were what it took to raise a child, not screens, Nintendo and child psychologists.

Nostalgia, or at least 'looking back', also often colours people's first perceptions of degrowth. Degrowth is so countercultural that some assume it's about undoing economic progress and returning to an idealised yesteryear. Yet beyond this assumption, a considered understanding of living and thriving within our planetary limits reveals that neither community nor degrowth are 'nice nostalgia' but more an 'absolute necessity' as we dismantle economic fictions and grapple with planetary realities. Both are essential responses to the overconsumption driving multiple crises and gross inequality now exacerbated by the economic fallout of Covid-19.

Societal institutions such as law, the labour market and the welfare state are all hard wired to the imperative of growth[7] – pre-dating all these, community has at best been sidelined. Not hidebound to endless growth, it afforded some protection from the blind economic totality of market forces crushing communities in pursuit of increased GDP. It's easy to see why the institutions of community have been systematically under attack; they are predisposed to localism and collectivism over globalisation and individualism. Essentially this is a story of the ways in which economic growth-at-all-costs has had successive and traumatic repercussions for communities; how they are now expressed and their capacity for self determination. Alone, we are more malleable as economic units of labour and more vulnerable to seductive brands and slick marketing. Covid-19 mutual aid efforts have begun a reclamation of this collective protection.

COMMUNITY AS DEGROWTH PRACTICE

FROM THIS STANDPOINT we can more usefully turn to consider what grounding degrowth in community might mean and its relevance for a post-pandemic world.

By making community where we stand and reclaiming the fire and the power of community, degrowth can become both a practical and personal practice. Being in community, we relearn ourselves as human and unlearn the superficial roles subscribed to us; consumer, denizen, employee. It isn't easy, this is a stretch – not least in our capacity for reflexivity and connection. In this stretching, we begin to dismantle the ways in which we've internalised the oppressive structures without which capitalism could not function; patriarchy, domination, judgement, transaction, punishment. It is in community, in relationship with others that these things are revealed – they show up – enabling processes of deconstruction.

This is part of the unlearning and relearning that must accompany degrowth. Community can be the crucible, for the kind of intense fire of relationship needed to burn off the crap and unshackle ourselves from those 'mind-forg'd manacles' Blake describes so poignantly.[8]

Committing to a practice of making community with those we share a place with, not only those with whom we share an interest, comes with a recognition of what we gain, rather than from some misplaced altruism. Because as Galeano's words suggest – *we have much to learn from other people*.[9] And I would suggest with a class lens, materially better off communities have much to learn from communities where collapse and struggle have been unevenly distributed over the decades. With a shift of perspective, these communities possess skills for incredible resilience, capacities and responses not reliant on consuming your way out of a situation. Theirs is a strength that isn't reliant on material resources. So, 'who is

helping who' becomes entirely context dependent.

These are the networks of relationships which support a greater capacity for self-reliance and self-determination. Networks that will become more critical at times of crises as disaster collectivism demonstrates,[10] something that community responses to the pandemic are powerfully revealing. Engaging in the wrestle, we strengthen generative relationships that prepare us for post-capitalist (and post-pandemic) realities. We exercise the emaciated muscle of the collective. Something we can only do from embeddedness in communities of place – up to the elbows in the messiness of relationship.

Grounding degrowth in community means recovering and reclaiming expressions and meanings of community that have been co-opted or corroded. From recovering a sense of the collective, to reclaiming forms of common ownership and social protection or the social means of production and consumption. That is not because it is the right thing to do but because these mechanisms are the means of degrowth on the ground – increasing local resilience and radical sufficiency in the face of collapsing institutions and ecological systems, weakened by a world where future pandemics are probable.

They also inform how we might 'build back better' and demand the kind of recovery that will truly support both public health and our communities. In the past, communities were mechanisms for meeting a range of needs; to belong, for identity, for protection, for meaning but also physical needs like shelter and food. The significant increase in community food growing projects is already recovering some of these practices and growing community through the process.[11] Being in community potentially offers a means to meet needs and increase our wellbeing that is not dependent on economic growth or brittle supermarket supply chains.

In community standing shoulder to shoulder, deliberating eye to eye, deep trust can be built that transcends social class and integrates diversity. We experience the ways in which our commonalities bind us more strongly than our differences divide us. This is an acceptance that comes closer to unconditional love. Not the quick hit buzz of belonging that fuels populism by excluding the 'other'. Instead we experience an exploration of equality that celebrates the various gifts of both light and dark we each bring. Not a thin kind of equality, taken out of context to compress us into homogenised masses ripe for exploitation. Recovering healthy communities creates capacity to reintegrate so much about society that has become fractured and divided as well as strengthens social bonds essential to navigating the challenges of orientating beyond economic growth and charting trajectories beyond post-pandemic capitalism.

Within the dominant over-culture, real community can be deeply counter-cultural – creating contexts that shatter some of the core logic of capitalism; human nature as inherently selfish and competitive and relationships based on transaction for gain. We glimpse the illusion and find that it is the conditions of the market, of atomised society that create, amplify and reward these behaviours. More than that, we experience the re-emergence of our natural capacity for collaboration, for compassion and our propensity for mutuality – qualities also recovered in the process of mutual aid. Mutual aid efforts and community understood in this way become a training ground for the kind of culture change we need to reorientate away from the doctrines of capital, exploitation and growth.

Degrowth may also find ground through prototyping new forms or expressions of community. That is, not simply recovering past practices like shared ownership of common resources but exploring forms that speak to the future, perhaps as yet unimagined possibilities. New communities have been

"Being in community potentially offers a means to meet needs and increase our wellbeing that is not dependent on economic growth or brittle supermarket supply chains."

emerging that support localism and collective means of production and consumption. Others are rising up in response to the pandemic, to climate emergency and other forms of collapse, in solidarity with indigenous peoples and ecosystems – new communities of resistance in an increasingly uncertain world. Some envision radically new forms of social protection – such as proposals which combine universal basic income within a locality with local currency creation[12] or Rich Bartlett's microsolidarities.[13]

Reclaiming and prefiguring community in these ways is inherently anti-capitalist; creating means of living and working together that curb market forces and regenerate the social fabric as resistance to neoliberalism. Not only that, they comprise relationships and practices capable of supporting not only post-capitalist futures but also a post-pandemic future. As we find our way on the route map out of lockdown and begin to envision the kinds of recovery needed to support communities in the coming years, perhaps this suggests there is an imperative that we do not limit our imagination nor overlook the power within communities. If we are to 'demand a new normal', we need to question recovery itself – that might otherwise reduce efforts to reforming a 'normal' that had long become numb to the grossest inequalities and rampant expressions of inhumanity.

Drawing these threads together, grounding degrowth in community could be understood as engaging in relationships, reclaiming community and recovering

practices and patterns that can support degrowth trajectories and a saner alternative to a dystopian capitalism behind cough screens. Community becomes a mechanism and a practice by which we might extract ourselves from the radical monopolies of the market and make new forms of community.

Community in this context is more than just a moral obligation for degrowth practitioners. Both are essential responses to the overconsumption driving multiple crises and gross inequality. Both are essential to a just recovery from the current pandemic and to ensuring protection from future crises, as recently demonstrated by community based responses to both the Covid-19 lockdown. Community understood in this way is both a means and an end of degrowth; both a degrowth practice and the horizon to reach for. In community we potentially are not simply making do with less but finding we have more. Community understood in this way has a renewed place to take up as we orientate to our post-pandemic world. ∎

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POWERING AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY

THERE ARE ADVANTAGES to living on an island one hour's irregular ferry connection from the mainland. It makes you resilient, adaptive, able to move from coping with little to maximising surplus nimbly and effectively. It also makes you very aware of your own fragility, of your reliance on others and theirs on you.

In these ways the people of Eigg are no different from other island-dwellers, people living in Scotland's most remote mainland communities, or on a knife edge of sustainable living in its towns and cities. The difference is that we own and are responsible for the land we live and work on. How we use, protect, enjoy or exploit Eigg's natural, cultural or social resources is largely up to us.

Eigg is community-owned; the responsibility for stewardship of the island and its future transferred into the hands of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust in June 1997. After centuries as the property of one person, the notion that Eigg could be owned and managed collectively was, to some, an unrealistic pipedream. But those behind the successful bid never doubted they would be the agents of change; that they would make the inequitable fair, the unviable thrive. Every June since, a weekend of ceilidh marks those 63 pioneering residents' vision, celebrating the belief that there can be another, a better, way.

As we enter the 21st year of the 21st century, our world reels in a perfect storm of economic, political, environmental and health turmoil. Whether you look out across a croft on Eigg, the back court of a tenement in Glasgow, or from a penthouse balcony in any one of our world's great cities, the impact of immense and irreversible damage appears starkly present. Whatever the roots of our collective disregard for the idea of limits, the reality for an ever-increasing number is that in this collective quest for more, we will all have to learn to live with less.

The roots of Eigg's community buyout came in the realisation the status quo - Eigg's sale from one private owner to another - came with no guarantee things would improve. After

Lucy Conway finds inspiration for a future of communal energy resources on a Scottish island. Illustrations by Marta Adamowicz.

years of feuding with Eigg's residents, the sale by Keith Schellenberg to a mysterious artist in 1995 was reportedly agreed with a signature scrawled on a dinner napkin. Maruma proved to be no more responsible a custodian, losing Eigg to the bank after defaulting on a loan.

There's a liberating energy in a collective belief you can make something better. With the wind of the Assynt Crofters success in their sails, the Eiggach believed they could manage Eigg better than those under whose tenure they'd seen the island decline. Better for people, for the land, and for the future of Eigg. A community bid was placed and won.

In the first months of community ownership, the residents of Eigg began planning their future. Their ambitions were comparatively modest; security of tenure for homes and businesses, a shop and tearoom, more jobs, more people, and electricity. Years of research, planning and then raising £1.6m finally saw community-owned Eigg Electric switched on in 2008. The days of noisy diesel-powered generators, providing expensive and intermittent power were over.

Powered by renewable energy from wind, water and the sun, the newly laid Eigg grid was not connected to mainland Scotland. All power used on Eigg had to be made on Eigg. As with the National Grid, Eigg Electric's generation limits were finite, albeit a tiny fraction of the limits of its mainland neighbour. Unlike customers of the National Grid however, everyone on Eigg knew exactly where and how their power was being generated. Four community-owned wind turbines, one large and two small hydro generators, and an array of solar photovoltaics (PV) located at different

points around the island. Residents knew that when the wind blew, the sun shone or the heavens opened, one or more of these was generating the electricity they were using.

To ensure everyone had enough, a limit of using up to 5kW at any one time was set for homes, 10kW for businesses. On the mainland, the single phase domestic limit is 23kW, sufficient for a house with 5 bedrooms, one electric shower and no significant loads. On Eigg, 5kW means you can have a kettle and washing machine on at the same time but have to wait until one is finished before putting on your immersion heater. For Eigg residents this means no hardship. Switching things off when they're not being used, buying low energy appliances and knowing which are energy hungry help keep homes below the 5kW limit.

Twelve years on, improved energy efficiency and innovation can make those five or 10kW go further. Eigg residents still live easily within their capped limit. New residents may not appreciate just how life-changing the move from time-consuming, expensive, loud and dirty domestic generators to power at the flick of a switch was, but they soon learn to unconsciously monitor their power use, calculating what's "on" and adapting to cooking or heating by non-electric means.

Recently Eigg's community has been thinking about its future, working in small groups and as a wider community to discuss what it looks and feels like. That future has more houses available for social rent, as well as to buy or build yourself. Warmer and better insulated homes with garden space to grow produce. Residents want jobs that are satisfying, that contribute to life on Eigg in some way and provide enough income to sustain them. Importantly, they also want to ensure their individual impact on Eigg's fragile ecology, and that of the wider world, is minimal. The community has drafted a Clean

"...the reality for an ever-increasing number is that in this collective quest for more, we will all have to learn to live with less."

Energy Transition Agenda that describes how individuals, businesses, the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust and its subsidiaries like Eigg Electric can act to reduce carbon and still thrive socially, economically and environmentally.
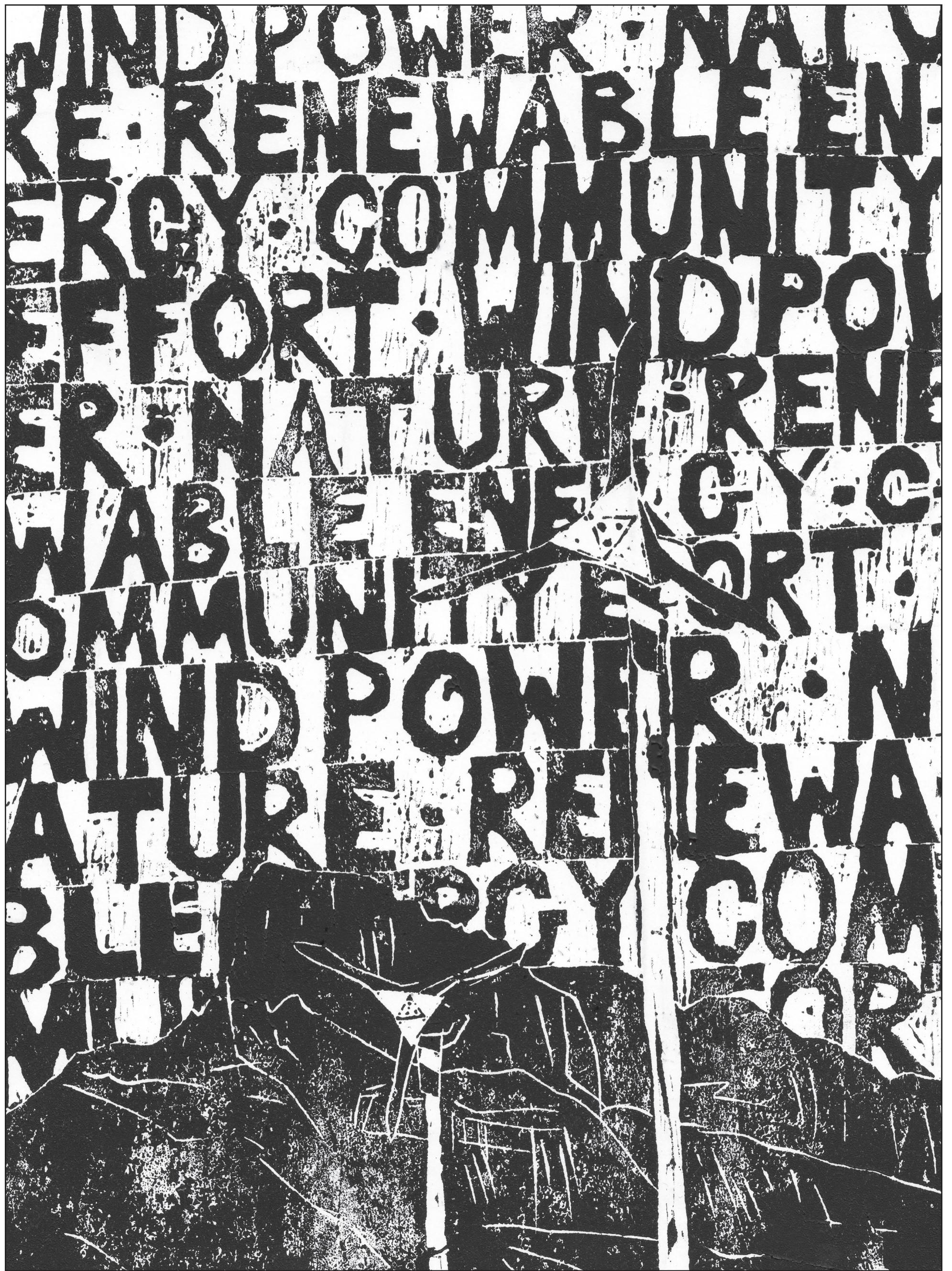
Growth is something that communities strive for, more people bring new life, new skills, new perspectives. Eigg's population has grown from 63 at the time of the buyout to 110 residents today. This significant but gradual growth has seen children of the buyout generation remain or return to the island as well as new families choosing Eigg to build their future. New homes and businesses have been created, more children fill the primary school, and there's a bigger pool of people to get involved and support the community. Tourism forms a large part of the island's economy, but so too do the creative industries, agriculture, health and education, forestry and, increasingly, food and drink. Growth is happening, energising and building confidence, creating opportunities and hope.

