LESS

A Journal of Degrowth in Scotland

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WELCOME TO LESS

FIRST AS TRAGEDY, then as farce. Fish in marine habitats off the coast of our corner of the North Atlantic are "British and happier for it"[1] after Brexit, according to Jacob Rees-Moog. Youth unrest ablaze in Northern Ireland as lockdown ennui meets marginalisation and predictable Brexit realpolitik. Mandatory, socially constructed royal mourning across the UK as hauntology meets hyperreal soft authoritarianism.

Meanwhile, the most symbolic image from this period remains that of a gigantic stuck container ship blocking one of the world's most important trade arteries, laying bare the fragile imbalance of our global supply chains. All this during a Scottish election cycle in which little of substance appears to be proposed in response to the metacrisis that threatens the basis of life.

A hostile environment that has been around long before Brexit was on the horizon seems to have permeated daily life for many of us. The real danger is when this state of exception seems to feel normal, and alternatives to seem fanciful. We need to imagine new worlds while we can.

It is one of those strange twists of fate that almost at the exact point in time when Brexit – and blue passports – finally arrived, freedom of movement stopped almost completely for UK citizens, halted by a mutant virus strain, the impact of which was exacerbated by incompetent government handling of the pandemic.

As we write this, we're past the vernal equinox and warmth and light are returning to Scotland, with the natural sense of hope this instills in the heart. Migratory birds and fish have left their winter haunts and arrived back at UK shores. Our annual reminder that freedom of movement is not just a perk that was temporarily bestowed upon us as a by-product of being a member state of a single market. Freedom of movement is the default mode of all life forms, us included – it's how evolution itself unfolded. Global freedom of movement is also a core demand of the degrowth movement.[2]

In LESS's first issue in 2021, we look at degrowth in the context of Brexit and the pandemic, and share some modest proposals to intervene and build new lifeways that are within our power.

As the institutions and public sentiment of a degraded United Kingdom cultivate a protectionist and insular retreat from the world, it's more important than ever to build political solidarity, intellectual networks, and cultural connections across Europe. In that spirit, this issue of LESS has contributions from Joachim Spangenberg (Vice President, Sustainable Europe Research Institute and Chair of BUND/Friends of the Earth Germany), a translation of work by Adrián Almazán and Luis González Reyes (Between limit and desire: strategic directions in the collapse of industrial civilisation) and an interview with activist, author and academic Andrea Vetter on degrowth principles by Svenja Meyerricks.

We also have a collaborative essay from the Highlands with contributions from Ainslie Roddick, Cáit O'Neill McCullagh, Charlotte Mountford, Fadzai Mwakutuya, Jo Rodgers, Kirsten Body, Lauren Pyott, Lisa MacDonald, Mairi McFadyen, Philomena de Lima and Raghnaid Sandilands.

We are also delighted to publish Sarah Glynn on cohousing and ecology, Pat Kane imagining a spot-capitalist future, Alis Le May on slow-fashion and restoration of local craft skills and poetry on borders between the global north and global south from Juana Adcock. We also feature art work by Pearse O'Halloran, Tarneem Al Mousawi, Stewart Bremner and Fadzai Mwakutuya.

Notes

1 *theneweuropean.co.uk/brexit-news/westminster-news/jacob-rees-mogg-scottish-fishermen-brexit-troubles-6904448*
2 *degrowth.info/en/2020/01/book-review-degrowth-postwachstum-a-german-introduction-to-degrowth/*

LESS IS 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.

We invite a combination of thoroughly researched material, opinion pieces, poetry and art work. Contributions are invited from those with lived knowledge in these areas, researchers, poets, creative writers and artists.

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TAILOR MADE DEGROWTH

Imagine how a revitalised, locally made clothing economy would create meaningful employment, enrich communities and challenge toxic mindsets about how we view ourselves and our clothes. By Alis le May.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY is among the most polluting industries on the planet. It is fraught with ethical atrocities, inherently resource-hungry and, some might claim, entirely unnecessary – in utilitarian terms we have produced enough clothing and textiles to meet the needs of our global population for generations.

Nevertheless, we remain unsated and, even in the face of a global economic recession (combined with a growing awareness of the imminent, terrifying consequences of overconsumption), it is predicted that this year we will still produce over 100 billion garments.[1]

It seems like a kind of madness, a collective hysteria so deeply entrenched and on such a scale that it almost forbids confrontation. But the future of our species demands that we change; the unacceptable exploitation of garment workers demands that we change; the current levels of pollution in our rivers, our oceans and our soil demand that we change.

This article aims to illustrate how a revitalised, locally made clothing economy is a degrowth approach that would create meaningful employment, enrich communities and challenge toxic mindsets about how we view ourselves, each other and the clothing we inhabit.

IMAGINE A CITY, and in this city are thirty bespoke tailors, making suits and coats for their clients. The tailors have known and provided service to their clients for decades. They know about each other's families, hobbies, hopes and disappointments. Their lives are interconnected – tailor and client, friend and neighbour, citizens of a shared place. Now imagine twenty-three dressmakers, creating outfits for their clients in every colour of the rainbow, realising dreams of wedding dresses, or the perfect summer blouse. They too form relationships; the exchange of money is necessary, but it does not corrode the connection. There exists a respect for learned craft and design talent, for listening and for creativity. There is something special, and ultimately something deeply human here.

Now imagine twenty-one shirtmakers, twenty-one milliners (hat makers) and five shoemakers, all building those relationships, honing their crafts, and existing in this diverse marketplace of locally made clothing. And the craftspeople of this great, diverse, creative city are not hidden out of sight in obscure back-lanes or industrial zones- they are in the heart of bustling city life, with visible shop fronts on high streets for all the population to see, know, and feel that good things are made here.

This is not a utopia or a dream that I am describing, neither is it London's Mayfair (one of the last great remaining districts of craftspeople in the United Kingdom). What I am describing is the city of Glasgow in 1968[2], a city with a population similar in size to today's, where poverty was rife – yet it supported a local industry of skilled craftspeople. If population and wealth are any indicators, the city should be able to support a visible local clothing industry now, so why not make clothes in Glasgow? Why not make clothes locally in Scotland? Why not grow new (and support existing) locally made clothing economies around the globe? I believe that looking to our past is more than an exercise in bittersweet nostalgia, but instead could help inform a blueprint for a sustainable future.

A locally made clothing economy is by nature a degrowth economy; recent research estimates that the global fashion industry will produce over 100 billion garments this year[3]. This is an incredibly hard figure to visualise. It would be unlikely to see those numbers replicated in a global industry formed of localised clothing economies, and powered by individuals and small teams of makers. The fantastic thing about degrowth (inherent in switching to a localised economy) is that you can gather support for rebuilding a diverse, local marketplace from a much broader section of the population than those who might typically engage with critiques of capitalism – and without ever mentioning the term "degrowth".

In the UK alone it is estimated that the fashion industry spends £241 million on advertising[4]. With increasingly powerful tactics, facilitated by social media platforms and the cultures that have emerged from them, a growth-focused fashion industry is in a better position than ever to convince us to buy, dispose, repeat. A small brand in Dundee making t-shirts, or a tailor in Edinburgh making bespoke suits, might employ the occasional use of online adverts, or use social media platforms to promote their business. Their powers of persuasion however, and ability to purchase space in the 'attention economy', pale in comparison to big brands, (particularly those with high-status associations) and they lack an incentive to seize the attention of whole nations with large campaigns. It is my belief that a fashion industry constituted from thousands of small and micro businesses, would create a very different culture of consumption.

"...the craftspeople of this great, diverse, creative city are not hidden out of sight in obscure back-lanes or industrial zones- they are in the heart of bustling city life, with visible shop fronts on high streets"

In our current context, where there exists an urgent need for reducing material consumption, the inherent production limitations of local brands and makers becomes their strength. This is absolutely the case with small, localised fashion brands (producing limited runs of 'ready-to-wear' collections).

Taking this further, in terms of limiting unnecessary consumption and changing buying habits, some of the most interesting (and often overlooked) potential lies in bespoke. A bespoke garment sits outside the mainstream fashion industry, is not subject to trends and does not require an advertising campaign. It is a carefully considered purchase, partly due to the expense involved in purchasing it, but for deeper reasons too – it requires consideration, thought, discussion and collaboration between customer and maker. Commissioning a bespoke garment is a 'high friction' transaction; fabric must be chosen, shape decided upon, number of pockets agreed etc. and that is before the making can even begin, with some, more complex bespoke garments requiring six or more months to create. It requires real consideration and it also requires patience, two practices the 'low friction' experience of shopping ready-to-wear online would have us avoid and ultimately forget how to exercise.

The term 'bespoke' has become synonymous with tailoring, in particular luxury tailoring, but, when I write 'bespoke', I am not ≫

Right: High heels discard as the women join in the high jinks at the Locarno in Glasgow. 27th September 1962. Credit: Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy Stock Photo

just referring to three-piece formal suits. It is defined as 'made for a particular customer or user' and so, today, a bespoke clothing economy (as part of a wider, local clothing marketplace) would more likely manifest in bespoke jeans, bespoke sweatshirts, bespoke t-shirts and bespoke casual dresses. In fact, any item of clothing you are wearing right now could be bespoke.

In the last 100 years, societies across the globe have challenged every kind of clothing rule and taboo, whilst becoming gradually entrenched in thinking that clothing must come from brands, not fellow citizens. If people were able to re-engage with the concept of buying bespoke, the possibilities for true individual expression and creativity reach new heights. In this way, a degrowth clothing economy is not about austerity and reducing individual freedoms; it is about increasing creativity and empowering self-expression in a way that the current mainstream fashion industry does not allow.

Wasteful and resource hungry is the true state of the fashion industry today. Entirely preventable waste occurs at every stage of its production, sale and use. Some waste is difficult to prevent; for example, in order to avoid producing waste fabric offcuts during production, garments would need to be designed using a zero-waste approach and this can be challenging (but not impossible) for mainstream brands to implement. The mass burning or burying of unsold garments to protect brand identity is a practice that is hard to defend. Burberry was famously outed for this practice[5] but they are only one of the many companies adopting this strategy for a problem which is simply 'just having too much stuff'. This story provoked public outrage but, if we picture it at a personal level, it can be easier to comprehend. How many of us have ever felt overwhelmed at the number of possessions we have (be that clothing or something else) and, in a fit of 'decluttering', condemned bags of unwanted items to the local charity shop or, in more desperate moments, the bin. If we are to tangibly tackle the problem of textile waste, we must acknowledge that responsibility exists with, and beyond, global brands. We too have an impact – currently it is estimated that the global population sends the equivalent of a rubbish truck of clothing to landfill every second[6].