Since Eigg Electric was switched on in 2008, Eigg's population has grown by about 30%; visitors to the island have more than doubled to over 10,000 each year. The system was designed to accommodate a growth in new electric connections, however while individual domestic usage hasn't increased much over the years, the number of connections and a growth in business use now means the system is reaching its capacity. Eigg needs to increase its electricity generation in order to sustain and support the growth of Eigg's community and economy.

With twelve years of experience as an electricity supplier, a knowledgeable and engaged customer base and ready access to renewable generation resources, the potential for growing Eigg Electric is evident. However, to increase its infrastructure takes capital, and Eigg's small customer base and low usage do not generate enough income to build the necessary reserves or support loan finance.

Eigg's solution is in the island's ambition to decarbonise its heating, cooking and island transport use by 2030 and to replace these fuels with locally generated renewable electricity. Using conventional economic growth principles and getting existing customers to consume significantly more electricity to replace coal, LPG gas, heating oil, diesel or petrol, means the financing model becomes much more viable. The operational costs of providing three or more times ≫

the current amount of energy to a similarly sized customer base are not much higher than present, resulting in more surplus to invest in the island's future.

We are currently working on what that looks like: how much electricity we need to generate, options for diversifying our renewable generation sources and the impact of increased generation on existing distribution infrastructure. In the short term, we will be adding 120kW of solar PV in spring 2021. This will raise the total generation capacity of Eigg Electric from 184kW to just over 300kW. By 2025, we hope to have installed enough capacity to enable all households and businesses to plan their decarbonised journey, safe in the knowledge that there will be enough energy available when they come to need it.

For the moment, the 5kW and 10kW limits will remain as we work as a community to establish the scope and scale of the new system; what its usage limits should be; and its charges, financing and operation. The same process of research and detailed community consultation that was used to establish Eigg Electric at the outset will be used again. However, there is one important difference between then and now.

When the initial feasibility for Eigg Electric was done in the early 2000s, consumers' choice to move from independently owned generators to community distributed renewable power was an easy and vastly more cost-effective choice. Today, cleaner, greener consumer choices are available for cars, household appliances, heating systems etc, but for many on Eigg the choice to adopt them now is price prohibitive. Over time, these options will become cheaper and more readily

"Eigg never stands still, but this isn't growth or development as recognised by conventional economics. Eigg has not opted out; we still operate within that global system, but perhaps we view it differently."

available than their carbon-fuelled alternatives. Until then, supporting and enabling the community through this transition is crucial. Eigg Electric needs to work closely with individual households as they move from LPG to electric gas cookers, from diesel to electric vehicles. It needs to support homeowners and the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust to improve energy efficiency in their social housing, to instal more efficient wood burning stoves using locally grown and harvested wood fuel, electric storage heaters or air source heat pumps.

In common with the rest of Scotland and the UK, the task of expanding Eigg Electric to support the ambition of a net carbon zero society is immense. Working with other off-grid communities and with academia, government and development agencies will help; but as with the original scheme, the success will be the engagement of Eigg's community.

The shiny novelty of 24-hour clean, green power may have dimmed a little over time, but Eigg residents still have a strong -almost visceral- connection to their power company. Five people work as part of the maintenance team and another five sit as voluntary Directors on the Board of Eigg Electric, a trading subsidiary of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust. Everyone buys their electricity cards in advance, limits their use on days when renewable generation is low, and talks of silver linings on the wettest days when the hydro generates enough excess power to heat Eigg's community hall and churches for free.

In my 2013 *Bella Caledonia* article I suggested that perhaps Eigg Electric's most radical achievement was not its technical achievement, but how it worked socially and culturally. I asked whether a collective approach to generating and using electricity might see energy more fairly and equitably distributed to all. As Scotland moves towards its goal of net carbon zero society by 2045, the need to significantly increase access to renewable electricity grows. So too does the potential to distribute locally generated energy through local networks.

The Scottish Government's Scottish Energy Plan envisions a "flourishing, competitive local and national energy sector, delivering secure, affordable, clean energy for Scotland's households, communities and businesses". With its emphasis on renewable and low carbon solutions, consumer engagement, and innovative local energy systems, there are clear parallels with the ambitions of Eigg Electric and other off-grid

communities. The micro-grids of Eigg and the Small Isles, Knoydart, Foula and Fair Isle, and the Orkney smart-grid and ACCESS project on Mull all now offer a more pertinent and timely model to the rest of Scotland than their size suggests.

As I write this in October 2020, we have no real way of knowing where we are in the Covid19 timeline. Is the worst yet to come and what does worse mean? With some external support, effective planning and a collective agreement to protect everyone in our community - especially our most vulnerable - Eigg has thus far remained positive and resilient throughout the pandemic. Highland Councillor Ben Thompson commented in Community Land Scotland's publication Built in Resilience, "The resilience planning and documentation that they were feeding back to us in the early stages of the pandemic was what you'd hope to get from a world-class NGO."

We recognise that the next twelve months, at least, are going to be very hard on Eigg. Tourism has been the mainstay of the island's economy. The last time it produced any significant income was the autumn of 2019. The next time might be the summer of 2021; an economic period that's been termed three winters. But those visitor-free months have given us the opportunity to expand on other aspects of Eigg's economy, to plan and implement the seeds of the future. That perceived island "vulnerability" manifests itself as pragmatic and empowered, independently minded as well as interdependently connected.

Since the buyout in 1997 the Eigg community have never shied away from big challenges. Aside from Eigg Electric, the community has also built a shop, tearoom, craft-shop and other community spaces, restored woodland, built and renovated houses. They created a high-speed community broadband company and built new homes and businesses supported with a love for wildlife, creativity, good food and of welcoming visitors to enjoy the island they're so proud of. Working with Lochaber Housing Association, Highland Council and NHS Highland, more social housing was created, the school renovated, a new roll on, roll off pier and a health centre for Eigg and the other Small Isles built.

Despite having a devastating effect on the island's economy, Covid-19 hasn't stopped the ambition and drive of the Eiggach. Our tree nursery has over 20,000 trees grown from island seed in order to create new woodland and replant

after 11 hectares of timber was harvested last year. The Trust's new wood fuel business continues to provide work and generate income, even if its visitor camping pods sit empty.

Two new houses for rent are planned and phase one of a £3m project to redevelop the original An Laimhrig building at the pier starts this autumn including a new toilet and shower block, improvements to the water supply and waste management. Phase two begins in 2021 with the expansion and improvement of the shop, tearoom, craft shop and adventure sports businesses, to provide much needed new community and visitor facilities. Covid-19 hasn't stopped islanders' own businesses either; Kildonan Bay Oysters are nearly ready for harvesting, Lost Map Records has a roster of nearly 30 artists releasing music, and the Isle of Eigg Brewery is about to launch a community share offer, making it Scotland's first community owned brewery with plans to invest 25% of its profits into island entrepreneurship.

Community land ownership is a responsibility, one that will last beyond our and our children's lifetimes. But that responsibility gives us and those who follow a collective right to determine how to deliver a better, more socially and economically just society while protecting the precious ecology of our extraordinary island.

Eigg never stands still, but this isn't growth or development as recognised by conventional economics. Eigg has not opted out; we still operate within that global system, but perhaps we view it differently. We're no paragons of virtue, but in the day to day of community land ownership, perhaps Eigg residents habitually have to work harder to ensure that community and environmental wellbeing is as important as individual or corporate wellbeing.

We don't really know; we don't have a formal metric to measure and compare this to other places. Our economics are for others more expert than I to comment upon. But in a recent community survey, 93% said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with Eigg as a place to live, 91% that they thought islanders pulled together to improve Eigg. Those figures, that exhilarating feeling that you're living somewhere you feel you can make a positive difference to, that sustains us. Helps retain the stamina and continuing belief of the buyout era that there can be another, better way. ∎

PATHWAYS TO A POST-CAPITALIST WORLD

Jason Hickel lays out a pathway to a different future from his new book *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. Illustration by Stewart Bremner.

We cannot save the world by playing by the rules. Because the rules have to be changed.
– Greta Thunberg

ONCE WE UNDERSTAND that we can flourish without growth, our horizons suddenly open up. It becomes possible to imagine a different kind of economy, and we're free to think more rationally about how to respond to the climate emergency. It's a bit like what happened during the Copernican Revolution. Early astronomers started from the assumption that the Earth sat at the centre of the universe, but this caused endless amounts of trouble: it meant that the movement of the other planets didn't make any sense. It created mathematical problems that were impossible to solve. When astronomers finally accepted that the Earth and the other planets revolve around the Sun, suddenly all the maths became *easier*. The same thing happens when we take growth away from the centre of the economy. The ecological crisis suddenly becomes much easier to solve.

Let's start with the most immediate challenge we face. If we want to reduce emissions fast enough to stay under 1.5°C (or even 2°C, but we should never countenance such a dangerous future) then we need to scale down total energy use. The less energy we use, the easier it is to achieve a rapid transition to renewables. Of course, low-income countries still need to increase their energy use in order to meet human needs. So it's high-income countries we need to focus on here; countries that exceed planetary boundaries and consume vastly more than they require.

This is not just about individual behavior

> *"Capitalism is a giant energy-sucking machine. In order to reduce energy use, we need to slow it all down. Slow down the mad pace of extraction, production and waste, and slow down the mad pace of our lives. This is what we mean by 'degrowth.'"*

change, like turning off the lights when you leave a room. Sure, this kind of thing is important (and obviously we need to switch to LED bulbs, improve home insulation and so on), but ultimately we need to change how the economy works. Think of all the energy that's needed to extract and produce and transport all the stuff the economy churns out each year. It takes energy to pull raw materials out of the earth, and to power the factories that turn them into finished products. It takes energy to package those products and send them around the world on trucks and trains and aeroplanes, to build warehouses for storage and retail outlets for sales, and to process all the waste when they're binned. Capitalism is a giant energy-sucking machine. In order to reduce energy use, we need to slow it all down. Slow down the mad pace of extraction, production and waste, and slow down the mad pace of our lives.

This is what we mean by 'degrowth'. Again, degrowth is not about reducing GDP. It is about reducing the material and energy throughput of the economy to bring it back into balance with the living world, while distributing income and resources more fairly, liberating people from needless work, and investing in the public goods that people need to thrive. It is the first step toward a more ecological civilisation. Of course, doing this may mean that GDP grows more slowly, or stops growing, or even declines. And if so, that's okay; because GDP isn't what matters. Under normal circumstances, this might cause a recession. But a recession is what happens when a growth-dependent economy stops growing: it's a disaster. Degrowth is completely different. It is about shifting to a different kind of economy altogether – an economy that doesn't need growth in the first place. An economy that's organised around human flourishing and ecological stability, rather than around the constant accumulation of capital.

THE EMERGENCY BRAKE

HIGH-INCOME NATIONS CONSUME on average 28 tons of material stuff per person per year. We need to bring that back down to sustainable levels. What's brilliant about focusing on materials is that it has a range of powerful benefits. Slowing down material use means taking pressure off ecosystems. It means less deforestation, less habitat destruction, less biodiversity collapse. And it means our economy will use less energy, thus enabling us to achieve a faster transition to renewables. It also means we will need fewer solar panels and wind turbines and batteries than would otherwise be the case, which means less pressure on the places (mostly

in the global South) where the materials for these things are extracted, and less pressure on the communities that live there.

In other words, degrowth – reducing material and energy use – is an ecologically coherent solution to a multi-faceted crisis. And the good news is that we can do this without any negative impact on human welfare. In fact, we can do it while *improving* people's lives. How is this possible? The key is to remember that capitalism is a system that's organised around exchange-value, not around use-value. Production is geared primarily toward accumulating profit rather than toward satisfying human needs. In fact, in a growth-oriented system, the goal is quite often to avoid satisfying human needs, and even to perpetuate need itself. Once we understand this, it becomes clear that there are huge chunks of the economy that are actively and intentionally wasteful, and which do not serve any recognisable human purpose.

STEP 1. END PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

NOWHERE IS THIS tendency clearer than when it comes to the practice of planned obsolescence. Companies desperate to increase sales seek to create products that are intended to break down and require replacement after a relatively short period of time. The practice was first developed in the 1920s, when lightbulb manufacturers, led by the US company General Electric, formed a cartel and plotted to shorten the lifespan of incandescent bulbs – from an average of about to 2,500 hours down to 1,000 or even less. It worked like a charm. Sales shot up and profits soared. The idea quickly caught on in other industries, and today planned obsolescence is a widespread feature of capitalist production.

Take household appliances, for example – things like refrigerators, washing machines, dishwashers and microwaves. Manufacturers admit that the average lifespan of these products has dropped to less than seven years. But when these products 'die' it's due not to system-wide failure, but rather to small electrical components that can easily be designed to last many years longer, at minimal cost. And yet to repair these parts is often prohibitively expensive, only marginally less than the cost of replacing the whole machine. Indeed, in many cases appliances are designed to lock mechanics out of the job altogether. People end up scrapping huge chunks of perfectly good metal and plastic every few years for no good reason at all.

The same is true of the technological devices we use every day. Anyone who has ever owned an Apple product knows this all too well. ≫

Apple's growth strategy seems to rely on a triple tactic: after a few years of use, devices become so slow as to be worthless; repairs are either impossible or prohibitively expensive; and advertising campaigns are designed to convince people that their products are obsolete anyhow. Apple is not the only one, of course. Tech companies sold a total of 13 billion smartphones between 2010 and 2019. Only about 3 billion of them are in use today. That means 10 billion smartphones have been discarded over the past decade. Add desktops, laptops and tablets and we're talking about mountains of needless e-waste – most of it generated by planned obsolescence. Every year, 150 million discarded computers are shipped to countries like Nigeria, where they end up in sprawling open-air dumps that leak mercury, arsenic and other toxic substances into the land.

It's not that the possibility for long-lasting, upgradable devices doesn't exist – it does – but its development is suppressed in favour of growth. Our biggest technology firms, which we celebrate as our greatest innovators, stifle the innovation we need because it runs *against the growth imperative*. And it's not just appliances and smartphones. It's everything. Nylon stockings that are designed to tear after a few wears, devices with new ports that render old dongles and chargers useless – everyone has stories about the absurdities of planned obsolescence. IKEA became a multi-billion-dollar empire in large part by inventing furniture that is effectively disposable. Whole swathes of Scandinavia's forests have been churned into cheap tables and shelving units that are designed for the dump.

There's a paradox here. We like to think of capitalism as a system that's built on rational efficiency, but in reality it is exactly the opposite. Planned obsolescence is a form of intentional *in*efficiency. The inefficiency is (bizarrely) rational in terms of maximising profits, but from the perspective of human need, and from the perspective of ecology, it is madness: madness in terms of the resources it wastes, and madness in terms of the needless energy it consumes. It is madness too in terms of human labour, when you consider the millions of hours that are poured into producing smartphones and washing machines and furniture simply to fill the void created, intentionally, by planned obsolescence. It's like shovelling ecosystems and human lives into a bottomless pit of demand. And the void will never be filled.

In a *genuinely* rational and efficient economy, companies like Apple would innovate to produce long-lasting, modular devices (like the Fairphone, for example), scale down their sales of new products, and maintain and upgrade existing stock wherever possible. But in a capitalist economy, this is not an option. Some might be tempted to blame individuals for buying too many smartphones or washing machines, but this misses the point. People become *victims* of this machine. Blaming individuals misdirects our attention away from the systemic causes.

How might we address these inefficiencies? One option is to introduce mandatory extended warranties on products. The technology already exists for appliances to last on average two to five times longer than they presently do, with

lifespans up to thirty-five years, at little additional cost. With simple legislation, we could require manufacturers to guarantee their products for the duration of maximum feasible lifespans. If Apple was held to a 10-year guarantee, watch how quickly they would redesign their products to be resilient and upgradeable.

We could also introduce a 'right to repair', making it illegal for companies to produce things that can't be repaired by ordinary users, or by independent mechanics, with affordable replacement parts. Laws along these lines are already being considered in a number of European parliaments. Another option would be to switch to a lease model for large appliances and devices, requiring manufacturers to assume full responsibility for all repairs, with modular upgrades to improve efficiency whenever possible.

Measures like these would ensure that products (not just appliances and computers but furniture and houses and cars) would last many times longer than they presently do. And the effects would be significant. If washing machines and smartphones lasted four times longer, we would consume 75% fewer of them. That's a big reduction of material throughput, without any negative impact on people's lives. In fact, if anything it would *improve* quality of life, as people wouldn't have to deal with the frustration and expense of constantly replacing their equipment.

STEP 2. CUT ADVERTISING

PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE IS only one of the strategies that growth-oriented firms use to speed up turnover. Advertising is another.

The advertising industry has seen wild changes over the past century. Up to the 1920s, consumption was a relatively perfunctory act: people just bought what they needed. Advertisements did little more than inform customers of the useful qualities of a product. But this system posed an obstacle to growth, because once people's needs were satisfied, purchases slowed down. Companies seeking a 'fix' – a way to surmount the limits of human need – found it in the new theories of advertising being developed at the time by Edward Bernays, the nephew of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Bernays pointed out that you can provoke people to consume far beyond their needs simply by manipulating their psychology. You can seed

"If washing machines and smartphones lasted four times longer, we would consume 75% fewer of them. That's a big reduction of material throughput, without any negative impact on people's lives. In fact, if anything it would improve quality of life."

anxiety in people's minds, and then present your product as a solution to that anxiety. Or you can sell things on the promise that they will provide social acceptance, or class distinction, or sexual prowess. This kind of advertising quickly became indispensable to American companies desperate to generate growing demand.

A survey conducted in the 1990s revealed that 90% of American CEOs believed it would be impossible to sell a new product without an advertising campaign; 85% admitted that advertising 'often' persuaded people to buy things they did not need; and 51% said that advertising persuaded people to buy things they didn't actually want. These are extraordinary figures. They reveal that advertising amounts to manipulation on an industrial scale. And in the age of the internet, it has become more powerful and insidious than even Bernays himself could have dreamed. Browser cookies, social media profiles and big data allow firms to present us with ads tailored not just to our personalities – our specific anxieties and insecurities – but even to our likely emotional state at any given time. Firms like Google and Facebook are worth more than companies like BP and Exxon, purely on the promise of advertising. We think of these companies as innovators, but the majority of their innovations appear to be focused on developing ever more sophisticated tools to get people to buy things.

It's a kind of psychological warfare. Just as the oil industry has turned to more aggressive ways of extracting reserves that are increasingly difficult to reach, so too advertisers are turning to more aggressive ways of getting at the last remaining milliseconds of our attention. They are fracking, as it were, for our minds. We are exposed to thousands of ads every day, and with every year that ticks by the ads become more insidious. It's an assault on our consciousness – the colonisation not only of our public spaces but also of our minds. And it works. Research reveals that advertising expenditures have a direct and highly significant impact on material consumption. The higher the spend, the higher the consumption. And right now the global advertising spend is rising fast: from $400 billion in 2010, to $560 billion in 2019, making it one of the biggest industries in the world.

Sometimes advertising unites with planned obsolescence in a toxic cocktail. Take the fashion industry, for example. Clothing retailers desperate to increase sales in an oversaturated market have turned to designing clothes that are *meant to be discarded* – cheap, flimsy garments that last only for a few wears, and are intended to 'go out of style' within months. Ads are deployed to convince people that the clothes they own are dull, outdated and inadequate (a tactic sometimes referred to as 'perceived obsolescence'). The average American today purchases five times as many garments each year as they did in 1980. In the UK, textile purchases surged by 37% in the four years from 2001 to 2005, as 'fast-fashion' techniques exploded into the mainstream. The industry's material use has skyrocketed to over 100 million tons per year, and energy, water and land use have soared right along with it.

If we take the American data as a standard, we can assume that regulations against fast fashion

alone could in theory cut textile throughput by up to 80%, without compromising people's access to the clothes they need.

There are many ways to curb the power of advertising. We can introduce quotas to reduce total ad expenditure. We can legislate against the use of psychologically manipulative techniques. And we can liberate public spaces from ads – both offline and online – where people don't have a choice about what they see. São Paulo, a city of 20 million people, has already done this in key parts of the city. Paris has made moves in this direction too, reducing outdoor ads and even banning them outright in the vicinity of schools. The results? Happier people: people who feel more secure about themselves and more content with their lives. Cutting ads has a direct positive impact on people's wellbeing. In addition to slowing down needless consumption, these measures would also free our minds – so we can follow our thoughts, our imaginations, our creativity without being constantly interrupted. And we can fill those spaces instead with art and poetry, or with messages that build community and affirm intrinsic values.

Some economists worry that limiting advertising would undermine market efficiency. Ads help people make rational decisions about what to buy, they say. But this claim doesn't hold water. In reality, most advertising does exactly the opposite: it is designed to manipulate people into making *irrational* decisions. And let's face it: in the age of the internet, people don't actually need ads in order to find and evaluate products. A simple search is enough to do the trick. The internet has rendered advertising obsolete (ironically, for a place that has become filled with ads), and we should embrace this fact.

STEP 3. SHIFT FROM OWNERSHIP TO USERSHIP

THERE IS ANOTHER inefficiency that's built into capitalism. A lot of the stuff we consume is necessary but rarely used. Pieces of equipment like lawnmowers and power tools are used perhaps once a month, for maybe an hour or two at most, and for the rest of the year lie idle. Manufacturers want everyone to own a garage full of things that can otherwise quite easily be shared, but a more rational approach would be to establish neighbourhood workshops where equipment can be stored and used on an as-need basis. Some communities are already doing this, maintaining shared equipment with a neighbourhood fund. Projects like these can be scaled up by city governments, and enabled by apps for easy access. Shifting from ownership to 'usership' can have a big impact on material throughput. Sharing a single piece of equipment among ten households means cutting demand for that product by a factor of ten, while saving people time and money in the process.

This is particularly true of cars. We know we need to switch to electric cars, but ultimately we also need to dramatically scale down the total number of cars. The most powerful intervention by far is to invest in affordable (or even free) public transportation, which is more efficient in terms of the materials and energy required to move people around. This is vital for any plan to get off fossil fuels. Bicycles are even better,

"Let's talk about what we want our economy to deliver. What industries are already big enough and shouldn't grow any larger? What industries could be usefully scaled down? What industries do we still need to expand?"

as many European cities are learning (as I write this, Milan is handing over 35 kilometres of streets to cyclists, in a bid to keep pollution low after their coronavirus lockdown). And for journeys that can't be made with either, we can develop publicly owned, app-based platforms for sharing cars between us – without the rentier intermediation that has made platforms like Uber and Airbnb so problematic.

STEP 4. END FOOD WASTE

HERE'S A FACT that never ceases to amaze me: up to 50% of all the food that's produced in the world – equivalent to 2 billion tonnes – ends up wasted each year. This happens across the supply chain. In high-income nations it's due to farms that discard vegetables that aren't cosmetically perfect, and supermarkets that use unnecessarily strict sell-by dates, aggressive advertising, bulk discounts and buy-one-get-one-free schemes. Households end up tossing away 30-50% of the food they purchase. In low-income nations it's due to poor transportation and storage infrastructure, which means food ends up rotting before it makes it to market.

Food waste represents an extraordinary ecological cost, in terms of energy, land, water and emissions. But it also represents a big opportunity. Ending food waste could in theory cut the scale of the agriculture industry in half, without any loss of access to the food we presently need. That would allow us to cut global emissions by up to 13%, while regenerating up to 2.4 billion hectares of land for wildlife habitat and carbon sequestration.

When it comes to degrowth, this is low-hanging fruit. Some countries are already taking steps in this direction. France and Italy have both recently passed laws preventing supermarkets from wasting food (they have to donate unsold food to charities instead). South Korea has banned food waste from landfills altogether, and requires households and restaurants to use special composting receptacles that charge fees by weight.

STEP 5. SCALE DOWN ECOLOGICALLY DESTRUCTIVE INDUSTRIES

ON TOP OF targeting intentional inefficiencies and waste, we also need to talk about scaling down specific industries that are ecologically destructive and socially less necessary. The fossil fuel industry is the most obvious example, but we can extend this logic to others.

Take the beef industry, for instance. Nearly 60% of global agricultural land is used for beef – either directly for cattle pasture or indirectly for growing feed. It's one of the most resource-inefficient foods on the planet, in terms of the land and energy it requires per calorie or nutrient. And the pressure to find land for pasture and feed is the single greatest driver of deforestation. As I write this, the Amazon rainforest is literally being burned for the sake of beef. Yet, far from being essential to human diets, beef accounts for only 2% of the calories humans consume. In most cases the industry could be radically scaled down without any loss to human welfare.

The gains would be astonishing. Switching from beef to non-ruminant meats or plant proteins like beans and pulses could liberate almost 11 million square miles of land – the size of the United States, Canada and China *combined*. This simple shift would allow us to return vast swathes of the planet to forest and wildlife habitat, creating new carbon sinks and cutting net emissions by up to 8 gigatons of carbon dioxide per year, according to the IPCC. That's around 20% of current annual emissions. Scientists say that degrowing the beef industry is among the most transformative policies we could implement, and is essential to avoiding dangerous climate change. A first step would be to end the subsidies high-income countries give to beef farmers. Researchers are also testing proposals for a tax on red meat, which they find would not only curtail emissions but deliver a wide range of public health benefits, while driving medical costs down.

The beef industry is just one example. There are many others we could consider. We could scale down the arms industry and the private jet industry. We could scale down the production of single-use plastics, disposable coffee cups, SUVs and McMansions (in the United States, house sizes have doubled since the 1970s). Instead of building new stadiums for the Olympics and the World Cup every few years we could reuse existing infrastructure. We know that to reach our climate goals we will need to scale down the commercial airline industry, starting with policies like a frequent flyer levy, ending routes that can be served by train, and getting rid of first-class and business-class cabins, which have the highest CO2 per passenger mile. And we must shift from an economy based on energy-intensive long-distance supply chains to one where production happens closer to home.

We need to have an open, democratic conversation about this. Rather than assuming that all sectors must grow, forever, regardless of whether or not we actually need them, let's talk about what we want our economy to deliver. What industries are already big enough and shouldn't grow any larger? What industries could be usefully scaled down? What industries do we still need to expand? We have never asked these questions. During the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, we all learned the difference between 'essential' industries and superfluous ones; it quickly became apparent which industries are organised around use-value, and which ones are mostly about exchange-value. We can build on those lessons.   ≫

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. My point here is to illustrate that we can accomplish significant reductions in material throughput without any negative impact on human welfare. And here's the powerful part. This approach would not only reduce the *flows* of material goods, it would also reduce the *stocks* that support those flows. Half of all the materials that we extract each year go to building up and maintaining material stocks: things like factories and machines and transport infrastructure. If we consume half as many products, we also need half as many factories and machines to produce them, half as many aeroplanes and trucks and ships to transport them, half as many warehouses and retail outlets to distribute them, half as many garbage trucks and waste disposal plants to process them when they're binned, and half as much energy to produce and maintain and operate all of that infrastructure. The efficiencies begin to multiply.