When we hear statistics about tonnage of textile waste, we can start to feel its burden build upon our backs, to the point where we feel paralysed, incapable of meaningful action. One of the many exciting things about a revitalised, locally made clothing economy is that it gives us tools to not only reduce the amount of waste we produce, but also to begin to see "waste" in an entirely different way.

Firstly, a fashion industry composed of small brands and makers would not have the manufacturing capability to create anywhere near the same levels of waste that we are witnessing right now. It is also unlikely that smaller businesses would ever need or want to burn or bury unsold garments. When you are directly connected to the making process, you are much more invested in your garments because you have been a part of the hours it took to create them. It would be a very unusual set of circumstances that would cause an independent designer to burn a collection they had spent several months creating. I still have pieces I made from when I was first learning how to sew (over a decade ago), and I expect that I will still have those pieces in ten years' time.

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A strong local clothing economy is likely to be a connected and social network, able to share resources and facilities to reduce waste and production costs for all. Taking an example from my own practice; prior to the pandemic, most of my commissions were wedding dresses or men's suits – traditional styles for formal occasions – and these clients were not interested in experimenting with interesting seam placement that could minimise waste. Why should they be? Even with the most economical lay plan (the way pattern pieces are nestled together for cutting, kind of like Tetris), I always produce small waste pieces that will very rarely be of use to me. In a connected, diverse local clothing economy, I would know exactly who those scraps would be useful to; in this way one designers' trash becomes another designers' treasure, waste and costs are reduced for both parties, and a culture of reciprocity would emerge.

Independent designers and makers are much more agile than global brands; they can quickly make use of pre- and post-consumer waste whenever opportunities present themselves or even make it a central part of their business model. In fact, they are already leading the way in this. Taking an example from Glasgow, upcycling brand ReJean Denim repurposes deadstock denim and preloved jeans into new, timeless pieces and offers a mending service to make sure the garment has as long a life as possible. This requires skill, but it also requires imagination – seeing waste as an opportunity, rather than a problem.

Exploring the problem of waste imaginatively – how long might a city such as Glasgow be able to sustain a diverse, creative clothing economy if all materials had to be sourced with city limits? Given the huge number of garments languishing in charity shops, clothing bins, textile recycling centres and even our own wardrobes, I doubt that designers would find themselves too limited if they only sourced their textiles locally – and, if they did, might it be worth exploring the value of this limitation? And might we start to question the notion that creative endeavour should never be limited, no matter the costs to our environment? Like most cities, we have fantastic local textile resources; we may not be able to grow cotton in Scotland, but we certainly have a lot of cotton right here already to work with. Truly imaginative designers can work with what they have in front of them, and we have so much.

The fast fashion culture we currently live in inevitably compromises quality to deliver at such a pace. Of course, there have always been varying levels of quality throughout the history of clothing production, but it is only in the last 50 or 60 years that we have seen the prevalence of planned obsolescence grow in the fashion industry. The big brands do not expect you to wear their garments more than eight to ten times, so why take the extra time in production to make them last three hundred washes? A local clothing economy cannot exist in this manner. Local businesses depend on customer loyalty, online reviews, and word-of-mouth to maintain their clients. Furthermore, a disgruntled customer in a local clothing economy can have a greater impact than simply leaving a bad review; they can walk into your shop or visit your studio and demand a repair or refund in person. There is accountability, a necessary aspect of any healthy community.

Designers who have a role in the production of their collections will see the value in making something well for its own sake (the philosophy of a craftsman[7]) and, with many designers running 'own name' labels, who would want their name on a poorly made garment? Moreover, when you are working with or selling directly to a customer, there forms a human connection, a sense of obligation – that person has chosen you to make something, something that will touch their skin, keep them warm, change the way they feel about themselves.

Amancio Ortega, billionaire and owner of Inditex (a fashion conglomerate that includes Zara, Bershka and Massimo Dutti) is unlikely to lose sleep when your Zara t-shirt starts to fall apart or when your jeans zip has broken after two wears and, regardless of how he might feel about either of these things, you cannot access him. As the writer Matthew Crawford says, "it's this sense that there's no one you can grab hold of by the lapels and hold to account… that is the definition of tyranny: power that is not accountable… and is not operating with your best interests at heart"[8]

You can complain at your local Zara shop, write a post on Instagram, even post the faulty garment back in protest- but are any of these tactics likely to raise production and material standards at Zara? A local clothing economy has to, and wants to, produce high quality clothing – it is essential to its survival, justifying the necessary higher price points. Furthermore, making things well is fundamental to the philosophy shared by most people who make their own products. By making things that last and being locally accessible to offer repairs, a locally made clothing economy reduces waste, builds relationships and restores customer respect and appreciation for 'a job well done'; no global brand can offer this.

But what about those who cannot afford to participate in a locally made clothing economy? The reality is that locally made clothing cannot and should not compete with the likes of Primark and BooHoo – in rebuilding a locally made industry, we do not want to copy the environmental or human exploitation of the global fashion industry. This requires a shift in thinking about the numbers of new clothes we can purchase per year. For a lot of people, buying locally is possible but it will mean buying less. In the context of Scotland, this may not be possible for those on the lowest incomes, even to meet their basic practical clothing needs. The city of Glasgow has some of the highest levels of deprivation in Western Europe and, whilst secondhand clothing can play a part here, we know that there exists real, understandable stigmas and shame around wearing secondhand. We must acknowledge that and be hopeful that revitalising a local clothing economy will just be one part of revitalising cities more broadly, and that by investing in the local makers, more jobs and better outcomes will be generated for the wider population. This is not 'trickle-down' economics as we have witnessed it, which in the words of Jason Hickel has been 'barely even a vapour'[9], this is local investment with local beneficiaries. The fact that people cannot afford to buy a locally made £17 t-shirt (versus a £2 equivalent at Primark) is an indicator of poverty caused by an economy that needs to be urgently addressed politically, not through independent makers being paid less.

"...when you are working with or selling directly to a customer, there forms a human connection, a sense of obligation – that person has chosen you to make something, something that will touch their skin, keep them warm, change the way they feel about themselves"

In the transition to a thriving local clothing economy, it is important that a broad range of tastes are catered for by local makers – for real change, this cannot be something solely for the sustainability-conscious middle classes. We need to bring along as many people as possible and everybody needs to feel welcome on the journey. One way to do this would be to reinstate local business in the heart of city centres. Why shouldn't a visit to Glasgow's famous 'style mile' on Buchanan Street bring you into contact with local fashion brands, tailors and dressmakers? Why has it become the norm that this territory belongs to global brands and conglomerates only? Brands who are happy to remove themselves when the going-gets-tough, leaving unemployment and desolate department stores behind them. These cities, these spaces, do not belong to global brands – they belong to us, the citizens.

At the beginning of this article I asked you to imagine a city, now I want you to imagine *your* city (or closest city, wherever that might be). Imagine all the shops, vacated through lockdown and recession, now populated with a diverse range of local makers. Imagine walking past a window, previously boarded up, lit bright and displaying a garment that was carefully made and *made there* – you may even be able to see the designer at work towards the back of the shop. Imagine a long-ignored, faded department store, re-painted and re-populated with local businesses. Imagine visiting other cities and discovering that city's local talent and unique fashion scene – not a carbon copy of global brand after global brand. If local authorities and government wanted to make this happen, they absolutely could, they could certainly make a start – it just takes the will, and a bit of imagination. ■

Notes

1 *Common Objective. 2021. Volume and Consumption: How Much Does The World Buy?; commonobjective.co/article/volume-and-consumption-how-much-does-the-world-buy*
2 *1968. Kelly's Directory of Glasgow, 1968. London: London, Kelly's Directories Ltd*
3 *Common Objective. 2021. Volume and Consumption: How Much Does The World Buy?; commonobjective.co/article/volume-and-consumption-how-much-does-the-world-buy*
4 *Notjustalabel.com. 2021. The Fashion Advertising Campaign: Big Business & Brand Identity; notjustalabel.com/editorial/fashion-advertising-campaign-big-business-brand-identity*
5 *Pinnock, O., 2021. No One In Fashion Is Surprised Burberry Burnt £28 Million Of Stock. Forbes, forbes.com/sites/oliviapinnock/2018/07/20/no-one-in-fashion-is-surprised-burberry-burnt-28-million-of-stock/?sh=1f29269d4793*
6 *Beall, A., 2021. Why clothes are so hard to recycle. BBC, bbc.com/future/article/20200710-why-clothes-are-so-hard-to-recycle*
7 *Sennett, R., 2009. The craftsman. London: Penguin Books.*
8 *EconTalk, 2021. Matthew Crawford on Why We Drive. EconTalk podcast, econtalk.org/matthew-crawford-on-why-we-drive/*
9 *Hickel, J., 2021. Less is More. London: Random House UK.*

THE ANTI-D'OH!

Mapping the emotional systems that could drive us to an ecological civilisation by Pat Kane

WE HEAR A lot from behavioural science and nudge theory about how susceptible humans are to addictive and self-destructive behaviour – our inner "Homer Simpson", short-termist, thrill-obsessed and anxious about status.

If this was the only account of evolved human nature going, then we'd be looking at our eternal vulnerability to consumerism and advertising, with all the dire consequences for material throughput this implies.

But what if there are a range of contending frameworks of human emotion and cognition – ones which emphasis the active power of imagination; or expand the repertoire of (and the interaction between) triggerable and visceral drives; or point towards ways whereby we can increase our non-reactivity, mindfulness and need for meaning?

Maybe we're more like Lisa Simpson than Homer? And maybe this can also provide a neurophysiological basis for constructing a robust and lasting post-consumerist identity?

"D'oh!" This is Homer Simpson's famous response to yet another failure to put his rationality ahead of his appetites and anxieties. But it's also the noise you hear behind so much of what has become known as "nudge theory"[1], as it observes us poor simians bumping into the sharp edges of a challenging modern world that, somehow and mysteriously, we managed to create.

Officially known as "behavioural economics", nudge theory is so-called because it aims to steer we bemused, still-paleolithic creatures around our own social and economic landscape, gently pushing us away from self-destructive behaviours that we can't help perpetrating.

Why can't we help it? Because beneath our elaborate and intricate worlds of code, law, culture and institutions, say the nudgers, we are essentially hunter-gatherers, whose survival drives persist into the complex present, and lead us astray.

Indeed, it's worse than that: we have figured our, via advertising and marketing (whether commercial or political), how to lead ourselves astray. Some classic examples follow. We have an ancient appetite for sweet and sucrose-intense foodstuffs – so we can be easily led down the path to over-consumption of junk and processed foods.

Our attention flickered around our old savannah landscapes, looking for predators or enemies – so we can readily become entranced by screens and interaction designs, which consciously and deliberately game those instincts securing our constant attention.