But we can't assume that these measures will automatically accomplish the reductions we need. Ultimately, governments need to roll out concrete targets for reducing material and energy use. Taxes alone won't be enough. Ecological economists insist that the only way to do it is with a hard limit: cap resource and energy use at existing levels and ratchet them down each year until you get back within planetary boundaries. This approach will rapidly change incentives across the economy, forcing companies and governments to be more rational, efficient and innovative.

The key is that this has to be done in a just and equitable way, to ensure that everyone has access to the resources and livelihoods they need to flourish, and so small businesses and underdog industries don't get squeezed out by bigger players. This can be done with a cap, fee and dividend system: charge industries a progressively rising fee for resource and energy use, and distribute the yields as an equal dividend to all citizens. The Yellow Vests movement that erupted in France in 2018 rightly rejected the government's attempts to balance environmental goals on the backs of the working class and poor. Injustice cannot solve a problem that has been caused by injustice in the first place. We need to take the opposite approach.

BUT WHAT ABOUT JOBS?

NOW, HERE'S WHERE things get tricky. The policies I've suggested above are likely to reduce total industrial production. This might be okay from the perspective of human needs (none of us would be worse off if our smartphones lasted twice as long), but it does leave us with a difficult question. As products last longer, as we shift to sharing things, and as we slash food waste and scale down fast fashion, employment in these industries will decline and jobs will disappear across the supply chains. In other words, as our economy becomes more rational and efficient, it will require less labour.

From one perspective, this is fantastic news. It means that fewer lives will be wasted in needless jobs, producing and selling things that society doesn't actually require. It means liberating people to spend their time and energy on other things. But from the perspective of the individual workers who will be laid off from these jobs, it is a disaster.

"Some critics have claimed that degrowth is nothing more than a new version of austerity. But in fact exactly the opposite is true. Austerity calls for scarcity in order to generate more growth. Degrowth calls for abundance in order to render growth unnecessary."

And governments will find themselves struggling to cope with unemployment.

This might seem like an impossible bind; and indeed it's one reason why politicians consider degrowth to be so unthinkable. But there's a way out. As we shed unnecessary jobs we can shorten the working week, going from forty-seven hours (the average in the United States) down to thirty or perhaps even twenty hours, distributing necessary labour more evenly among the working population and maintaining full employment. We can facilitate this process by introducing a job guarantee (a policy that happens to be resoundingly popular), and roll out retraining programmes so that people laid off from shrinking industries can transition easily to others (renewable energy, public services, maintenance, etc.). This approach would allow everyone to benefit from the time that's liberated by reducing material throughput. It's an essential part of any degrowth strategy.

The exciting part is that reducing working hours has a substantial positive impact on people's wellbeing. This effect has been demonstrated over and over again, and the results are striking. Studies in the US have found that people who work shorter hours are happier than those who work longer hours, even when controlling for income. When France downshifted to the thirty-five-hour week, workers reported that their quality of life improved. An experiment in Sweden showed that employees who reduced their working time to thirty hours reported improved life satisfaction and better health outcomes. Data also shows that shorter hours leave people feeling more satisfied with their jobs, boosting morale and happiness. And – perhaps best of all – shorter hours are associated with greater gender equality, both in the workplace and at home.

Some critics worry that if you give people more time off they'll spend it on energy-intensive leisure activities, like taking long haul flights for holidays. But the evidence shows exactly the opposite. It is those with less leisure time who tend to consume more intensively: they rely on high-speed travel, meal deliveries, impulsive purchases, retail therapy, and so on. A study of French households found that longer working hours are directly associated with higher

consumption of environmentally intensive goods, even when correcting for income. By contrast, when people are given time off they tend to gravitate towards lower-impact activities: exercise, volunteering, learning, and socialising with friends and family.

These effects play out across whole countries. For instance, researchers have found that if the United States were to reduce its working hours to the levels of Western Europe, its energy consumption would decline by a staggering 20%. Shortening the working week is one of the most immediately impactful climate policies available to us.

But perhaps the most important part about shortening the working week is that it frees people to spend more time *caring* – be it nursing a sick relative, playing with children, or helping regenerate a woodland. This essential reproductive work (most of which is normally done by women) is totally devalued under capitalism; it is externalised, unpaid, invisible and unrepresented in GDP figures. Degrowth will free us to reallocate labour to what really matters – to things that have real use-value. Care contributes directly to social and ecological wellbeing, and caring has been shown to be more powerful than material consumption when it comes to improving people's sense of happiness and meaning, vastly outstripping the dopamine hit we might get from a shopping binge.

The benefits of a shorter working week keep multiplying. One group of scientists summed up the evidence like this: 'Overall, the existing research suggests that working time reduction potentially offers a triple dividend to society: reduced unemployment, increased quality of life, and reduced environmental pressures.' Transitioning to a shorter working week is key to building a humane, ecological economy.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW about this idea. In fact, it's not even particularly radical. In 1930, the British economist John Maynard Keynes wrote an essay titled 'Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren'. He predicted that by the year 2030 technological innovation and improvements in labour productivity would free people to work only fifteen hours a week. Keynes turned out to be correct about productivity gains, but his prophecy about working hours never came true. Why not? Because gains in labour productivity have been appropriated by capital. Instead of shortening the working week and raising wages, companies have pocketed the extra profits and required employees to keep working just as much as before. In other words, productivity gains have been used not to liberate humans from work but rather to fuel constant growth.

In this sense, capitalism betrays the very Enlightenment values it claims to advance. We normally think of capitalism as organised around the principles of freedom and human liberation – that's the ideology it sells us. And yet while capitalism has produced the technological capacity to provide for everyone's needs many times over, and to liberate people from unnecessary labour, it deploys that technology instead to create new 'needs' and to endlessly expand the treadmill of production and consumption. The promise of true freedom is perpetually deferred.

REDUCE INEQUALITY

AS WE SHORTEN the working week, we need to ensure that wages remain adequate for people to live well. Some of this will be automatic, as a shorter working week and a job guarantee would strengthen the bargaining power of labour. But we can also introduce a living wage policy that's pegged to the week or month, rather than to the hour. In a degrowth scenario, this means shifting income from capital back to labour, reversing the appropriation of productivity gains that has happened since Keynes penned his essay in 1930. A shorter working week would be funded, in other words, by reducing inequality.

There's plenty of room for this. In the UK, labour's share of national income has declined from 75% in the 1970s down to only 65% today. In the United States it's down to 60%. Hourly wages could be raised quite a lot by reversing these losses. There's plenty of room for this within companies too. CEO compensation has grown to dizzying heights in recent decades, with some executives capturing as much as $100 million per year. And the gap between CEO salaries and the wages of average workers has exploded. In 1965, CEOs earned about twenty times more than the average worker. Today they earn on average 300 times more. And in some companies the gap is even more extreme. In 2017, Steve Easterbrook, the CEO of McDonald's, earned $21.7 million while the median full-time McDonald's worker earned $7,017. That's a ratio of 3,100 to one. In other words, the average McDonald's employee would have to work 3,100 years – every day from the advent of ancient Greece until now – to earn what Steve Easterbrook received in his annual pay cheque.

One approach would be to introduce a cap on wage ratios: a 'maximum wage' policy. Sam Pizzigati, an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, argues that we should cap the after-tax wage ratio at 10 to 1. CEOs would immediately seek to raise wages as high as they can reasonably go. It's an elegant solution, and it's not unheard of. Mondragon, a huge workers' co-operative in Spain, has rules stating that executive salaries cannot be more than six times higher than the lowest-paid employee in the same enterprise. Better yet, we could do it on a national scale, by saying that incomes higher than a given multiple of the national minimum wage would face a 100% tax. Imagine how quickly the income distribution would change.

But it's not just income inequality that's a problem – it's *wealth* inequality too. In the United States, for instance, the richest 1% have nearly 40% of the nation's wealth. The bottom 50% have almost nothing: only 0.4%. On a global level the disparities are even worse: the richest 1% have nearly 50% of the world's wealth. The problem with this kind of inequality is that the rich become extractive rentiers. As they accumulate money and property far beyond what they could ever use, they rent it out (be it residential or commercial properties, patent licences, loans, whatever). And because they have a monopoly on these things, everyone else is forced to pay them rents and debts. This is called 'passive income', because it accrues automatically to people who hold capital without any labour on their part.

But from the perspective of everyone else it is anything but passive: people have to scramble to work and earn above and beyond what they would otherwise need, simply in order to pay rents and debts to the rich. It is like modern-day serfdom. And just like serfdom, it has serious implications for our living world. Serfdom was an ecological disaster because lords forced peasants to extract more from the land than they otherwise needed – all in order to pay tribute. This led to a progressive degradation of forests and soils.

So it goes today: we are made to plunder the Earth simply to pay tribute to millionaires and billionaires.

One way to solve this problem is with a wealth tax (or a solidarity tax, perhaps). The economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman have proposed a 10% annual marginal tax on wealth holdings over $1 billion. This would push the richest to sell some of their assets, thus distributing wealth more fairly. But in an era of ecological crisis, we must be more ambitious than this. After all, nobody 'deserves' this kind of wealth. It's not earned, it's extracted: from underpaid workers, from cheap nature, from rent-seeking, from political capture and so on. Extreme wealth has a corrosive effect on our society, on our political system, and on the living world. We should have a democratic conversation about this: at what point does hoarding become destructive and unacceptable? $100 million? $10 million? $5 million?

Reducing inequality is a powerful way to reduce ecological pressure. It cuts high-impact luxury consumption by the rich, and reduces competitive consumption across the rest of society. But it also removes pressures for unnecessary growth. The policies I've proposed here would lead to a disaccumulation of capital. This would cut rent-seeking behaviour, and the rich would lose their power to force us to extract and produce more than we need. The economy would shift away from unnecessary exchange-value and more towards use-value. It would also reduce political capture and improve the quality of democracy; and democracy, as we will see later, has intrinsic ecological value.

"Ending planned obsolescence, capping resource use, shortening the working week, reducing inequality and expanding public goods - these are all essential steps to reducing energy demand and enabling a faster transition to renewables"

DECOMMODIFY PUBLIC GOODS AND EXPAND THE COMMONS

AS WE SCALE down excess industrial production we can mitigate impact on livelihoods by distributing labour, income and wealth more fairly. But there's another crucial point to add. Remember, when it comes to human welfare, it's not income itself that matters; it's the welfare purchasing power of income that counts.

Let's take an example that's close to my own experience: housing in London. House prices are astronomically high, to the point where a normal two-bedroom flat may cost £2,000 a month to rent, or £600,000 to buy. These prices bear no relationship to the cost of the land, materials and labour involved in building a house. They're a consequence of policy decisions, such as the privatisation of public housing since 1980, and the low interest rates and quantitative easing that have pumped up asset prices since 2008. Meanwhile, wages in London have not kept pace – not even close. To cover the gap, ordinary Londoners have had to either work longer hours or take out loans (which represent a claim on their future labour), just to access a basic social good they used to be able to get for a fraction of the cost. In other words, as house prices have soared, the welfare purchasing power of Londoners' incomes has declined.

Now, imagine we drive rents down with permanent rent controls (a policy that 74% of British people happen to support). Prices would still be outrageously high, but suddenly Londoners would be able to work and earn less than they presently do *without any loss to their quality of life*. Indeed, they would *gain* in terms of extra time to spend with family, hanging out with friends, and doing things they love.

We could do the same thing with other goods that are essential to people's wellbeing. Healthcare and education are obvious ones. But why not the internet? Why not public transport? Why not basic quotas of energy and water? Researchers at the University of London have demonstrated that a full range of what they call Universal Basic Services could be publicly funded (with progressive taxation on wealth, land, carbon, etc.) at costs much lower than we presently spend, while guaranteeing everyone access to a decent, dignified life. On top of this, we could invest in public libraries, parks and sports grounds. Facilities like these become particularly important as we shorten the working week, so that people can spend their time in ways that enrich wellbeing with little environmental impact.

Decommodifying basic goods and expanding the commons allows us to improve the welfare purchasing power of incomes, so people can access the things they need to live well without needing ever-higher incomes in order to do so. This approach reverses the Lauderdale Paradox in order to generate growth ('private riches'), forcing people to work more simply to pay for access to resources they once enjoyed for free. As we create a post-growth economy we can flip this equation around: we can choose to restore commons, or create new commons, in order to render ever-rising incomes unnecessary. The commons become an antidote to the growth imperative. ≫

A THEORY OF RADICAL ABUNDANCE

THIS BRINGS US to the real heart of a post-capitalist economy. Ending planned obsolescence, capping resource use, shortening the working week, reducing inequality and expanding public goods – these are all essential steps to reducing energy demand and enabling a faster transition to renewables. But they are also more than that. They fundamentally alter the deep logic of capitalism.

The rise of capitalism depended on the creation of artificial scarcity. From the enclosure movement to colonisation, scarcity had to be *created* in order to get people to submit to low-wage labour, to pressure them to engage in competitive productivity, and to recruit them as mass consumers. Artificial scarcity served as the engine of capital accumulation. This same logic operates today. It's all around us. Take the labour market, for example. People feel the force of scarcity in the constant threat of unemployment. Workers must become ever more disciplined and productive at work or else lose their jobs to someone who will be more productive still – usually someone poorer or more desperate. But as productivity rises, workers get laid off – and governments have to scramble for ways to grow the economy in order to create new jobs. Workers themselves join in the chorus calling for growth, and push to elect politicians who promise it. But it doesn't have to be this way. We could deliver productivity gains back to workers in the form of higher wages and shorter hours. The constant threat of unemployment is due to an *artificial* scarcity of jobs.

We see the same thing happening when it comes to the distribution of income. The vast majority of new income from growth gets siphoned straight into the pockets of the rich, while wages stagnate and poverty persists. Politicians and economists call for more growth in order to solve these problems, and everyone who is moved by the tragedy of poverty lines up behind them. But it never works as they promise it will, because the yields of growth trickle down so slowly, if at all. Inequality perpetuates an artificial scarcity of income.

This plays out in the realm of consumption too. Inequality stimulates a sense of inadequacy. It makes people feel that they need to work longer hours to earn more income to buy unnecessary stuff, just so they can have a bit of dignity. In this sense, inequality creates an artificial scarcity of wellbeing. In fact, this effect is quite often wielded as an intentional strategy by economists and politicians. The British Prime Minister Boris Johnson once stated that 'inequality is essential for the spirit of envy' that keeps capitalism chugging along.

Planned obsolescence is another strategy of artificial scarcity. Retailers seek to create new needs by making products artificially short-lived, to keep the juggernaut of consumption from grinding to a halt. The same goes for advertising, which stimulates an artificial sense of lack; a sense that something is literally missing. Ads create the impression that we are not beautiful enough, or masculine enough, or stylish enough.

And then there's the artificial scarcity of time. The structural compulsion to work unnecessarily long hours leaves people with so little time that they have no choice but to pay firms to do things they would otherwise be able to do themselves: cook their food, clean their homes, play with their children, care for their elderly parents. Meanwhile, the stress of overwork creates needs for antidepressants, sleep aids, alcohol, dieticians, marital counselling, expensive holidays, and other products people would otherwise be less likely to require. To pay for these things, people need to work yet more to increase their incomes, driving a vicious cycle of unnecessary production and consumption.

We see artificial scarcity being imposed on our public goods too. Since the 1980s endless waves of privatisation have been unleashed all over the world, of education, healthcare, transport, libraries, parks, swimming pools, water, housing, even social security. Social goods everywhere are under attack for the sake of growth. The idea is that by making public goods scarce, people will have no choice but to purchase private alternatives. And in order to pay, they will have to work more, producing additional goods and services that must find a market, and thereby creating new pressures for additional consumption elsewhere in the system.

This logic reaches its height in the politics of austerity, which was rolled out across Europe in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Austerity (which is literally a synonym for scarcity) is a desperate attempt to restart the engines of growth by slashing public investment in social goods and welfare protections – everything from elderly heating allowances to unemployment benefits to public sector wages – chopping away at what remains of the commons so that people deemed too 'comfortable' or 'lazy' are placed once again under threat of hunger, and forced to increase their productivity if they want to survive. This logic is overt, just as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the government of British Prime Minister David Cameron, welfare cuts were conducted explicitly in order to get 'shirkers' to work harder and to be more productive ('workfare', they called it).

> *"Liberated from the pressures of artificial scarcity, and with basic needs met, the compulsion for people to compete for ever-increasing productivity would wither away. The economy would produce less as a result, yes - but it would also need less."*

Over and over again, it becomes clear that scarcity is *created*, intentionally, for the sake of growth. Just as during the enclosures in the 1500s, scarcity and growth emerge as two sides of the same coin.

THIS EXPOSES A remarkable illusion at the heart of capitalism. We normally think of capitalism as a system that generates so *much* (just consider the extraordinary cornucopia of stuff that's displayed on television and in shopfronts). But in reality it is a system that is organised around the constant production of scarcity. Capitalism transforms even the most spectacular gains in productivity and income not into abundance and human freedom, but into new forms of artificial scarcity. It must, or else it risks shutting down the engine of accumulation itself. In a growth-oriented system, the objective is not to satisfy human needs, but to *avoid* satisfying human needs. It is irrational and ecologically violent.

Once we grasp how this works, solutions rush into view. If scarcity is created for the sake of growth, then by reversing artificial scarcities we can render growth unnecessary. By decommodifying public goods, expanding the commons, shortening the working week and reducing inequality, we can enable people to access the goods that they need to live well without requiring additional growth in order to do so. People would be able to work less without any loss to their wellbeing, thus producing less unnecessary stuff and generating less pressure for unnecessary consumption elsewhere. And with our extra free time we would no longer have to engage in the patterns of consumption that are necessitated by time scarcity.

Liberated from the pressures of artificial scarcity, and with basic needs met, the compulsion for people to compete for ever-increasing productivity would wither away. The economy would produce less as a result, yes – but it would also *need* less. It would be smaller and yet nonetheless much more abundant. In such an economy private riches (or GDP) may shrink, reducing the incomes of corporations and the elite, but public wealth would increase, improving the lives of everyone else. Exchange-value might go down, but use-value will go up. Suddenly a new paradox emerges: abundance is revealed to be the antidote to growth. In fact, it neutralises the growth imperative itself, enabling us to slow down the juggernaut and release the living world from its grip. As Giorgos Kallis has pointed out, 'capitalism cannot operate under conditions of abundance'.

Some critics have claimed that degrowth is nothing more than a new version of austerity. But in fact exactly the opposite is true. Austerity calls for scarcity in order to generate more growth. Degrowth calls for abundance *in order to render growth unnecessary*. If we are to avert climate breakdown, the environmentalism of the twenty-first century must articulate a new demand: a demand for radical abundance. ∎
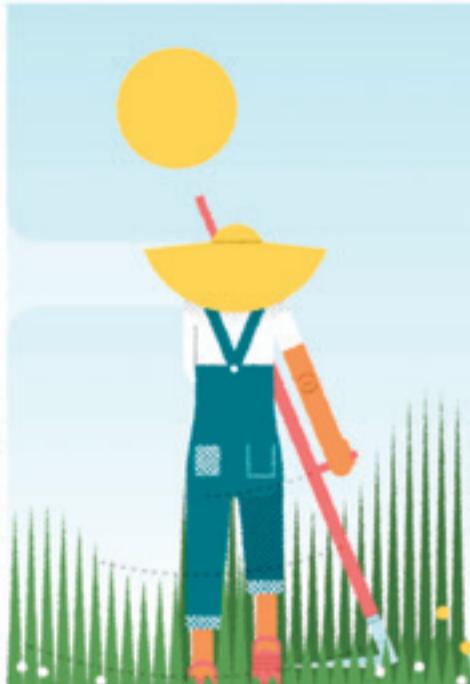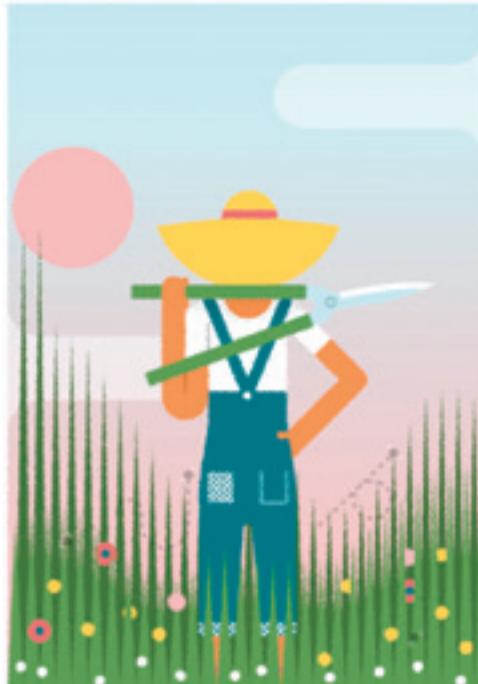
Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World is available now from Penguin Books.

METICULOUS THE GARDENER

by Tawona Ganyamatopé Sitholé

Illustration by Andy Arthur

that plant is a weed

meticulous the gardener
decides with no hesitation
growing where it shouldn't
so of kukosha
having none
so here come
necessary tools for necessary
hacking
hacking
digging
digging
that plant
of a thriving population
born of wind pollination
grounded such thing
earthed by totem being
a weed for weeding
and to do it properly
have to pull from the roots
and that's the land cleared

this plant is a plant

meticulous the gardener
knows with no investigation
growing there it should
and of kukosha
having tonnes
so here come
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tending
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this plant
of promising signs
born of meticulous design
founded such thing
birthed by human being
a plant for planting
and to do it properly
have to pool from the youth
and that's the land developed

this plant that is rooted not in soil
this plant that stems not from seed
this plant that branches not for light
this seedling that is not a sibling
of scattered fellow earthlings

although raw materials will be ripening as it grows
    so is this then what develop meant

this plant that does not dance in the wind
this plant that does not drink in the rain
this plant that does not eat in the sun
this plant that does not
catch brushstrokes of the seasons

although raw materials will be ripening as it grows
    so is this then what develop meant

this plant that is not
a free and open source
no nourish flourish lively lush
just fizzy dizzy busy buzz
of worker drones
striving in dependence of this growth
expansionextension
extensionexpansion
expansionextension
extensionexpansion
playing on repeat
like songs
    mighty mighty songs
    of revolution
    with a dreamy melody
    sung from lips not from heart
by growth wishers shedding skin
for eeky strangers within
haplessly knocking shins
in a graceless jig
going
villainvictimvillainvictim
villainvictimvillainvictim
in this graceless jig

the day is done

meticulous the gardener
declares with no reservation
after an industrious time
a'counting ripe materials
and of kukosha
who can say
earth is earth
nature is nature
a plant is a plant
hmmm
a human being is something else
■

TRACES OF A VIABLE FUTURE

I N EACH ISSUE of LESS we will be speaking to people organising around principles of Degrowth as we seek out the trace elements of a new economy and a new society. For this issue we spoke to Alon Schwabe and Daniel Fernández Pascual from the Climavore project on Skye; to Chris Hellawell, founder of the Edinburgh Tool Library project; and Sophie Unwin, founder of the Remade Network.

Mike Small explores the glimpses of a future beyond endless consumption and acquisition, where thrift and restoration replace extraction and ownership.

LESS spoke first to Alon Schwabe and Daniel Fernández Pascual, asking them how the project works and how the original idea for Climavore came about.

CLIMAVORE started as a framework to explore how to eat as humans change climates. In supermarkets of the global North you see how the sense of seasons has vanished; you can find tomatoes, oranges or salmon pretty much all year round. In response to the climate emergency we started to question what are other seasons we could eat according to today? If we are going through human-made periods of drought, desertification, polluted oceans, etc., how would we adapt food production and consumption landscapes accordingly? CLIMAVORE proposes to respond to those conditions and reimagine food landscapes while divesting from polluting farming practices.

Can you tell us about the On Tidal Zones project on Skye?

The project was initiated around an Atlas Arts Commission in 2017, and has evolved into its own entity. It's a response to the environmental impact of salmon farms in Scotland. Through a framework thinking about regenerative aquaculture, it started as an underwater oyster table on the intertidal zone that appears and disappears with the tides. At high tide, it is home for oysters, mussels and seaweeds. At low tide, we have been using it as a dining table for humans to discuss alternative aquacultures for the Isle of Skye. For the past years we have been exploring how to divest away from intensive salmon farming and

transition into other regenerative approaches instead, focusing on filter feeders, and collaborating with residents, local restaurants and food establishments, as well as through pedagogical activities and CLIMAVORE apprenticeship programmes.

In our journal, we are exploring how we can live well within ecological limits in the different communities in Scotland we inhabit and engaging with practical real-world projects that embody some of the values of degrowth. One of the things that degrowth argues is that we have to break the cycle of endless extraction. The Tidal Zones project seems to embody that. It is restorative rather than extractive. Is that how you see it?

Certainly. Farmed salmon has grown to such a scale that is comparable to battery-chicken farms and cattle feedlots, it's just that we don't see what's happening underwater. The different initiatives, events, and collaborations with local small-scale producers and restaurants are aiming to transition

> *"We may need to critically challenge the idea of scaling up. In general, we believe that first we need to start unlearning many of the paradigms of the past decades that have caused such an environmental crisis."*

instead to local seaweeds and bivalves, ingredients that regenerate the water by breathing. They have been a key part of the Scottish diet for centuries, but have been slowly disconnected from people's cultural imagination in the past decades. They can nonetheless play a key role in living *with* the coast.

How does this scale up? It may be a paradox but we need to grow some 'sectors' and values and 'restorative food practices' is one of them.

Do we need to scale up? It's really a hard question that we think a lot about. Many of the problems of industrialised food have precisely come because of scaling up in the name of solving the world's hunger. We do need to address food sovereignty and security, but perhaps we also need to take a previous step and first rethink food distribution networks, farming inequalities, toxic runoff, intermediaries, speculation, price dumping, etc. In the same way that many people are thinking about degrowth, we may need to critically challenge the idea of scaling up. In general, we believe that first we need to start unlearning many of the paradigms of the past decades that have caused such an environmental crisis. There is a lot of work to be done, and perhaps it´s worth testing cooperative and small-scale models beforehand.

Food cultures are broken by capitalist production. Is this what you are witnessing in Scotland and does it differ from observations in other places?

The way mainstream food supply works today completely relies on intensive production and extractive systems, except for a minority of initiatives that are supporting more regenerative approaches. In that regard, if you look at salmon farming, you can quickly realise that it is a business completely taken over by a few global corporations

that replicate their operations in Scotland, Chile, Tasmania, Norway, and so on. The fact that the technology of open-net pens with highly automated feeding systems repeats itself all over the world, also brings a common struggle towards toxic runoff and depletion of wild counterpart species. So the moment we start identifying salmon farming as a global problem, then we will be able to address ecology at a planetary level and rethink food production in different terms.

On Tidal Zones, Skye.
Credit: Nick Middleton

WE SPOKE NEXT to Chris Hellawell from the Edinburgh Tool Library and asked him about the origins of the project.

The Edinburgh Tool Library works in the same way that a regular library does, but we lend out tools instead of books. We work on the principle that in sharing resources already in our community, we are reducing the need to buy (and therefore manufacture) more things. The result is a reduction in the carbon footprint of our community, the saving of money, and the saving of space. It also means that ETL has built up an inventory of tools that can be used for other projects too. In much the same way that we want to maximise the usefulness of an individual tool by sharing it amongst as many people as possible, we also recognise that we, as an organisation, are a useful tool for our community too. We have two fully kitted out workshops, and in there we teach skills to our membership, but also people receiving support from other charities, to break down barriers to inclusion. We also offer our resources (volunteers, equipment, space) to make things for other groups. We have in the past built outdoor seating for a community garden, made an outdoor classroom and mud kitchen for a primary school, and are currently refurbishing a vandalised pirate ship.

ETL is based on a very simple idea of access over excess, and is based on the tool library models you can find across North America. We brought it to the UK after I visited the Toronto Tool Library. And ever since, there has been a wonderful international collaboration between lots of fantastic organizations worldwide.

LESS is exploring how we can live well within ecological limits in the different communities in Scotland we inhabit and engaging with practical ≫

real-world projects that embody some of the values of degrowth. One of the things that degrowth argues is that we have to break the cycle of endless consumption and production. The ETL model of sharing seems to mirror this. We don't all NEED to own a lawnmower or a drill or a chainsaw that we only use once a year. So tool-sharing seems to make sense and also build community and knowledge-sharing. Is that how you see it?