To survive, we sort ourselves into in-groups and out-groups, and develop attachments to kin (whether biological or fictive) – so we moderns are all-too-susceptible to status wars, identity politics/marketing, and even tribalism by means of polarisation.[2]

We have an "aversion to loss" more than we have an "attraction to gain", rooted in our early hominid insecurities about storing and retaining resources. Yet at the same time we are also afflicted with "optimism bias": we routinely overestimate our own chances of success, and the impact of our own skills and talents, in any challenging situation – again, a capacity we apparently developed as we adapted to our harsh environments.

It's amazing. How do these broken, misfiring creatures even make their way to the bus stop each morning?[3]

Scepticism about the research basis of "nudge" thinking is justified. Many of its tests have been enacted on early twenties graduates and post-graduates on Western university campuses, who one could conceivably imagine to be more impulsive and individualistic in their actions than in many other cultures.[4]

Building a case for "liberal paternalism", in the words of Sunstein and Thaler – where psychologically-informed politicians, managers and administrators "architect the choices" of these poor Homers, steering them away from "predictably irrational" self-harms — is easier if the human evidence for it is so specific (eg impatient, not fully mature young students).

By the same means, of course, these creatures can also be steered towards self-harm. The perpetual offer of cut-price chocolates at the supermarket counter is an example of nudge thinking that aims to exploit our "cognitive biases". It associates spending at the counter with a cash saving on a sugar high, wiring a retail behaviour in with our ancient susceptibility.[5]

In terms of the urgency of climate crisis – where a consumerism that plays on and to these cognitive and physiological biases keeps material throughput constantly on the increase, as we're triggered to keep impulse buying – the nudgers' map of evolved (and limited) human nature would seem to bring us grim news.

If indeed we are these lost, stumbling, savannah-era creatures, stranded paleolithics endlessly susceptible to the sparkles and enticements of consumer society and political messaging, then all we can hope for is that our rulers and steerers – who possess this powerful map of human weakness – don't jerk us around too much. And if/when they do, they do it in the right direction. Because we, the people, are poor forked Homer Simpsons, waiting to be nudged towards the light.[6]

BUT WHAT IF we were Lisa Simpson, as much as Homer? That is, what if we were expressive, constructive, artistic, idealistic, self-programming, ethically ambitious?

Well, we know this to be the case – we know these people in our own lives, we can find them in the media if we look hard enough, and sometimes they achieve stellar status by virtue of their sheer integrity (Greta Thunberg's moral intensity about the climate crisis the most recent example). Those of us who are progressive activists are inspired by such people, and hope to ignite their flame inside us, and in those we hope to mobilise.

And in our urgency, most of us won't be stopped from trying to summon up the better angels of our nature, by a crabbed, self-subverting mantra about the evolved inevitability of our species-mediocrity. Yet the human science of this probably does have to be grappled with, and countered, rather than just ignored. If only because it unnecessarily induces despair and fatalism about how much humans can transform their own understandings and motivations.[7]

If we are creatures of cognitive surplus, as much as of cognitive limits, then it is possible that we might respond to (say) an appeal to build a complex "ecological civilisation" (to use Jeremy Lent's term)[8]. In such a civilisation, we are (at worst) masters of our evolved and visceral reactions to the world. And at best we are mindful self-shapers and systemic adepts, applying our ingenuity to the pursuit of a planet-friendly common life.

As far as my reading in the last 20 years can tell me, there is more than enough evidence in the human sciences to support our capacity for this kind of fully-awake, complex living. But we need to start arranging it all into a new map – one that can fully contend with the depressing overview of the nudgers.

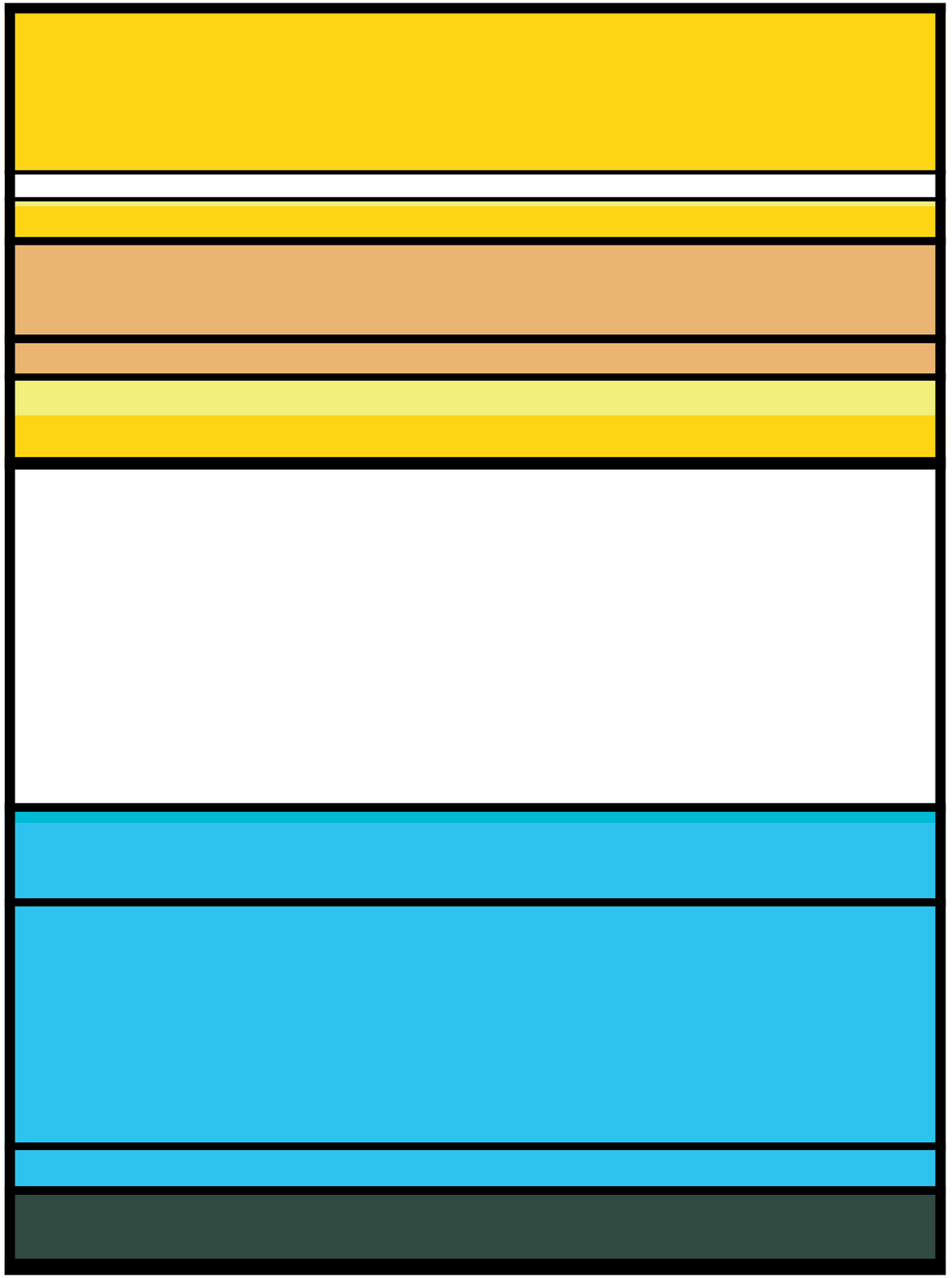
The first point of intervention would be to widen the "dashboard" of primary emotions that are understood as triggering our most "predictably irrational" responses.

In the Scottish independence movement, the spectre of "Project Fear" – the name the No side gave to their scaremongering referendum campaign in 2012-2014 – contains one of the key "negative" emotions that can be seen to deeply drive human (and indeed mammalian) existence. Yet there are potential Projects also for both Anger and Panic/Sadness (this latter emotion rooted in anxiety around separation, aloneness and abandonment. Does that ring a bell?).

This is one end of the "primary emotions" dashboard as laid out by the late Jaak Panksepp, founder of what's called "affective neuroscience" or AN (which distinguishes itself from cognitive neuroscience (CN) in its emphasis on how our ancestral emotions deeply determine our consciousness).[9]

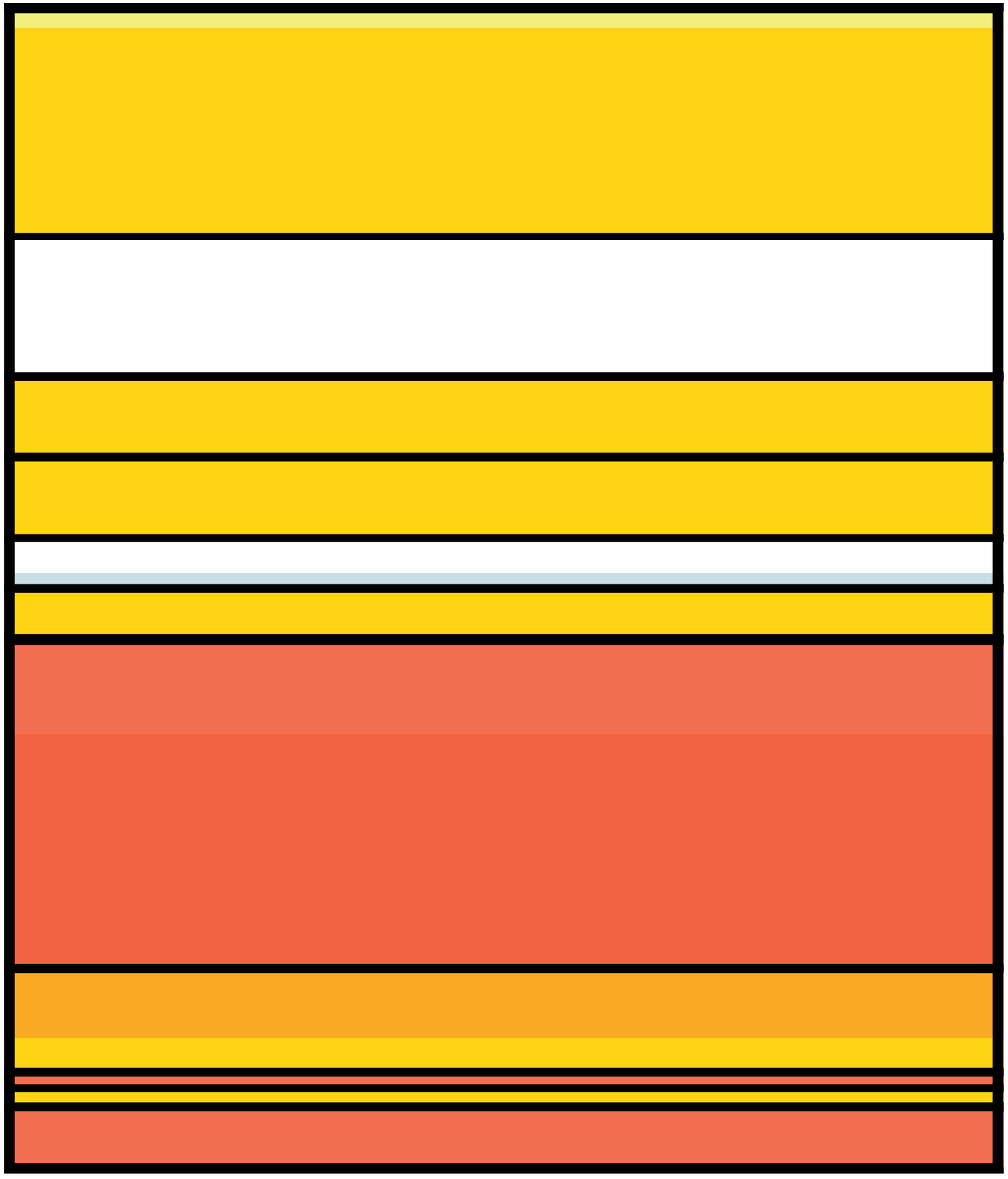
What is exciting about Panksepp and AN is that the dashboard extends towards other ≫

"But what if we were Lisa Simpson, as much as Homer? That is, what if we were expressive, constructive, artistic, idealistic, self-programming, ethically ambitious?"



primary emotions – and these are as positive and generative as the others are negative and defensive. Panksepp titles them Care, Play and Seeking/Curiosity (he even fully CAPITALISES them, to emphasize their primacy in organisms, but I won't follow that rule here).