Basically, yes! I've been reading *The Economics of Arrival* by Katherine Trebeck and Jeremy Williams, and this is what we are saying – there needs to be a point where we have what we need and we stop striving for more 'stuff', a point where we have arrived at 'enough'. The tool library demonstrates that at least in terms of tools, the things we need are already in our community; it's just a case of people getting access to them – of getting them from a dusty shelf into someone's hand.

We have also demonstrated that many of the skills needed are also prevalent in our community, and ETL gives our volunteers and our wider community an opportunity to use those skills for the good of others. That might be a volunteer showing someone how to use a particular tool to take home and use themselves, or a group of volunteers coming together to build something for a local school.

Fundamentally, tool libraries are about maximising the potential of a hammer or saw, but they are also about maximising the potential of a community.

How does this scale up? It may be a paradox but we need to grow some 'sectors' and values and 'sharing' is one of them. Do you see it as a franchise so that you have continuity of values and knowledge – or can anyone / should anyone set up a tool library? Is the end goal a tool library in every city or every community?

It is already scaling up. We were the first in the UK five years ago, but there are now another 25+ in the UK, and we are doing monthly group seminars with groups looking to set up. Since the summer we have spoken to over 15 such projects. What we don't have is much capacity, and what we need is governmental support to set up a body to support these groups. The economic benefits are huge (we have shared over £1million worth of tools – 20,000 loans), and there should be tool and/or sharing library in every community.

Recently I've been reminded of 'the 3 Rs' of reduce, reuse and recycle. I think, like many, I learned that as a child, and have always subconsciously put them on a par with each other. But of course they're not. And I find it particularly jarring that environmental policy seems to push recycling over reduction and reuse, when the recycling sector is built upon the need for waste to be created in the first place. This is completely untenable, and the most resource efficient of the Rs is to reduce consumption in the first place. So yes – I think the sharing sector has huge potential, and is currently under-explored and under-funded. It goes against a capitalist economic model, but so does human existence on this planet. "Anyone who thinks it's possible to have infinite growth on a finite planet is either a madman or an economist." – Kenneth Boulding

We don't want to go down the franchise model; we want to develop a programme of support to communities to do it themselves. We know how to do tool libraries, but nobody knows a place as well as the people that live there, so every library should grow from the community. We just want to share what we have learned, and our mistakes and our triumphs, and work with people to make something that fits them. There are over 300 sharing libraries worldwide, and no two are alike, so there is a model out there that will suit various circumstances. It might be something that resembles a DIY store, or it might be a cupboard in

"There needs to be a point where we have what we need and we stop striving for more 'stuff', a point where we have arrived at 'enough'. The tool library demonstrates that at least in terms of tools, the things we need are already in our community; it's just a case of people getting access to them"

the village shop, but both are equally valid, and incredibly important to those people that are part of it.

Do you see the ETL as challenging the idea of ownership? as in usufruct[1] – a system in which a person uses the real property of another?
I see it more as challenging the need for ownership in the first place. I think it aligns the move towards long term rental of things like white goods and household appliances. If manufacturers want to still make a profit, they will need to make things that last, and require less repair, but also that are more modular, and upgradeable and repairable. It also fits with the idea of the repair manifesto[2] – that you don't own something if you can't repair it yourself. If you need to go into the Apple store to fix your phone, you are still at their mercy, and they still own a part of the phone. Something that is well made and modular should be easy to fix, or to replace the broken module, and so the cost

Notes
[1] *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usufruct*
[2] *ifixit.com/Manifest*

of repair to the manufacturer or the company you are paying your rent to, is lower. The current situation of built in obsolescence and replacing something as soon as any part of it breaks is completely unsustainable. Until manufacturers are responsible for the lifetime footprint of their product, ETL and other organisations like us are necessary to take up their slack.

You've been pivotal in developing social enterprise in Scotland. How can we best steer social enterprise towards environmental justice and viable responses to climate breakdown? How do you see this developing?

It's stating the obvious, but covid-19 has given us all a sudden jolt, and that goes across sectors and industries, and affects us all. There is, however, potential for some good to come out of an awful situation. We have all witnessed a variety of responses from businesses to the crisis, some bad, and some good. Some looking to profiteer, and some looking to support their communities. And in this way, I think, whether or not businesses categorise themselves as social enterprises, the average person on the street has seen that businesses can do good. So I think the idea of a socially minded business is one that we have all experienced. I think that could be a huge gambit to social enterprise in general, and I am hopeful that at the very least, the general public will see that the shops and services in their area form part of their social fabric, and equally that these businesses begin to see themselves as part of the community, and start to take steps to support, and preserve and nurture that community. In that process, I am hopeful that these businesses understand the opportunities that arise from supporting their communities and more widely, environmentalism, and that there is a move towards social enterprise amongst existing organisations, not just new start ups.

WE SPOKE NEXT to Sophie Unwin, the founder of the Remade Network in Glasgow.

Can you tell us about how the project works and how the original idea came about?

The Remade Network model is about creating community centres and other social enterprises where people can learn how to fix everyday household objects rather than buying new, with workshops in furniture repair, textiles mending, and appointments in how to fix your tech. There are various income streams, including selling refurbished computers and furniture – like a kind of alternative department store. The model is different in different places, from Brixton, where I started work, to Edinburgh, where I developed the business from £60 to £240,000 and 80% traded income, and to Glasgow, where we have established a neighbourhood repair service 'the Repair Stop' in Govanhill within the Govanhill Baths Community Trust, which offers affordable repairs in electronics, electrical goods and textiles.

The original idea, like all ideas, probably came about through various things, conversations and experiences – I had the chance to live in a small village in Eastern Nepal over 25 years ago. In a year there, living in a household of six, we created less than a dustbin of rubbish. We reused all our containers, refilled our sacks of rice and pulses, bought vegetables unpacked from the local market, and got milk straight from our neighbour's cow. When anything broke, it was cheaper to fix than buy new. That experience opened my eyes to the reality behind the myths of economic development – I learned more than I could teach, especially given that as a privileged volunteer teacher the syllabus I was using was a legacy of the Raj – having to teach short stories by Tolstoy and Edgar Allen Poe to rural teenagers who needed to learn conversational English to get jobs.

I've always been interested in meaningful work, especially seeing my Dad really hating his job as a banker, and sadly, dying young before he had the chance to pursue many of his dreams. Coming back from Nepal to Brixton, which was previously my home, I felt it was more important to question our western model of growth than import it to other countries! And in 2008, at the time of the economic crash, I was part of my local Transition Town group. I was frustrated to see people like my neighbour, an elderly Afro-Caribbean immigrant, struggling to make an income doing bike repairs in his garden. The town hall held a launch of the Brixton Pound, and at that launch invited people to share their ideas for things that could help the community. I went on stage, unplanned, and said, 'Why don't we create a centre where our elderly immigrants can teach our unemployed bankers?' Everyone cheered, and I struck up a conversation with a local woman called Hannah Lewis who wanted to create a project based on the local redesign and reuse of products. We joined forces, and the project was born, first in a pop-up space within Brixton Market, and then in a permanent space created by redeveloping a block of disused garages.

LESS is exploring how we can live well within ecological limits in the different communities in Scotland we inhabit and engaging with practical real-world projects that embody some of the values of degrowth. One of the things that degrowth argues is that we have to break the cycle of endless consumption and production. The Remade model of repairing seems to mirror this. We don't all NEED to replace things that could be fixed. Is that how you see it?

Yes absolutely – I think that it's about seeing the world differently. Moving away from a mindset of constant upgrades to understanding the value of keeping things longer, buying things that last in the first place. None of this is new – especially in rural communities – but I think there's a growing awareness that the old practices of mending and making do and the ones that need to come full circle.

This is both a perspective and a values shift and I think it is a part of a shift from an individualist society to one which is about more cooperative structures which value the common good. That's certainly what I experienced in rural Nepal – a higher quality of life than in the London suburbs where I spent my teenage years. Our mindless growth culture is creating some very toxic outcomes and is spiralling out of control. Repair is a way of slowing down, sharing, and bringing people together, revaluing our belongings and understanding how much our everyday objects take care of us, if we take care of them. It's also something we're going to need more and more as we face a likely recession – a way of saving money.

There's a secondary point – which is that many products are designed to break down in the first place so people buy more of them. So for me the campaigning element of these projects goes hand in hand with the practical project – calling for goods to be built to last and supporting the wider Right to Repair movement.

I think that when people understand that growth is a lie, they wake up to endless new possibilities of living a more self-reliant and authentically connected life.

How do we – or should we "scale this up" (I'm aware I'm regurgitating jargon)? It may be a paradox but we need to grow some 'sectors' and values and 'remaking' is one of them. Do you see it as a franchise so that you have continuity of values and knowledge – or can anyone / should anyone set up a Remade project?

I have set up Remade Network as a network to work collaboratively with other community groups. There's been a lot of learning so far and I hope that as I continue to develop the model others will be able to share their learning too.

> *"I think that it's about seeing the world differently. Moving away from a mindset of constant upgrades to understanding the value of keeping things longer, buying things that last in the first place."*

Also, I see this model being just as important for tackling inequality as tackling climate change. Others may set up franchises but I believe that heavily branded model is in danger of perpetuating the problems of concentrating wealth, and I'm doubtful of its impact – essentially being a service that benefits middle-class audiences rather than creating a genuinely redistributive model about salvaging and repurposing resources. In Glasgow I'm working very collaboratively with Repair Café Glasgow, Glasgow Tool Library, Govanhill Baths Community Trust and Glasgow City Council. We share the values around social justice as well as environmental change, and these collaborations allow further sharing of resources and ideas.

You've been a huge success in developing social enterprise in Scotland. How can we best steer social enterprise towards environmental justice and viable responses to climate breakdown? How do you see this developing?

Thank you! That's a big question. I think that social enterprise is understood differently by many people. For me the main question is one of impact and change – we need hugely radical change at the moment if we're to have a hope of navigating the massive political, ecological and social challenges ahead.

For some people social enterprise is a new way of doing business; for others it's about business that has some social impact. I think we need to think of social enterprise as a change agent, not just a subset of business – in other words, led by the values and impact, and making money as a means and not an end. I'm not sure this is answering the question, but in Scotland I would love to see people who are the most affected by climate breakdown having greater agency and power in steering some of the decisions in the policy landscape in social enterprise and beyond. ∎

For more information on these inspiring projects and people got to:
cooking-sections.com
edinburghtoollibrary.org.uk
remade.network

CULTURE BEYOND EXTRACTIVISM: WHAT MIGHT A POST-GROWTH CINEMA LOOK LIKE?

Churning endless bland commodified culture has no place in a postgrowth future argues Maria A Velez Serna. Illustration by Marta Adamowicz.

IN THIS ARTICLE, I argue against the growth-based model of the cultural industries, focusing on cinema and thinking towards alternative pathways for a post-growth creative sector in Scotland. In the months since I started writing it, many of the things I argued about have ground to a halt due the Covid-19 pandemic. Production projects have stalled, venues have closed, awards have been postponed and festivals moved online. As people's livelihoods hang in the balance, it needs to be said that this crisis is not a solution to the problems with the status quo. Indeed, its tendency is to reinforce the concentration of power, as the sector reacts defensively and closes down spaces for experimentation. Returning to this analysis while the situation remains very uncertain is a risky exercise, but I do it in the hope that, amongst the grief and the fear, there is also a critical desire for a different life in and out of this impasse.

Amongst the hardships that people have endured throughout the pandemic times, the closure of cinemas is amongst the least significant. That is, of course, unless you work in the film exhibition sector, in which case you are likely to be one of the millions of precarious workers who have found themselves unable to access furlough schemes or other forms of support. As screening venues closed their doors in March, film and TV production schedules also stopped, leaving their freelance crews unsure of when they may work again. Meanwhile, as sociability was curtailed in the interest of preventing contagion, the role of media in connecting people and offering some lightness has been keenly appreciated. Some audiences have enjoyed unprecedented access to films online and on broadcast, with filmmakers sharing their work for free, festivals emerging from all over the world, and even new work exploring experiences of lockdown using constraints as creative prompts. Streaming platforms saw an opportunity and seized it, with Netflix gaining twice as many subscribers as expected, and Disney+ moving in to capitalise on the childcare gap. Considering that 87% of Scottish households have internet access, but only about 13% of adults go to the cinema more than once a month, it would seem that this move online can be a democratising one. However, if this remains only an exercise in market expansion and capture by streaming platforms, there is little cause for celebrating the temporary collapse of the cinema business.

There is an imbalance between the social value ascribed to the arts in general and film in particular, and the precariousness of its survival in a recession. My attempt to see a different future through this fog seeks to imagine a just transition where such insecurity is not the norm for workers, without trying to salvage the many unsustainable aspects of their jobs. In order to think beyond this crisis and towards a post-growth film culture in Scotland, we need to centre the needs of people, communities, and the environment, rather than the profit of media corporations and their local retail outlets.

As an industrial product, cinema has long been subject to the expansionist logic of investment markets, financial or otherwise. Since the birth of Hollywood, the mainstream film production system has been an oligopoly, and it is now fully enmeshed in webs of corporate takeovers that span all branches of the media. Outside the US, the influence of this model has shaped local attempts to create an 'industry', whereby public money is used to subsidise infrastructure and appeal to investors. On the margins of these industrial dreams, cultural workers scrape a living from thoroughly insufficient public support, predicated on a model of the 'creative and cultural industries' tied to economic growth and competition. The current brake on this treadmill can help reveal the inequity of this approach.

As well as being economically unjust and culturally under-nourishing, our dominant media models are wasteful, polluting, and underpinned by colonialist and extractivist processes. In her book *The Cinematic Footprint*, Nadia Bozak argues that "cinema is intricately woven into industrial culture and the energy economy that sustains it". From the very beginning, the manufacture of raw film stock polluted groundwater, ate up large amounts of silver and camphor, and required millions of gallons of water every day. It would seem like today's digital cinema does away with those issues, until we consider the rare-earth minerals in screens and circuits, the batteries, and the server farms that run VFX graphics processing and streaming platforms. The problems have changed, but the extractivist and competitive underpinnings remain.

A film culture informed by climate justice and deep adaptation needs to take these impacts seriously. In what follows I make an argument for a reduce-reuse-recycle approach to the film industry, and a hopeful outline of what a post-growth film culture may look like.

REDUCE: AGAINST THE BLOCKBUSTER

THE FIRST PROBLEM of thinking about cinema in a post-growth Scotland is that it is not by any means obvious that it should exist. Purely on environmental grounds, even a mid-budget film causes CO_2 emissions comparable to the annual footprint of thousands of UK inhabitants, and sends tons of timber to landfill, so it is worth considering whether all of this is justifiable.

As with most spaces where a degrowth strategy is needed, distinctions soon emerge between a concentrated, resource-intensive layer at the top, and a much more organic ecosystem below. In the media world, there are the blockbusters and glossy serials produced by a small number of media corporations. These titles have an oversize impact in terms of budget, resource use, box office and cultural visibility. According to UNESCO statistics, in 2016 just over nine thousand feature films were released. Three-quarters of these came from six countries: India, China, United States, Japan, Korea and the UK. However, the US alone captures over 70% of the global box office, while a single company (Disney) distributed seven out of the ten top movies. A typical film from Marvel Studios, now owned by Disney, has a budget of 200 to 400 million dollars, which is at least ten times as much as the average UK or Korean film. This is then a global industry where the profits flow towards a handful of corporations.

This mode of production demands programmed obsolescence, as each new film has to be sold to larger audiences, or more affluent ones. As Maxwell and Miller argue, "[t]here is a structural ≫

> *"As well as being economically unjust and culturally undernourishing, our dominant media models are wasteful, polluting, and underpinned by colonialist and extractivist processes."*

INDUSTRIAL CULTURE
FAST FASHION · STAR
SYSTEM · GLAMOUR ·
BLOCKBUSTER · ECON
OMIC GROWTH · MAT
ERIAL CONSUMPSION
ANUFACTURED CI
NEMA · FINAN
INV
EST
MEN

homology between this disposable attitude to film production and forms of consumption oriented to fast fashion, fun, and a throwaway culture", where each fad must quickly make way for the next indistinguishable 'unprecedented' product. This high-stakes game is incompatible with the wellbeing of film workers and the reduction of environmental impact. While new voices and ideas may be incorporated every so often, overall the system manages risk by repeating itself, and hence reproducing its systemic racism, sexism, transphobia, and class-based gatekeeping.

There are strong movements for reform within this production model, from #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite activism to the inclusion of 'diversity riders' in studio contracts. Since the 1990s, several 'green' initiatives have emerged within media industries, seeking to stave off external regulation and win over public opinion through voluntary schemes, such as sustainability consultancy, carbon offsetting, improved recycling, rechargeable batteries, and reuse of props and sets. However, these schemes often have an overly narrow definition of environmental impact, and their attachment to profit as a main driver means that they end up being 'greenwashing' or branding exercises, even when the efforts of the workers on set are genuine.

Most blockbuster-style films simply cannot be made sustainably, no matter how much they spend on carbon credits. See, for example, Kevin B Lee's video essay on the making of *Transformers 4*, with its multiple transcontinental locations, its explosions and helicopter shots. Perhaps it would be unfair to expect a film about big trucks to go for net zero, but it is easy to see how the financial logic of transnational coproduction encourages wasteful shooting practices.

Many countries, Scotland included, have hitched their cultural policy wagon to this continent-hopping location shooting, offering scenic landscapes, skilled workforces and tax exemptions to lure producers. And yet, regardless of how many lochs, glens and castles you can put on a location guide, they will be subsumed into what Jennifer Kay calls a "simulationist aesthetic", with "fake trees made out of wood and artificial rain made with water". In that system, films shot in Scotland may have very little to show or say about it; their relationship to the landscape and

the people is an extractive one.

People use films to think and feel with, and sharing images, sounds and stories gives them ways to relate to one another, to themselves and to the world. These are things that we need for a good life. But the use of resources needs to be more proportionate and, above all, fairer. Greater diversity in casting and storylines has been applauded as the sign of change, but a just transition approach to film production would mean abandoning big studio cinema (whether mainstream or arthouse) in order to make space for the *minor*. This is the abundance of creativity, thought, observation and expression already thriving through collaboration rather than competition. I am thinking of indigenous cinema; films by trans and non-binary people, by neurodiverse and disabled people, by black people, and people of colour; radical political cinema, experimental films, long slow films, extremely short films; films of local interest or profoundly niche appeal; and all the intersections between categories, all the boundary-crossings that become possible across the margins when the centre is struck down.

A just transition would reject the premises of blockbuster cinema. It would advocate for slower, more collaborative, and resourceful creativity, giving films and filmmakers the time to find their voice and reach audiences at their own pace. This requires us to rethink the temporality of film circulation. The media corporations' hold on screens and profits is maintained through a stranglehold on the legal

People use films to think and feel with, and sharing images, sounds and stories gives them ways to relate to one another, to themselves and to the world. These are the things we need for a good life. But the use of resources needs to be more proportionate and, above all, fairer.

distribution of new titles, which makes it comparatively difficult for independent, low-budget films from around the world to reach audiences. The suspension of filming due to Covid-19, and the closure of cinemas worldwide, has wreaked havoc with the film release schedule, which is organised around the summer blockbusters. This interruption of the franchise treadmill offers a moment of respite and a glimpse of what could be supported instead.

REUSE: AGAINST THE COMING ATTRACTIONS
MAINSTREAM FILMS HAVE always been sold as perishable items: they peak on the opening weekend and quickly fade from public awareness, replaced by the next star-fronted blockbuster. More specialised films may have a slower circulation through film festivals and arthouse screens, but such spaces also privilege new releases. Only a handful of films make it into the prestige lists to become occasionally resurrected as classics. Film circulation before Covid-19 had an absurdly wasteful cycle, like the best-before dates on long-life supermarket food.

Unlike food, however, film doesn't actually go off, and hence a lack of releases does not create scarcity. At home, audiences have been finding their way to older films. Repertory channels like Talking Pictures TV have seen their audience numbers soar, film archives have been presenting online programmes, and the Black Lives Matter movement has brought forward an overdue appreciation of Black film history. The lockdown experience shows that if older films are seen, celebrated, contextualised and accessible, a richer film culture is possible with fewer new films. Each encounter between film and audience produces, in its localised way, a new film experience. Switching off the blockbuster hype machine gives audiences more chances to find the films that speak to them.

This is not only a matter of availability. Back when Netflix was still a DVD mail-delivery company, *Wired* columnist Chris Anderson used it as an example of his influential model of the 'long tail' of online media distribution, which showed how the on-demand model would make old films commercially valuable. However, 15 years later, this model has done little to challenge the dominance of a decreasing number of film productions. Instead, the streaming companies compete with one another by hyping up a constant flow of new content, while the back catalogues dwindle and fade from

view. The dispersed library of global cinema available online may offer opportunities for film buffs with the disposable time and money to seek it out, but popular media consumption has continued to concentrate on a handful of crowd-pleasing products.

Algorithmic recommendation systems are designed as traps, optimised to swallow up leisure time so that the subscription becomes indispensable. They are more likely to serve up more of the same, with just enough variation. Recommendations are crucial to save consumers from feeling overwhelmed by choice, particularly in an anxious era where people are made to feel personally responsible for judging the ethical and environmental impacts of each decision. But we may need to look beyond algorithms in order to rebalance collective and individual choice, to counteract both fragmentation (filter bubbles) and concentration (blockbuster culture). Nothing new needs to be invented for this to happen: film clubs have existed for a hundred years, allowing people to get together and make collective choices, and to sustain a shared viewing experience that doesn't depend on obsolescence cycles.

To combat the predictability and shallowness of algorithmic recommendations, we can look to the people who have been doing the work of choosing and programming films outside conventional new releases. Repertory programmers, cine-club and film society committees, archive researchers, librarians, and community organisers have been sharing their discoveries, presenting films that may not be new but are relevant to a particular situation or place, that resonate with an audience, or that are simply too good to forget. Their online activities during Covid-19 have allowed them to reach new audiences. However, the guidelines for safe public gatherings will affect their ability to resume screenings differently; while some may be better prepared than commercial cinemas, others may struggle in smaller, shared venues. Initiatives like Radical Home Cinema, where people visit each other's houses and share hospitality as well as films, may take a while to restart, but can be one of the many variants of what cinema can be beyond the multiplex.

RECYCLE: AGAINST SINGLE-USE FILMS
WATCHING MORE OLD films would already reduce the need for new films, but expressions of the present are still important. Old films

again may offer a way to reduce the impact of creating new work. There is an ocean of footage lapping at our feet, and from its depths, new works can emerge, with no need for new shooting expeditions or energy-guzzling studios. Filmmakers are increasingly awake to the potential of archival and found footage as a creative element. Reused images can have a conventional historical function, or they can be expressive, critical, experimental, and intriguing. Found-footage films have been around for a long time, allowing artists to create meaning and excitement without the expense of shooting. In doing so, they have provided an implicit critique of 'the disposable nature of contemporary consumer culture'.

Remix films are another way of defying the obsolescence model in film culture, and instead re-inscribe meaning-making and creativity as a circular process. One of the biggest obstacles to this circularity is the institution and enforcement of intellectual property. There is a different discussion to be had about the necessity of ensuring that people can have a livelihood without depending on meagre royalties, but current copyright regimes are not defensible on that basis. One needs only to look at how media corporations pursue takedown actions against individual YouTubers for their critical use of clips, to realise that the disproportionate enforcement of intellectual property continues to benefit corporate interests above actual artists and creatives.

As Kropotkin wrote, **'[t]here is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present [...] By what right then can any one whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say—This is mine, not yours?'**

Each piece of media embeds substantial amounts of common energy and resources. If the vast repositories of existing moving images become a common source from which to make new combinations, then it is possible to recirculate that energy instead of creating more waste. As a "metahistorical work", the remix can contribute to urgent new understandings of history, unravelling the linear framework of progress. More tactically, recycled media can be used in what the situationists called detournement, or media jujitsu, where the strength of media persuasion and spectacle can be turned against its capitalist foundations. According to filmmaker Craig Baldwin, remixing

"Resistance is both pragmatic and utopian. It is about sustaining a space where things can happen and people can meet. In the simplicity of this aspiration there is much to learn for the future directions of cultural activity."

and found-footage film-making traditions have a lot in common with folk art, and in these informal practices there is potential for a more democratic access to the means of production. The popularisation of remixing as a folk practice doesn't have to sacrifice its "adventurous and insurgent character".

There are plenty of examples online, more recently on social media platforms like TikTok, to show that remixing and recycling media objects has the potential to be at the same time popular, accessible, and critical. This is not a niche or avant-garde corner of the art world, but an everyday vernacular. Reclaiming archive images can produce radical encounters with history, contesting racism as in *Handsworth Songs* (Black Audio Film Collective, 1986) or extractivism as in *Fly me to the Moon*[1] (Esther Figueroa, 2019). Scotland has its own crop of thought-provoking uses of archive, from the playful medley of *From Scotland with Love* (Virginia Heath, 2014), to the weaving of old and new analogue footage in *All Divided Selves*[2] (Luke Fowler, 2011), or the surfacing of women's perspectives in *Her Century*[3] (Emily Munro, 2019). With a rich legacy of moving images to draw on, and new questions to ask of them, this can be a form of minimal-impact filmmaking that reclaims the throwaway and contests the disposability of the medium.

WATCHING TOGETHER

WHILE ARCHIVE FILM is thriving online, it is important to keep utopian fantasies about the internet in check. Even The Economist recognises that, "as a business, entertainment has in some ways become less democratic, not more. Technology is making

the rich richer, skewing people's consumption of entertainment towards the biggest hits and the most powerful platforms". Therefore, transforming creative practices needs to be accompanied by changes in media consumption.

The solutions offered so far to the Covid-19 crisis in the screen industries have a pull towards the private. Streaming serves individual consumers and promotes an illusion of personal choice. It offers a technological remedy for social problems, such as the exclusion of disabled audiences and the geographical disparities in access to film. At the same time, new initiatives such as drive-in cinemas and exclusive screenings have emerged to cater to the better-served, affluent audiences. There is then a risk that the 'new normal' for the cinema industry will be a hollowing out of its public function, and a continuation of energy-intensive, wasteful practices. It is true that domestic screens have become increasingly efficient, but the amount of information flowing through circuits, cables, satellites, and data centres to serve on-demand media consumption is still ballooning. Although providers of web services have moved faster than other industries towards sustainable energy sources, the speed of growth threatens to outrun these efforts, with Amazon for instance turning back to fossil fuels to power some of its data centres. So, even on this metric alone, the benefits of streaming need to be assessed critically. And I hardly need to expand on the case against drive-ins.

Getting together to watch films is a traditional practice that defies the imperative of convenience and personalisation. But if watching films together is to have a future in a low-carbon world, the purpose-built cinema is not the best venue for it. Instead, once it is safe to do so, we could have ephemeral cinemas in each neighbourhood: in people's living rooms, in community halls, schools, parks, lecture theatres, pubs, cafes, and bike shops. There is no need for a cinema to be just a cinema; it may instead be one of the happenings that sustain a multipurpose venue. This premise is already in practice in the community cinema movement, in independent exhibition festivals

such as Scalarama, and across several DIY spaces that have cinema at their heart, such as the Star and Shadow in Newcastle, the Cube in Bristol, or the Deptford Cinema in London. Christo Wallers of the Star and Shadow calls this a 'relational' mode of film exhibition, where "community is invoked as an act of cultural resistance to the transactional, individualistic structuring of dominant cinema". This resistance is both pragmatic and utopian. It is about sustaining a space where things can happen and people can meet. In the simplicity of this aspiration there is much to learn for the future directions of cultural activity. ∎

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Notes

[1] grahamfoundation.org/grantees/5446-fly-me-to-the-moon

[2] themoderninstitute.com/viewing-room/luke-fowler-i-all-divided-selves-i-2011

[3] nls.uk/exhibitions/her-century

FASCISM, BREXIT & COVID: A CONVERSATION

Luke Devlin in conversation with Benjamin Zachariah. Illustration by Andy Arthur.

D URING TIMES OF economic contraction, the impacts are felt hardest by those with the least to lose. This often presents an opening for far-right populism who come with ready-made scapegoats and simplistic solutions. As Samuel Decker writes, the far-right has offered the currently most popular challenge to neoliberalism's TINA principle ("There Is No Alternative"), advocating protectionism while attempting to "channel discontent with neoliberal globalisation into national resentments."[1]

Degrowth principles and practice can offer credible alternatives to TINA, not through shallow promises of a nostalgic return to an imagined golden age (Decker 2018), but by acknowledging global limits while advocating for an economics of fairness and solidarity. But to do this, we must reckon with far-right narratives and claims to power, and understand what fuels them.

LESS spoke to Benjamin Zachariah, a scholar of global fascism based in Berlin, in conversation with Luke Devlin, a social researcher and activist based in Glasgow.