It shouldn't be hard to imagine how one might begin to orchestrate these three emotional systems in service of an ecological civilisation – particularly if we attend to Panksepp's particular definitions. What's also important to note is that AN believes these are "visceral" emotions – meaning that to the human experiencing them, they are near involuntary reactions: we are "pulled" towards them, and they contend powerfully within us. (To my mind, this is a different framing of emotion than that of the nudgers, who delight in how our noble and rational intentions are endlessly subverted by our evolved inheritance. Instead, these are emotions understood more operatically, as a profound and



"As far as my reading in the last 20 years can tell me, there is more than enough evidence in the human sciences to support our capacity for this kind of fully-awake, complex living."

turbulent motivational landscape, the primal drama of our lives).

Care – essentially, maternal and paternal protection and development of offspring, community members, or any other entities requiring nurturance and support – seems obviously useful. Environmental discourse is powerful when it invokes Mother Earth or Gaia; and the concept of the Anthropocene implies a story in which we are responsible for the fate of the blue planet. To care for an entity is not to be transactional with it, or to have one's emotions subverted by individualism or ego.

Yet we can amplify the power of Care with the power of Play, as an emotional system. Care provides the human organism with the experience of being at home in, being loved and esteemed by, the world. And Play stands upon the security Care generates, in order to healthily (and joyfully) experiment and test how we can be in that world.

Far from being trivial or a diversion, in evolutionary terms Play is how social, symbolic, imaginative animals like us rehearse being with each other. It creates zones (and much of the arts can be subsumed in the Play system) in which realities are simulated, put together and taken apart, with the risks taken being merely discursive or creative, not life-or-death.[10]

When we understand how Play operates in the evolved human condition, we can break through the way that advertising (and digitality) hold promises of novelty and new worlds just out of reach of their consumers, in an endless and addictive fashion. Instead, if we try to access the creative and prototypical impulse at the heart of Play, and instil it with the empathy of Care, we end up with the young climate strikers and Extinction Rebellion's most successful moments – turning streets into alternative communities of performance, discourse and bravery. Into "grounds of play".

Seeking/Curiosity is a deep emotional system for Panksepp, which goes way beyond the mammalian realm, and is essentially to do with the inner state of any organism, which needs to ascertain what its external environment is – whether sustaining or threatening – and moves around in the world to seek out that evidence. At the human level, philosophers like Spinoza called this "conatus" – understood as drive, will, motive.

Seeking/Curiosity sits below and beyond Anger, Fear, Panic, Care or Play. It manifests as a desire than can't requite itself, or the impulse to action rather than passivity in a situation. Such desire is clearly harnessable in many directions, and for many different "Projects". (There is a seventh primary and visceral emotion in the Panksepp system, Lust, which shouldn't go without saying – but perhaps needs another essay to integrate into our picture, as it can either integrate or unravel those in its grip).

The science of emotions, as explored by other figures like Antonio Damasio, often connect this desire to the need for "homeostasis" in organisms – a term you may know as referring to self-balancing and self-correction (like the homeostat regulating the heating in your house). Damasio prefers the term "homeodynamics". This is the gentle flourishing which is the ideal state for a healthy organism – keeping enough energy resources in reserve, to fuel a curiosity about your environment.[11]

When connected to Play, and particularly when it happens in the super-playful human animal, this Seeking/Curiosity is the drive behind the elaborate structures and rules of our civilisations. Of course, all of these emotional systems fuel the more self-conscious, cognitive and imaginative parts of our minds, which grow the cultures that are between us. We can imagine (and remember) civilisations that are (and were) founded on the visceral triggering of Fear, Anger and Panic/Sadness.

Yet I am strongly suggesting that affective neuroscience should give activists the confidence to identify, and then to cultivate, the more "positive" and generative primary emotions. They can be deep motivators towards building an ecological civilisation.

A FINAL CAVEAT. The human sciences (and particularly the sciences of emotions) are a crowded, contested and constantly shifting field. A recent challenge to affective neuroscience's map of evolved and deeply rooted emotions comes from the constructionist model, preeminently developed by the aforementioned Lisa Feldman Barrett.[12]

It's "constructionist" because Barrett and her peers believe that emotions are much more culturally constructed (and culturally relative) than they are a set of "essential" emotional modules. In a sardonic way, she charges essentialists as invoking "an inner beast that needed to be controlled by divine, rational thought".[13]

Her own laboratory studies and literature reviews aim to refute the idea that we have a "fear" circuit or "play" circuit in the brain. For Feldman, the emotions are much more emergent between a human and their environment. They arising from the meeting of a flexible brain network that's constantly anticipating our reality; and a culture/language that gives us more subtlety in handling emotions, the more culture we imbibe.

This means, as far as I understand her work, that our emotive, motivated selves are far more shapeable by a powerful story, metaphor or image (still or moving) that we have been previously prepared to accept. Yet if we understand this, claims Barrett, we can then take on the responsibility to re-story ourselves. And now aware that we have a much greater capacity to do this than we realised.

I find myself placed somewhere between the "essentialist" and the "constructionist" positions in this debate, these two camps of the neuroscience of emotions and cognition. I think it's important that humans realise how homologous they are with other mammals, and even organisms beyond that. It feels like a biological connection, a shared fate, which might be transforming if dwelt upon deeply enough.

But I also appreciate that we are also radically constructionist animals – with extraordinary capacities for self-reflection, conceptualisation, fabulation. We will need all those imaginative powers, rethinking not just technology but styles and ways of life, if we are to get out of the 2020s alive.

At least, let's say that there's more to us, and our evolved resources, than Homer Economicus. ■

Pat Kane is a writer, musician, activist, consultant and futurist (www.patkane.global). His book The Play Ethic was published in 2004, and he is currently completing a follow-up.

Notes

1 *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nudge_theory*

2 *'This Is Your Brain on Nationalism: The Biology of Us and Them', Robert Sapolsky, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2019, foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-02-12/your-brain-nationalism*

3 *See this comprehensive list of "cognitive biases" en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases*

4 *"Nudge theory is a poor substitute for hard science in matters of life or death", Sonia Sodha, The Guardian, 26 April 2020, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/26/nudge-theory-is-a-poor-substitute-for-science-in-matters-of-life-or-death-coronavirus*

5 *"Nudging at the checkout counter – A longitudinal study of the effect of a food repositioning nudge on healthy food choice", L.C. Van Gestel et al. Psychology & Health, Volume 33, 2018 – Issue 6, tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08870446.2017.1416116*

6 *See my review of nudge thinking in the Independent, 23 October 2011 https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/nudge-nudge-pat-kane-s-big-ideas-for-busy-readers-864477.html*

7 *See my New Scientist review of Cass Sunstein's The Ethics of Influence, 16 November 2016 newscientist.com/article/mg23231002-200-playing-politics-exposing-the-flaws-of-nudge-thinking/. "This is why nudge thinking may be faltering – its understanding of human nature unnecessarily (and perhaps expediently) downgrades our powers of conscious thought. From the psychology and neuroscience around play, creativity, dreaming and sleep, we can as easily derive a picture of human cognition that doesn't recoil from the buzzing, blooming demands of everyday life, but exults in using imagination, stories, abstraction and metaphor to comprehend the world.*

Can we architect a society that supports our cognitive surpluses, rather than exploiting our cognitive limits? If 'attention is a scarce resource', as Sunstein writes, perhaps we might manage the coming march of automation a different way, by using it to reduce our overall working hours? This would then increase the zone in which our attention could be freely and creatively exercised."

8 *'What Does An Ecological Civilisation Look Like?', Jeremy Lent, Yes! Magazine, Feb 16, 2021 yesmagazine.org/issue/ecological-civilization/2021/02/16/what-does-ecological-civilization-look-like/*

9 *'Selected Principles of Panksepian Affective Neuroscience', Kenneth L. Davis and Christian Montag, Frontiers in Neuroscience, 17 January 2019 frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2018.01025/full. See also 'Reconciling cognitive and affective neuroscience perspectives on the brain basis of emotional experience', JaakPanksepp, Richard D.Lane, Mark Solms, Ryan Smith, Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, Volume 76, Part B, May 2017, sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149763416301506*

10 *'Ethology, Interpersonal Neurobiology, and Play Insights into the Evolutionary Origin of the Arts', Ellen Dissayanake, American Journal of Play, Winter 2017, Volume 9, Number 2 journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/9-2-article-1-ethology.pdf*

11 *Antonio Damasio and Manuel Castells in conversation, ALOUD @ Los Angeles Central Library Feb 6, 2017, youtube.com/watch?v=ONByvKuMa4w*

12 *Her excellent career website is lisafeldmanbarrett.com*

13 *"The Secret History of Emotions", Lisa Feldman Barrett, Chronicle of Higher Education, March 5, 2017 chronicle.com/article/the-secret-history-of-emotions/*

CO-HOUSING

Communality is a pre-requisite to a degrowth future. This is true in housing as much as any sphere as we imagine moving beyond ownership. Sarah Glynn on a home for everyone.

IN CO-HOUSING PEOPLE live in planned communities with shared spaces and facilities as well as their own private space. For many, this can only be a dream, because there is so little co-housing available. Now that the pandemic has increased awareness of the importance of community and of the trauma of loneliness, co-housing may feature in many more dreams. Perhaps this can help make it a growing reality.

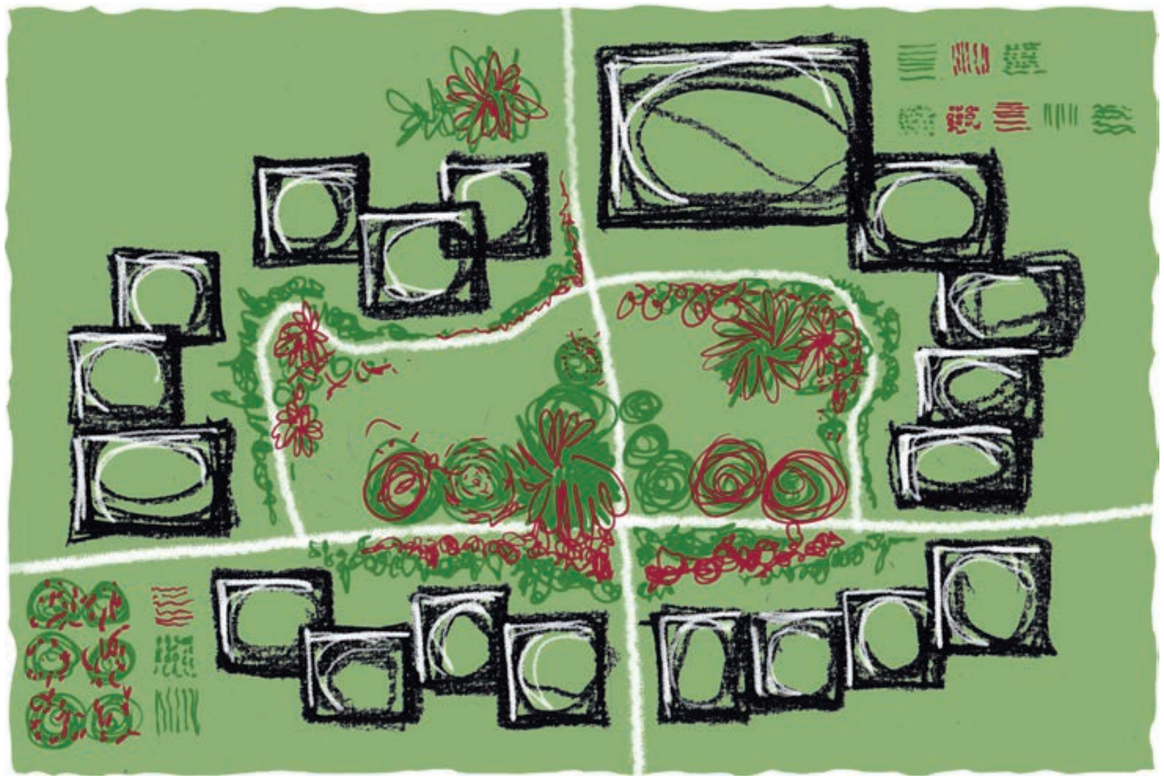
Co-housing helps people live as part of a *community*, facilitating the everyday interactions that keep us connected, as well as deeper friendships and more practical bonds.

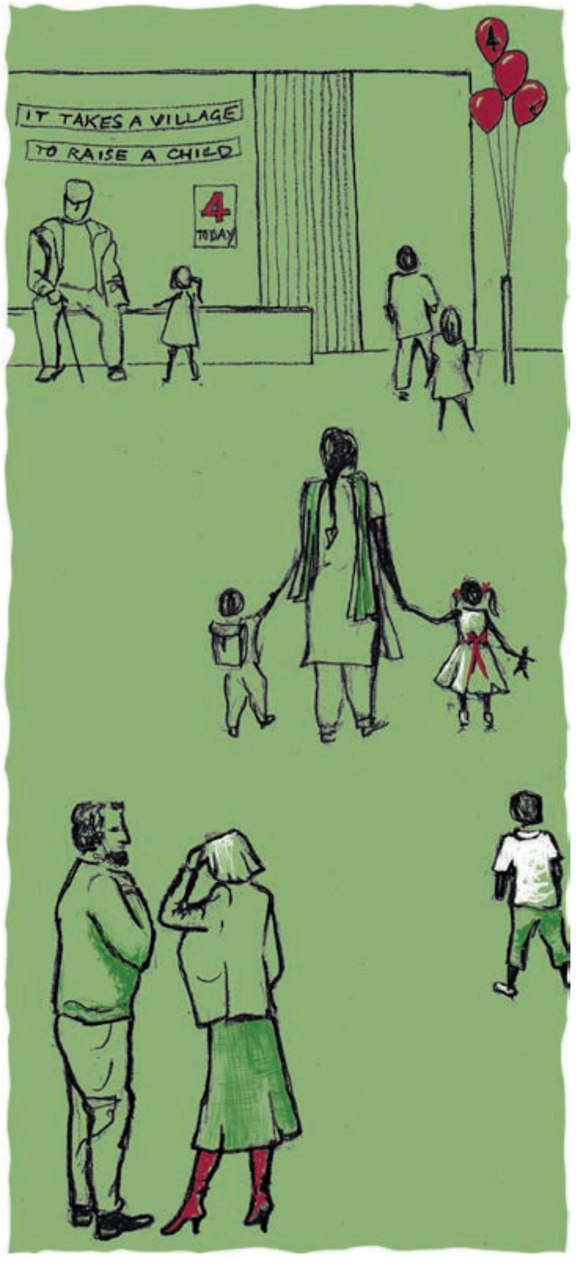
There is *no need to be lonely*, but still space to be alone.

Building a community together provides opportunities to *share skills* and give *mutual support*.

Shared communal facilities allow co-housing to make good use of limited space. Gardens and community rooms can be generously proportioned, while private areas can be kept smaller, and the overall complex remains compact. The *effective use of space* saves both money and energy, and *shared facilities* could include a carpool or energy-efficient laundry or heating system. In a compact city, distances to the building blocks of daily life can be kept shorter.

If co-housing is combined with a well-thought-out funding scheme, this can help create balanced communities that continue to be affordable for all who live there. ■





Characterised as 'peripheral' even within Scotland and caught in a historical matrix of coloniality and 'under-development' - the Highlands and Islands holds an emerging network of possibility.

THE CARRYING STREAM: TOWARDS A PLURALITY OF POSSIBILITIES

By Ainslie Roddick, Cáit O'Neill McCullagh, Charlotte Mountford, Jo Rodgers, Kirsten Body, Lauren Pyott, Lisa MacDonald, Mairi McFadyen, Philomena de Lima and Raghnaid Sandilands. Art by Fadzai Mwakutuya.

THIS COLLABORATIVE ESSAY reflects multiple voices on degrowth from a Highlands and Islands, or Gàidhealtachd, perspective. From Loch Ness to Caithness, Ullapool to the Isle of Skye, we are a 'rurally syndicated' gathering of women – artists, researchers, educators, producers, programmers, practitioners – each living and working in communities across this vast, dispersed and diverse region. Some of us have grown up here, some of us have lived and worked here for many years and others are finding our belonging in this place, having made our home here much more recently.

In the context of Scotland's centralised, urbanised and growth-oriented society, the Highlands and Islands are viewed by many as 'on the edge.' With today's unprecedented post-Covid economic decline and the loss of widespread EU funding through Brexit, there are many socio-economic challenges facing the marginalised communities of this region. The entangled legacies of coloniality and the effects of growth capitalism are strongly implicated in these challenges: inequitable patterns of land ownership, lack of access to housing, fragile local economies, the impacts of over-tourism, the decline of Gaelic in its heartlands and the commodification of history, culture and creativity. Primary industries have rescinded, while service industries have grown.

We suggest here that the Highlands and Islands have a vital role to play in Scotland's degrowth future. Degrowth is a way of naming a vision and practice that describes the kinds of relationships between people, resources and power that foster community resilience, ecological stewardship, democratised decision making, creativity and conviviality. We reflect here on where we each see the roots and shoots of degrowth emerging in our own places, lives, work and practice as a plurality of possibilities.

FIRSTLY, Cáit O'Neill McCullagh reflects from her home in Easter Ross on how this collaboration, the gathering, began. Currently researching with communities connecting heritage and learning towards sustainability in Orkney and Shetland, Cáit practices co-curating as a public ethnology, co-producing exhibitions, films and new writing with people across the Highlands and Islands.[1] She has curated in museums in Lismore, Ross and Inverness.

THE GATHERING

MEETING TO SHARE news, inspirations, concerns, and ideas for ways of working together – via video calls and inevitable 'DMs' – *the gathering* appears like so many of the cyber-ventures that have emerged due to the conditions of Covid-19. In a newly-focused world of blended learning and Zoom seminars, 'community transmission' – once mediated from mouths to ears, and in the tacit sharing of everyday living, but now a source of viral fear – is increasingly virtual. Yet, we see now that *the gathering* was also another adaptive step into the ongoing of a 'carrying stream.'[2] This *carrying* is the continuum of Highlands and Islands traditions and practices nurtured, through times, as particular responses in specific environments. These practices express the critical and creative adaptivity of those who have been able and/or have chosen to *stay* here.

We live in northern latitudes susceptible to the extremes of the anthropogenic climate crisis. We also inhabit the legacies of inequitable and unjust land ownership patterns. Our open and fragile ecologies are vulnerable to successive iterations of extractive enterprise – including single species afforestation, fossil fuel entanglements and mass tourism. These anthropocene traces challenge relational living between people, and between people and place, abstracting our relationships to nature. Additionally, our geography appears to predispose living in dispersed, atomised communities. Yet, this seeming wildness – or candidate 're-wilding' of often once-peopled land – owes more to long, localised genealogies of Imperialism. These 'uncanny hauntings'[3] of multiple colonialisms – internal and worldly complicit – and historicities of peripheral positioning by agents outwith our locale, influence life here, yet. Over time, these influences have contributed both to diminishing local populations and to undermining opportunities to sustain ecologically, culturally, politically and materially.

There are other ways of seeing that these lenses of environments, historicities and social actions afford. These include considering the historic *needs* of people making home in our places – living in collaborative, seasonally attuned conviviality – as *gifts* of becoming. Cooperating for growing, harvesting, weaving, for the empirical development of knowledges about where fish will shoal, which plants will heal, and for discerning how and where to stay and make dwelling, the community transmissions of knowledge-in-language cultures – expressed in story, music, visual arts and performance – have often knit people in our places into highly socially connective communities.