The UK is now facing an economic downturn triggered not only by the fallout of the pandemic, but also by a No Deal Brexit which now seems very likely if not inevitable. Historically, such periods of rupture have seen a shift to the far or further right. What signs and changes have you already observed of this happening in the UK's wider political and social landscape?

BZ: There's definitely a shift to the right, but it's a speeding up of a longer trend. if you go back to 'New Labour', there were several instances when they looked far more conservative than the Conservatives, especially the John Major government. Then after the Blair years, and the brief unelected Prime

"Brexit certainly provided a legitimating framework for a new explicitly racist politics. Racism is now open and is no longer illegitimate."

Ministership of Gordon Brown, in several respects David Cameron came across as to the left of New Labour when he campaigned. The Tories have swung back to the right, where they probably belong, but they have moved much further to the right than in the Major years, I'd say, and then with the various right-wing parties coming and going, and the Tories attempting to keep their role as the only legitimate party on the right, they inevitably moved so far that they matched and in some cases overtook the right outside the spectrum of legitimacy. Suddenly the Tommy Robinsons were not so far away from the mainstream.

In this context, Brexit certainly provided a legitimating framework for a new explicitly racist politics. Those are the 'signs and changes' that are most visible. Racism is now open and is no longer illegitimate, as it appears to have been endorsed by official parties like the Tories. But there were of course the Lexiteers, who had long argued that getting out of the EU would bring politics 'home' to Britain, where a national left could have more say in policy, and their arguments were not built on racism, even if they didn't calculate how that sort of narrow and exclusionary trade-unionist politics would feed into racism.

So it's important not to oversimplify. Also, there's a strong minority racism in Britain - even among academics, who allegedly should know better, or at least pretend to be non-racist. I know of instances of South Asian-origin academics abusing Eastern European-origin academics and telling them to 'go home'. This was the beauty of Brexit propaganda - for some weird reason 'Commonwealth'-origin citizens thought they'd be better off when 'Europeans' were forced to leave. Of course the economic downturn will increase insecurity and encourage a reasonably vicious me-first mentality, which will not be helped by the identitarian politics of the last few decades.

LD: I'd certainly agree about the triangulation of the Blair era as being part of what's got us here- but I'd like to look at this 'longer trend' as well. Claims of a national humiliation and subjugation at the hands of an unaccountable foreign power, and the promise to restore popular sovereignty

against 'corrupt elites', have moved from the fringes to become a reliably irresistible route to power, even by members of those elites themselves, as in the UK. I've seen comment on so-called 'stages of fascism' and the extent to which some of them are taking place now: political capture of judiciary and military, etc. I'd be interested to hear what you think about where we're at with that?

BZ: Well, I think we need to think in terms of a fascist repertoire that is flexible enough to respond to different situations, so I don't think there's a specific line to cross. That's the trouble with trying to think with a 1920s or 1930s situation too strongly in mind. But in terms of the capture of the army and judiciary, or the infiltration of police forces and army by fascist organisations, we are pretty advanced now. In India, the judiciary at the centre is packed with party men from the fascist ruling party. Some of the federal units have somewhat independent high courts, but these are being packed too. The army there has many who are directly loyal to the ruling party. Gleichschaltung is at least being strongly attempted. In the UK, or in Germany, where recently a number of senior police officers have been found to be members of fascist movements, things are still better in that fascism is a tendency supported by ruling elites, but is still a movement in search of power despite many fascist ideas finding resonances, and not being recognised as fascist ideas.

How can we learn from anti-fascist organising globally and in specific locations when we brace ourselves for an economic downturn, resisting further shifts to the right in that context?

BZ: I don't think anti-fascist organisation has been particularly successful, to be honest. Certainly not globally. It's often been said of anti-fascists that they can't agree on anything except that they don't like fascists. In the global organisation stakes, they haven't been able to agree on who the fascists are. Sure, we discuss each other's fascist groups, we repost social media posts, and we imagine that because our Twitter feeds and Facebook friends contain Brazilian or Turkish or Indian news about fascist mobilisation, or about why those countries have governments ≫

that can be called fascist, we are part of an international solidarity campaign. But in practice we can't act or organise globally. States' repressive rules and 'democratic' visa regimes will put a stop to that.

We might, though, be able to learn from global fascist organising - they are less squeamish about borrowing from each other. That's a paradox, given that fascisms are situated in extreme ethno-nationalisms, and therefore should, if their claims to their own unique national character is taken seriously, be unable to borrow from another movement. But Anders Breivik's 1000+-page manifesto contained Hindu fascist propaganda, and when the Indian fascist regime abolished the autonomous status of Kashmir, they invited the right-wingers of the European Parliament to visit Kashmir to endorse their position that all was well - at a time when journalists were being excluded from Kashmir.

Specifically, we can compare strategies, tactics and propaganda of fascist and extreme-right groups across the world, note what they have in common and seek to combat those points, and to share that knowledge among anti-fascist groups worldwide. But we are not a movement, we are relatively small and isolated groups, operating in very hostile legal and policing contexts that are geared more to criminalising us than the extreme right.

LD: That certainly resonates with my experience in Scotland. In June 2020, there were a few days when a large mob of fascists effectively held George Square in Glasgow, carrying out violent assaults and overwhelming both the police and the small number of counter-protesters. It was ostensibly to 'protect the statues' in the square from Black Lives Matter- but really was just the latest manifestation of a malignant West of Scotland subculture of mainly Rangers supporters associated with Ulster Loyalism and British Nationalism, for whom anti-immigrant sentiment, racism and anti-Catholic sectarianism has long been a recruiting ground for the far-right. The ability to take a public space with impunity and assert dominance is an attempt to form community and identity by individuals unable or unwilling to do so in any other way. Obviously not all Rangers fans are

like this, and this kind of street-level recreational violence hasn't so far translated to electoral success. But there is a network of pubs, social clubs, lodges, and online communities where this kind of sentiment is freely expressed, along with the kind of social exclusion, toxic alcohol culture and classist dismissal of large swathes of society, especially in communities hardest hit by globalisation, de-industrialisation and multiple deprivation. In general we prefer to pretend it doesn't exist- or at best formulate unworkable legislation such as the now-repealed Offensive Behaviour at Football Act, or the widely criticised draft Hate Crime Bill. There has been less desire to examine the difficult questions of why such a destructive and harmful subculture exists in the first place, and therefore tackle the roots of it and the structures that support it.

BZ: It's interesting to hear about the specifics of right-wing mobilisation in Scotland. I've long been interested in the ability of nationalisms to generate violent behaviour based on emotive symbols. Remobilisation of fascists in Germany has also been very successful around football as well, in a country where explicit demonstrations of nationalism were considered automatically suspect for a long time. And fascist thugs can appeal to a lowest-common-denominator 'affect' argument that sadly has been promoted by some sections of the identitarians - in other words, there is no requirement to think and behave rationally, because the emotional is important to society. And so it is, of course, but emotions are not transmitted across the specifics of particular people's experiences, so they exclude by definition.

And a part of the resentment that's being built upon by white fascist groups in Europe is the (usually mistaken) perception that too many 'cultural' concessions have been made to 'new' citizens. Or 'refugees'. In India, as I remember it, the rise of the fascists coincided with the propaganda that 'they'

> *"We can compare strategies, tactics and propaganda of fascist and extreme-right groups across the world, note what they have in common and seek to combat those points, and to share that knowledge among anti-fascist groups worldwide."*

were getting too many concessions that the majority couldn't claim - the 'they' were usually Muslims.

This 'we are giving away our own culture' argument is based on a static view of pristine and separate, bounded and definable 'cultures' that seems to be shared by identitarians across the divides of left and right - some people use the term 'identitarian left', but I think identitarian politics is not left or right - it can be used on both sides. And the 'betrayal' argument that fascists like to use is provided in current politics by this theme.

To what extent are there parallels between fascist organising and neo-imperialist narratives permeating British politics today?

BZ: It's not clear who is chasing who to the right. At the moment, neo-Nazis appear to be setting the agenda, and mainstream parties making concessions, running further right after them. A lot of the changes are visible in a changing symbolism and rhetoric - singing Rule Brittannia, the Reichsflagge of Wilhelmine Germany being flown at demonstrations outside the Reichstag in Berlin, attempts to rally round statues of slave-traders or empire-builders in the UK, defences of the Confederate flag in the USA, have all been met by right-wing mainstream parties looking the other way or actually supporting the use of these symbols. But the symbolism is directly connected to right-wing violence. In the USA, Trump came close to being reelected as a direct consequence of his having used race war as a tool, and his teaming up explicitly with fascist organisations in the police and army (traditionally the best place to hide your fascism from all but your Kameraden).

We can certainly say that the return of pro-imperialist narratives and the backlash against 'progressive' political views has enabled and to some extent legitimated this positioning. The backlash was, of course, to some extent a result of the excesses of identitarian politics - a kind of world in which white people were responsible for everything that was wrong, and people of colour could claim some kind of pre-lapsarian innocence. But if - as appeared to have happened - political legitimacy was gained by making a kind of historic

> *"This is where there is a danger that the far-right can be seductive: by providing a confident, grounded certainty amidst a diffuse uncertain hour of chaos. It also provides its own alternative to consumerism and hyper-individuality, along with a primal myth of progress."*

victimhood claim for an entire group, it was a matter of time before 'white' identitarian politics would make the same moves - they just needed to play up a narrative of white victimhood, which would not in all cases be entirely wrong or implausible. The thing with identitarian politics is it's neither left nor right and it's usable in a variety of situations.

I'd say it's not merely neo-imperialist narratives such as Niall Ferguson's celebration of Britain having civilised the world that encourage or catalyse far right politics. The change in the language of political legitimacy brings an explicitly extreme right politics back into the open. The counter-critique has been rather stupid, and it's been too ad hominem to work - if you say, 'that's a white supremacist narrative', that's not nearly enough. The narrative is also wrong - for reasons that people can be persuaded of whatever their identitarian affiliations or origins. But this persuasion cannot be persuasive if it targets people for some sort of inherited perpetrator or victim status, or by policing words and expressions.

LD: For me, there is a subtler dimension to this which can be missed in the reductive way these discourses are playing out right now, especially online. As well as the unhelpful dimensions you describe, there seems to be a necessary movement towards raising up perspectives and communities who have been historically under-represented or marginalised, and making space for the important learning that can come through that - "the authority of those who have suffered". A narrative of victimhood doesn't mean there haven't been victims. The question is, how to discern ways to do this are not tokenistic or performative, but reckon with the conditions and structures that are operating globally- and with perspective. I wish a fraction of the attention given to often trivial culture wars was given to actual cultural genocide in Kashmir or Xinjiang, for example, especially when our consumerist supply chains of almost everything we buy directly implicate us in forced labour in the name of "ethnic harmony". But conversations on positionality can be an opening up of conscience, 'digging where you stand', and can open up a space for things to change for the better (as long as authoritarianism is resisted), so I'm a bit more hopeful about left 'identitarianism' than you are, I think. But

for me it's vital to encourage people to 'exit the Vampire Castle', in Mark Fisher's words - finding ways to challenge each other without excommunication.

How can economic narratives that focus on systemic shifts towards equality and redistribution be alert to resisting co-option by the far right?

BZ: Has there been a strong economic narrative in recent years? Take the various manifestations of the save-the-planet tendency - I can't call it a 'climate change movement' because it's too fragmented, disorganised and ill-informed. It's mostly a romantic narrative about lost innocence and personal virtue. We're not talking about systemic changes, wastage, and unnecessary overproduction in a capitalist system that has long been obsolete. We end up suggesting that everyone can plant a tree or refuse to fly or to recycle all their plastic as individual consumers.

LD: This is where there is a danger that the far-right can be seductive: by providing a confident, grounded certainty amidst a diffuse uncertain hour of chaos. It also provides its own alternative to consumerism and hyper-individuality, along with a primal myth of progress. It's an easier 'sell' with ready-made scapegoats, and it's much harder to wrestle with the complexity and insecurity of our global situation with humility and discernment. One of the few hopeful things I saw in Brexit was that people were actually willing to vote -and defend- a decline in their material quality of life because of their political commitment. George Monbiot once wrote 'nobody ever rioted for austerity' - they do now. And with the mutual aid networks and collective sacrifices society has made during Covid times -despite, not because of, government action- including renewed clarity around

just exactly what constitutes essential, meaningful work, and just how much of that work was done by migrants.

BZ: Obviously, the narratives of ressentiment alone can feed a populist right or a populist left tendency. It doesn't help to target individual rich people and their morality, for instance -which is an old short-cut- and in the end, one of these people will be Jewish and another Muslim, and the debate will be sidetracked into the nonquestion of the anti-Semitism of the left or the Islamophobia of those who want to dispossess or overtax a successful man from a minority.

We need a return to the reasoned, and attempted universalist, critiques of an old Marxian left, even if we diverge from them substantially. We aren't raising new questions, we are returning to old ones, in comparable situations to old ones, but we seem to be unable to tap into the older knowledge at all. (Marxian, for me, is not a party-political term, and there are no viable communist parties today, so perhaps the polemic against official Marxisms is irrelevant now).

LD: There is a huge risk in a kind of Scottish exceptionalism: that we have an exclusively civic type of nationalism that is immune to ethnocentrism. The modern Scottish independence movement has generally been successful at the hygiene necessary to marginalise and exclude fascism, but it would be foolish to be complacent about it. Something troubling I've seen recently has been a number of individuals who are long time independence activists becoming involved in Covid-19 conspiricism, and sharing platforms with populists, cranks, QAnon fantasists and outright fascists under the banner of 'freedom' and 'unity'. This needs to be refused, educated against, and exposed. The great disruption we're in can also be an opportunity: revealing the bankruptcy of the 'there is no alternative' growth paradigm, as it's no longer working for just enough people to claim viability; the moral imperative of mutuality and reciprocity (including across differences in identity); and redefinition and revisioning of the nature of work- of which there is plenty for us to be getting on with. ∎

Notes
[1] degrowth.info/en/2018/01/from-degrowth-to-de-globalization/#more-408769

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH

We are facing climate, economic and social crisis.
Growing our economy is costing us our future.

THERE IS ENOUGH

There is enough for all of us if we choose to live differently.

TOGETHER, WE ARE ENOUGH!

Together we can find ways to move through times of crisis and beyond.

We see that inequality, oppression, injustice, power, climate and ecological breakdown are all connected by the same story: that the economy must keep growing – no matter what the cost. This story of growth is so embedded in our ways of living that any kind of change demands the complete re-imagination of our society. We believe that not only is this possible, it is now essential.

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