The gathering represents what Ivan Illich has identified as 'critical technology.'[4] Like the *cèilidh*, *hairst* and *hamefaerin*, it is another iteration of such knowledge sharing. Practicing 'potential history',[5] we gather to share useful pasts, consider how these contribute to and renovate present knowledges, and imagine assembling possible futures. *The gathering* emerged from friendships founded on these shared ≫

interests, and our various ways of nurturing and deliberating them through creative, critical work in an 'undercommons' – *with* and *for* people.[6] Alongside and in communities, we work in arts, heritages, and learning and research. By deliberating collaboratively our communal actions and the meanings we make of them in these 'spaces of appearance'[7], we open up the traditions that shape our people-places to ask together with historian-activist, Ariella Azoulay, how are we making 'traditions of what *can* be'?[8]

Gaelic – language of and in our places – inspires us in this future-assembling of knowing *how to know* what sustains people and homes; our *oikos*. It connects our reflecting with these 'Own' ecologies to our deepening empathy with others seeking sustainability and justice throughout the world. This integrative empathy is held in the word *dùthchas* – a 'unity existing between land, people, all living creatures, nature and culture.'[9] It expresses, as Alan Riach proposes, traditional prefiguring of our contemporary concerns for ecological balance. In this *oikos* balancing *with* and *for* all being – in local and world-facing lives – we place our *gathering* into the 'carrying stream', transmitting our hopes and intentions to 'leave no-one behind.'[10]

ENTANGLED LEGACIES

THE 'UNCANNY HAUNTINGS' of colonial legacies, in all their guises, should inform how we understand the various traditions and heritages within the Highlands and Islands, both historically and today. As researcher Lauren Pyott reminds us, the pioneering work of David Alston has uncovered the breadth and depth of Highland involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, something which touched upon the lives of many in the region, whether directly or indirectly.[11]

Contemporary land ownership patterns are still rooted in historical injustices, tied both to the legacy of the Highland Clearances and, as recent research has confirmed, slavery-derived wealth was used 200 hundred years ago to enclose land into large estates.[12] The landscape was then used to distract from the reality of this transformation through romantic narratives and a visual culture of sublime, people-less wilderness – an elite way of seeing that served the interests of landed power. Symbolic of this era is the iconic image of Landseer's 'Monarch of the Glen' (1851). Exploitative forms of tourism, Lauren argues, can serve a similar process, with the perpetuation of this way of seeing alongside the inexorable spread of holiday lets transforming the land and communities of the Highlands into a place where young people are unable to find or afford homes.

Many would argue that communities in the Highlands and Islands are reliant on tourism and the revenue it brings. The promotion of this region as a tourist destination does generate jobs and profits for some; at the same time, mass tourism – as an engine of economic growth – is complicit with global capitalism's depthless markets and precarious labour, it commodifies cultures and is implicated in global climate breakdown through mass international travel. The impacts of over-tourism in fragile communities are stark. Writing from Achiltibuie in the Coigach peninsula, Lisa MacDonald asks,

"Are we really so dependent on tourism that our own young families can't find homes? The current rate of through-put feels industrial, even abusive. It creates hostility, not hospitality. The same is true in Skye, and I can see it happening all along the NC500: where folk used to be delighted that visitors wanted to come here, now it is simply too much, and we become irritable and unwelcoming. What are the ways in which we could reclaim the word 'hospitality'? Can we find ways to use local resources more sustainably?"

This is an increasing reality and one actively promoted by national and regional government agencies. The NC500 is an example of a marketised and marketising response to the Scottish Government's espousal of tourism as the single most important strand for Highlands and Islands local enterprise. It was dreamt up in this fossil-fuelled growth paradigm as a way of exploiting the opportunity (and culture and natures) in much the same way as colonial, extractive industries have been in the past: maximise profit, exploit the resource, minimise input to sustain the resource (people and environment). It has subsumed primary industry in terms of infrastructural support, with money being given for visitor attractions and car parks. Moreover, there is a clear lack of investment in infrastructure that allows tourism to feed back into the local economy, as opposed to just profiting certain businesses.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

ETHNOLOGIST AND WRITER Mairi McFadyen,[13] writing from Abriachan on the north side of Loch Ness, is a member of the Enough! Collective. In November 2020 she was a contributor to the online short course 'Degrowing the Economy, Regrowing our Lives' run by Enough! and the Centre for Human Ecology. The pursuit of growth, she writes, has suppressed and damaged many things that support the flourishing of life and its vital sustaining. Degrowth, in part, is about *regrowing* those lost capacities, within ourselves and in our communities.

As long as the fundamentals of our society rely on growth, the introduction of degrowth is very difficult – possible only in a 'society of degrowth' which we must *create ourselves*.[14] Degrowth is not a monolithic alternative to the existing capitalist status-quo; rather, it encompasses 'a matrix of alternatives' which 'opens up space for human creativity.' Imagining and assembling a degrowth future, then, is an invitation to adventure into a *plurality of possibilities*. At the roots of a degrowth society, this matrix of alternatives might be made up of community land trusts, community gardens, woodlands and farms, community energy initiatives, cooperatives of all kinds, artists' collectives, fair trade, food justice or food sovereignty groups, alternative currencies, not-for-profit community and social enterprises, systems of local exchange, tool libraries, seed libraries, repair cafés, voluntary arts groups, community heritage groups and climate or environmental action groups, among many other examples. The question is how to cultivate this degrowth potential, opening up opportunities and non-commodified spaces for individuals, groups and communities to connect, organise and create lasting change.

"Gaelic – language of and in our places – inspires us in this future-assembling of knowing how to know what sustains people and homes; our oikos."

There are countless such initiatives seeking alternative ways of living and working in the Highlands and Islands today. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many mutual aid groups emerged in local communities, and the Black Lives Matter movement globally has opened up some spaces for dialogue about addressing racism and decolonisation across different spheres in the region. Philomena de Lima, professor of Applied Sociology and Rural Studies – also involved in organic cheese making at one time – reminds us that the Highlands and Islands has provided a home to households and groups – from the region and those who have arrived here by accident or design – who have practised degrowth principles for decades. Little is known or written about these threads that form the fabric of the region. A few notable examples, she suggests, include: the off-grid Scoraig community on the West coast; organic farming and crofting households connected through Working Worldwide on Organic Farms (WWOOF); food buying groups across the Highlands from Tain, Skye to the Islands which were set up in the early 1980s and who sourced their food from Green City, a workers' cooperative based in Glasgow; from these groups emerged a demand for accessing food in the Highlands which led to Highland Wholefoods, a workers' cooperative set up in 1989; Clown Jewels, an arts project in the 1980s and 1990s which emerged from various individuals moving to the Highlands from communes in Perthshire and elsewhere and those living in the Highlands; and Reforesting Scotland, established in 1991, now a membership organisation concerned with the ecological and social regeneration of Scotland.

There is also a rich and radical heritage of activism and resistance. The story of community land ownership is vital here, a story in which the rural Highlands and Islands – Assynt, Eigg, Gigha, Harris – led the way for the urban movement. We can also find inspiration from those communities who have long demonstrated ways of living sustainably, not in a nostalgic or romantic sense, but in the radical sense of recovering lost knowledge and experience.

Far from being peripheral, the Highlands and Islands have a vital role to play in imagining and assembling Scotland's degrowth futures. In practice, degrowth is about seeking out the principles of reconnection, decolonisation and decentralisation to renew and strengthen local communities of place and interests. In the sections that follow, we highlight some diverse but confluent tributaries into this 'carrying stream.' ≫

PEOPLE AND PLACES

PHD RESEARCHER JO Rodgers, based in Glengarry, is a co-organiser of 'The Edge' research theme at the University of the Highlands and Islands.[15] Through monthly seminars, blog articles and photography, this forum offers a rich, interdisciplinary space for exploring and creatively expressing the histories, contemporary experiences and potential futures of people living, working and researching in so-called 'peripheries.' Her own doctoral research explores the interplay between roots-seeking travel and heritage in the island of Tiree from the perspectives of both islanders and visitors. Jo is also a (voluntary) director of Glengarry Community Woodlands and the Development Officer at the Community Woodlands Association, which supports Scotland's growing network of community woodland groups, many of whom are exploring communal and ecological practices rooted in degrowth principles.

Mairi is also a voluntary director at The Shieling Project / *Pròiseact na h-Àirigh in Glenstrathfarrar*.[16] The tradition of 'the shieling' – the summer pastures where people used to graze cattle, living in huts or shelters on common land – is a motif and context here for place-based learning about crofting, horticulture, green building, food growing and cooking, renewable technologies, traditional skills, crafts and culture. The project is in part inspired by the GalGael trust in Glasgow, a community organisation re-kindling community through *learning by doing*.[17] The Shieling too embodies degrowth principles; it's about living in right relationship with the land, exploring the landscape's past to help shape a more resilient future.

Lisa MacDonald is a teacher, writer, singer and crofter in Achiltibuie. She is particularly interested in connections – between people and place, between past, present and future, between Gaelic language and heritage, between rights and responsibilities, and all across the integrated ecosystem that is this world. She writes,

"For me, degrowth is about reclaiming self-sufficiency. There is so much land that we could grow things on, live on, raise children and hens and cows, but we can't because it belongs to some landowner far away. The Green Bowl in Elphin have done a brilliant job of creating a crofters' co-operative who grow things locally and then organise the picking up of supplies and the delivery of orders from meat and eggs to vegetables and baking. We shouldn't need to rely on vast supermarkets shipping food from goodness-knows-where, at a huge environmental and social cost. Until we get to organising real land reform, we could all grow wee bits in our gardens and organise sharing. It gives us back confidence in ourselves and in the land – and in our place on it. It also connects us to each other within communities: I have hens, you bake – beautiful!"

Food sovereignty is a vital part of degrowth. Earlier this year, the Highland Good Food Conversation took place online, bringing together farmers, crofters, growers, bakers, cooks and community groups.[18] The conference provided an opportunity for people to work together and come up with tangible actions that will contribute to achieving a more just, sustainable food system in the region. Accompanying the conference was a blog and series of podcasts, which explored themes such as regenerative farming, crofting, micro dairies, grain and bread production, aquaculture and the rise in community fridges.

Raghnaid Sandilands – writer, independent publisher and Gaelic translator[19] – is involved with several creative community projects in Strathnairn on the south side of Loch Ness. *Lios na Feàrnaig* / Fearnag Growers is a community garden in Farr Estate, host to events, projects and art workshops. The garden's most recent venture will see Col Gordon, a director of 'Scotland the Bread'[20] run a small heritage grain project, supporting the growing, harvesting and processing of old grain varieties – from seed to slice! Raghnaid is also involved with the local *Fèis* and with 'Farr Conversations' – a talk series set up in 2014 to 'oil the wheels of engagement with issues affecting Scotland by hosting lively nights in one Highland hall.' Farr Conversations has explored issues such as land reform and housing alongside music, songs and stories. For Raghnaid, this local activism is about inviting people to take agency in their own place, to 'occupy the local hall' and to be part of a story that is slowly accruing and unfolding. She describes this work as 'cultural darning and mending' – the act of finding disconnected threads from the past and weaving them back together with purpose. She writes,

"Whatever diminishment of culture and landscape might have taken place, we can make imaginative connections that cut across time, to seek out knowledge and be part of a process that allows us, perhaps, to begin to create the circumstances necessary for transformation and change."

Lauren Pyott is a researcher, cultural organiser and renters' rights activist based in Inverness. Her previous research explored decoloniality and the politics of solidarity in the arts, and she is now involved in forming a Highland branch of the tenancy union Living Rent.[21] She is also setting up a social enterprise in Inverness called Clachworks, which is working towards creating an open space for making and remaking, with a vision for a tool library, open-access workshop, and community garden.[22]

"Degrowth and decoloniality are the two foundational elements that drove Clachworks from its inception and can only be properly understood in tandem. While the recent flourishing of 'upcycling' projects and growing interest in the circular economy are long overdue, Clachworks realises that this is nothing new. The crofting culture that once sustained human populations across the Highlands was necessarily circular, based on a synergetic relationship between the land, the lives inhabiting it and what they could produce."

The circular economy's tenets of 'make, remake, reuse' were encoded in the very lifestyle and economic reality of subsistence farming in the region. The linear model of 'take, make, use, discard', which so successfully replaced it, should not only be seen as an environmental disaster, but also as a colonial act of what Mignolo terms 'epistemicide': the erasure of ways of thinking and being in the world.[23] Clachworks seeks to make critical connections between past and present, local and global, providing tools for making and remaking the world we live in.

Kirsten Body is a visual arts producer also based in Inverness. She works for the Scottish Artists' Union and is a founding member of the artist-led collective Circus Artspace, established in 2019.[24] Circus is committed to supporting graduate artists in the Highlands and to building a public programme around contemporary visual arts. In 2021, this will include new billboard commissions, an off-grid residency with Black Isle Permaculture and Arts and Inverness' first Zine Festival. She writes,

"Circus want our 2021 programme to track the shifting demographic of the Highlands and Islands and focus on the hidden, forgotten and unheard voices within our community. We want to diverge from Highland cliches and traditional notions of romanticism to reveal unexplored narratives and illustrate the interweaving, international cultures of our place. We want to amplify a wider diversity of voices, places and experiences and promote equality, with a particular focus on non-dominant narratives and communities."

Earlier this year, Circus collaborated with artist Fadzai Mwakutuya to host an informal online conversation called 'Ubuntu // Daondachd // Humanity' about intersectional topics, including the experience of and reception to migrations – people leaving, returning and coming to the Highlands and Islands. Fadzai, from Zimbabwe and based in the off-grid community of Scoraig near Ullapool, is an artist who makes thought provoking socially engaged artwork under the name Afro Art Lab.[25] She is also a member of the Repository of the Undercommons (RotU), a curator/artist residency borne out of Enough!

"Far from being peripheral, the Highlands and Islands have a vital role to play in imagining and assembling Scotland's degrowth futures. In practice, degrowth is about seeking out the principles of reconnection, decolonisation and decentralisation interests."

as a way to '(re)imagine alternatives, (re)create cultural codes, messages and values for our future(s).' She writes,

"In my art practice I use the concepts of degrowth and decolonisation abstractly in the choice of subject matter and materials whilst creating artwork. Degrowth has always been a way of life in developed countries in Africa; we do need to decolonise though, as Africans, and unlearn the ways of the west as we imagine them. I often remark on how this cycle of change is irrevocably enshrined in humanity, the constant conflict between perpetual efforts to campaign against narratives of power structures and encourage reform processes."

Charlotte Mountford is also involved in socially engaged art practice. She is a cultural producer and programmer, a Mancunian who moved to the Highlands to become co-director of Lyth Arts Centre in Caithness (LAC).[26] She writes, "I love my role here, as it allows me to practice radical localism and challenge conceptions about what it means to be 'rural'." She reflects,

"The conditions of COVID-19 provided an opportunity to really rethink how we work as an organisation. In a normal year, LAC would present hundreds of events from artists and creatives from all over the world. Reflecting, it is possible to see how extractive this is as a practice, particularly the world of international touring; how unsustainable it is for poorly paid artists and our environment. The pandemic has provided us with a blue-print for future working, notably in the development of new projects like CAIR: Caithness Artists in Residence. 'Cair / Cayr' is a Scots word which means to return to a place where you have been before. I initially thought this meant* Déjà vu*, but then realised 'cair' doesn't feel accidental – it is a deliberate return. Many of us thought we wanted to return to the normal we had before coronavirus, but I don't. Where I actually want to return to is a place we have all been before; a place of home and of community."

CAIR embeds artists with distinct Caithness communities, exploring how LAC can work with artists and facilitate creative responses to local problems, encouraging creative cultural activism and prioritising an artist and community-centric approach to recovery after coronavirus. The artists are all based in Caithness, mostly in the communities they are working with. Instead of a one-off workshop by a visiting artist, the artists are working with their matched communities over the next six months, co-designing a bespoke programme of work that will explore local themes and issues:

"We can use artistic skills to capture perceptions and share them. As social practitioners, everything we do is inscribed in a place and time. What we are trying to do is not marketising placemaking but* place-being *and commonplacing; a creative assemblage representing the multi-faceted responses and encounters of a place."[27]

"We can use artistic skills to capture perceptions and share them. As social practitioners, everything we do is inscribed in a place and time."

Ainslie Roddick moved from Glasgow to become director of ATLAS Arts[28] in Portree at the end of 2019. ATLAS organises collective art projects across Skye, Raasay and Lochalsh, and has a growing library of zines, seeds, equipment, and a studio for making and binding books. Building on a legacy of projects invested in local ecologies, their new team is beginning to imagine how the organisation will work and feel in the years ahead. Exploring 'Plural Futures' through conversation, meals and artist projects, the programme is taking shape through gatherings and bodies of work which centre complexity in belonging. The School of Plural Futures began in 2021, an alternative school led by folk aged 17-25 on Skye, exploring global climate justice as it relates to the lived reality and history of the locale, and the various outcomes and desires of the school will begin to inform ATLAS' future work. As this evolves, reflecting on the *the gathering*, Ainslie writes,

"I am grateful to this gathering of critical friends in supporting a slowness that is not too slow, and for the succinct reminders of the mistakes, bad intentions, historical repetitions, and the power of stories."

Cáit shares some final thoughts concerning how *the gathering* is a becoming of tradition; not just the traditions of what has been, but for what can be. The recognition that 'community transmission' enables the virus to grow has restricted our convivial opportunities for tacit carrying, including adapting those traditions, knowledges, and practices that are vital for resourcing people-places through the constant certainty of change – what Raghnaid has called our 'cultural darning and mending'. The pandemic has restricted our spaces for sharing these 'critical technologies', including the affordance to collaborate in examining the narratives that shape us and, as Fadzai reminds us, to practice the reflexivity that 'shifts' our mindsets towards the futures we are making. While *the gathering* emerged as a particular environmental response, in a fragile environment being pushed to further precarity, it is also a creative, critical social action of transmitting the expressions of our ecological connectivity, an enacting of our intention to be a reflexive resource. In collectively considering and responding – as Ainslie says, being 'slow but not too slow' – we examine and embody practices of 'carrying', balancing unity between all being; making home – *oikos* – in collaboration with our local and world ecologies together.

We know, and we share, that this particular *and* connective 'worlding' requires inhabiting discomfort zones. Deepening reflexivity, undertaking Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience'[29] – degrowing and decolonising thinking and acting to enable new ways of knowledge – requires a commitment to engage in these discomforts, to *need* learning. This dynamic, relational anticipating, assembling and embodying is an inhabiting of specific lived experiences, and a reaching out in necessary connectivity. Gathering to share actions, examine contexts, and imagine more sustaining and just futures, is emerging to us as we experience it – stepping into the flow, finding our feet, being disturbed into shifting position, and, together, finding how to balance. This reflects the need-and-gift balancing of *dùthchas*, responding to the new particular needs of Highlands and Islands dwellers – including ourselves – in this time of pandemic, from the perspective of the 'carrying stream.' ■

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SCOTLAND QUO VADIS?

"To see ourselves as others see us." – From Germany Joachim Spangenberg shares a view of Scotland as a post-Brexit, pre-independent model for degrowth and survival. Photos by Stewart Bremner.

SCOTLAND IS A country facing challenges while heading for several transitions simultaneously, but also blessed by opportunities. Working to realise them is urgent to make Scotland future-proof – a green country with a clean economy and solidarity society. Transforming the economy by physical degrowth would be active work towards independence, first within the political restrictions of the UK, then possibly with extended competences in devolution (usually the offer to buy off independence votes), and finally in an independent state. Political independence might even come too early if the journey towards degrowth and sufficiency has not made sufficient progress by that date.

INDEPENDENCE? WHICH INDEPENDENCE?

IF THE MAJORITY of Scottish citizens will support independence, in a democratic county, the way forward would be obvious. Or is it?

Let's first scrutinise what "independence", this totemic catchword, really means, and then have a look at processes, strategies and results. Totems symbolise important desires, but rarely give the full picture as believers in "sovereignty" south of the Scottish border are just realising.

First of all, independence is neither a state nor an act, but a process, as the fuK (formerly united Kingdom) is just experiencing; it comprises at least cultural, economic and political independence plus an established independent reputation.

Cultural independence without political independence is only possible with a high degree of autonomy, while the UK is probably the most centralised state in Western and Central Europe (an achievement given the competition of France, Spain, Poland and Hungary). In respecting mutually diverging preferences and not imposing those of one side upon the other, an option evaporated at the latest since the Westminster government decision to leave the EU and take Scotland (unlike Northern Ireland).

So the call for political independence is plausible, but not enough: political independence without economic independence is but a chimera, and how difficult it can be to gain that status is something the UK government is just learning on the fly (to avoid misunderstandings, economic independence does not imply a strive for autarky, but trade between independent states with their own national economies, not of one state with its appendix). An established independent reputation requires a distinguishable profile in all three dimensions, and targeted action and communication for its establishment.

CULTURAL INDEPENDENCE

REGARDING THE CULTURAL independence, Scotland has gained its own profile as a rather normal northern European nation with an inclination for social justice, a green (and blue) environment, participatory democracy and a functioning welfare state. Productivity is as high as in England, the population is well educated, and many universities are world-beating. However, it is suffering a bit from its political environment, a little England nation which is an extreme outlier compared to the rest of Europe. In England, neoliberal attitudes are running deep (according to a Kings College London study, about half of the Britons – 84% of them English – blame people becoming unemployed in the COVID crisis that losing their job was their own fault[1]). This attitude has been propagated and exploited by an undemocratic and increasingly illiberal, cronyism driven political-economic system on top of a weak and shrinking industrial base (accelerated by Brexit) and a dominating financial industry mainly located in London. Unfortunately, there have been some spill-overs into Scotland, partly enforced by UK law, but also partly adopted by mainstream politics.

For instance, as a result of UK politics, local communities have been suffering from austerity like communities across the UK, and have been transformed geographically and functionally through the introduction of the new public management in 1975.

In the higher education system, Scotland does not only host the best university in the UK, but also many of its more fragile and most commercialised ones. In both cases economic the effective provision of public services – higher education is an almost cost-free service in most European countries – are hampered by budget constraints.

The neoliberal obsession with economic growth prevents rational analysis of needs, and undermines key environmental and social policy requirements. Fortunately for Scotland, some of its traditions also in these fields have deep roots and high resilience – its local jurisdiction, for example, reaching back 700 years, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities some 500 years, with 1975 marking the transition of local authorities from a model resembling European traditions to the new public management approach preferred in the Anglosphere since the Thatcher and Reagan times.

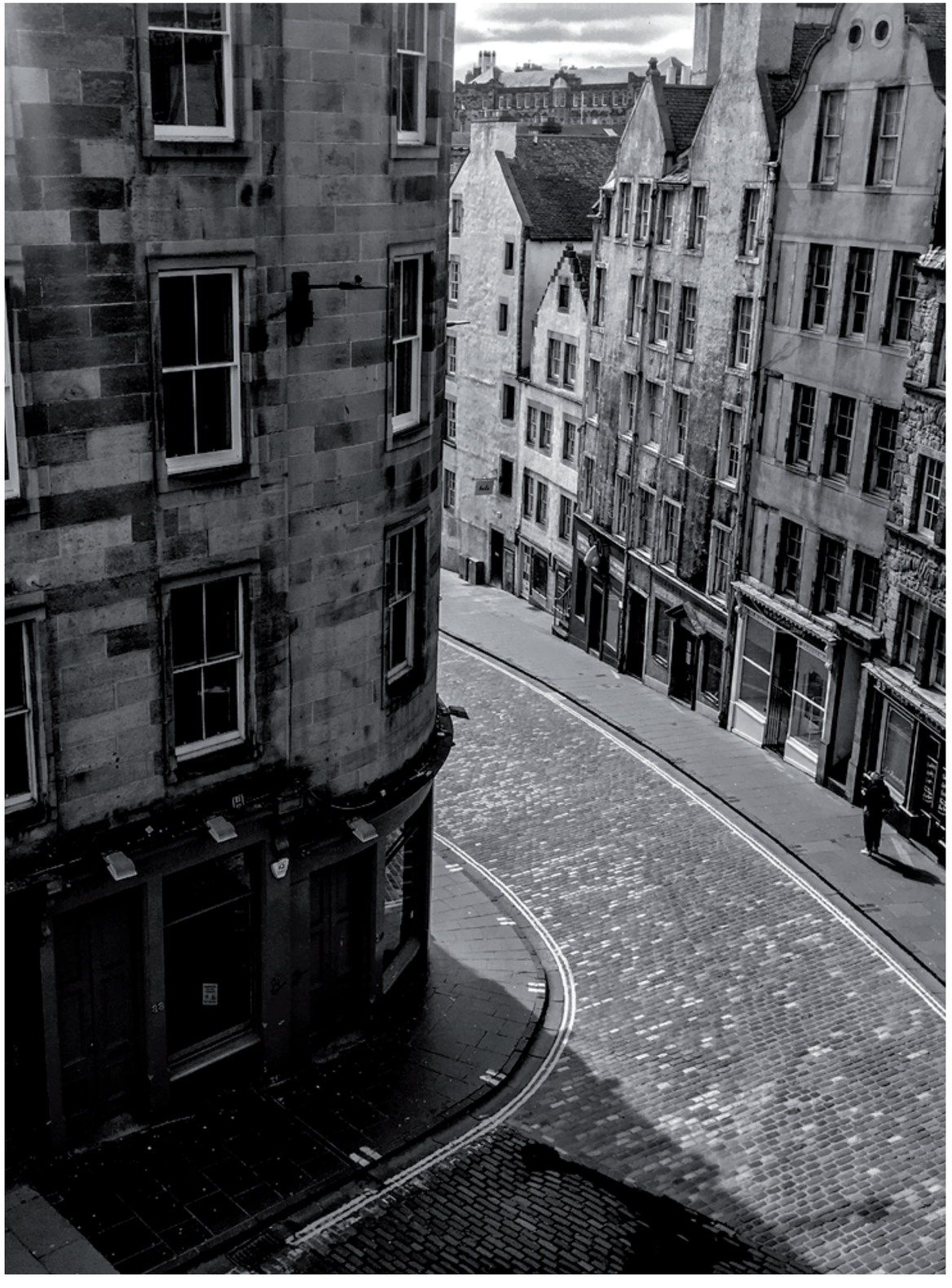
POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

SO WHILE A political *divorce* may be as long away as Mr. Johnson stays his course, there is some repair work to be done in the Scottish society and its institutional structures. Dismantling (part of) the Wheatley reforms, complementing the reminder that with a maximum of local citizen participation would overcome an important legacy of Thatcherite times.

Other elements – constrained by resources for the time being, but groundwork is possible – would be doing whatever is possible to restore the public services slashed under austerity, in particular at the local level, including functioning, decentralised health care system. Or take the higher education: if it is considered not a market good but a public good, it should be as freely accessible as the NHS.

Have in mind that the classification of goods, whether as public, meritocratic, common pool or private market goods is a societal decision, and independence includes rethinking the current patterns, based on Scottish values and preferences. Strengthening local authorities would also release civil society from a major burden and permit focussing its energies more on the future than on plastering over the cracks of a broken system: as admirable as the efforts of NGOs and charities are, it is a shame that they have to substitute for lacking public services instead of offering innovation and added value.

All of this implies that winning a referendum is not the only strategy to pursue independence – it may even be more important to do the basic preparations now which would permit, once self- ≫



determination over the tax income has been achieved, to build new and better. Admittedly, it is a bit like refurbishing a ship while sailing it – but better to do it before the storms resulting from the divorce will sink the boat. However, redesigning governance and institutions, under the limitations prevailing, requires fresh thinking and public discourses regarding societal preferences and social practices. The symptoms of aspects of English conservatism cannot be overcome – not even after political independence – if the Scottish government still feels bound to neoliberal politics of deregulation, free markets and balanced budgets. The tide has turned in Europe in this respect (witness the European Green Deal and the growing discussions about Degrowth or the role of the state): the SNP should rethink what is an appropriate economic policy perspective for Scotland, in particular when the scheduled path leads back into the EU.

WITH DEGROWTH AND SUFFICIENCY FROM PROBLEM-CAUSING TO PROBLEM-SOLVING POLICIES

ACCORDING TO THE recent study of the London School of Economics, leaving the UK would be twice to thrice as expensive for Scotland as having been taken out of the EU via Brexit. However, such figures are always based on assumptions, and in this case the assumption is a rather unchanged economic structure and policy, and continued economic dependence on England. However, if these assumptions are changed, the result will be different.

I here argue that a sustainable transformation of the economy, significantly reducing its resource consumption, i.e. with physical degrowth, can be a game changer for a transition towards both sustainability and economic independence.

So what does 'physical degrowth' mean?

It is generally known that fossil fuel consumption drives the climate crisis, land use change drives biodiversity loss in particular in agricultural areas, and material flows destroy landscape and habitats while underpinning climate and biodiversity problems. Hence without a significant reduction of the environmental pressures from resource consumption, it will neither be possible to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals, nor to guard the natural assets making up for a significant part of the wealth of Scotland. Current policies, however, are not dedicated to safeguarding assets, but to liquidate the stocks of natural wealth as only the sales but not the stocks count for the GDP, and GDP growth is the fetish of (neo)liberal policies. Consequently, degrowth is not about decreasing the GDP but rejects this fetish. Instead degrowth aims at reducing resource consumption to enable people to "living well within planetary boundaries" (Jonathon Porritt) or "living well, within the limits of our planet" (the EU 2050 target). This requires to complement the decarbonisation of the energy system with a dematerialisation of production and consumption, and efficiency with sufficiency.

As this may appear as if explaining one dubious new term by using other, just as dubious ones, let me give another round of explanations. While efficiency is well known as 'making more output from the same input' (hardly ever 'using less input for the same output', a way to describe dematerialisation), sufficiency policy can be defined as 'enough for every need'. This implies that neither insufficient resource access like energy poverty, nor the squandering of resources beyond human needs is accepted. While human needs are limited, what is infinite is the number of potential satisfiers for these needs. Sufficiency is then to find resource light satisfiers for human needs, many of which will be communication, social bounds and other social processes, rather than market goods. And even the definition of good consumer goods and their value would change: if an industrial quality vacuum cleaner survives twenty times as many uses as a household cleaner, but costs twice as much, the equipment cost per use decreases by 90%.

Cars are essentially not auto*mobiles* but auto*stabiles*, standing uselessly around and occupying public space between 22 and 23 ½ hours per day; over a lifetime of twelve years they are used three months to one year. Sharing could increase the daily use time from one to ten hours, driving the cost of cars per kilometer down 80% even if a doubling of prices for better quality is assumed.

Significant reductions in resource consumption (and sales, and hence GDP) would occur without any decrease in services enjoyed. Of course, such a transformation would require creating new decent employment opportunities for idle production workers in the reproduction sector of care, maintenance and repair. The higher price of better quality goods is an opportunity for the Scottish banking sector to come forward with loan and credit schemes which finance the extra cost with payback coming from the subsequent savings.

Degrowth and sufficiency would restructure input and output, supply and demand, reducing resource consumption and hence import needs, and moderate the export volumes required for a balanced trade. Currently about two-thirds of all Scottish imports come from the rest of the UK, and 60% of its exports go there – degrowth and sufficiency would change that. Regarding imports, the collapse and subsequent re-establishment of supply chains in the Corona crisis, and following Brexit, has shown that import restructuring is indeed possible, while some more proximate production in regional clusters is helpful for enhanced resilience. Finding new export markets is not as serious a challenge as the LSE assumed, as products for sustainable consumption are new and meet the demands of growing consumer groups; they are also in line with the recent developments of EU law to make repairability of a range of consumer goods and the extended availability of spare parts mandatory. These are but first steps of 'Turning the Trends Together', as the 8th EU Environmental Action Programme is titled.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE: MINIMISING RISKS

CURRENTLY ABOUT two-thirds of all Scottish imports come from the rest of the UK, and 60% of its exports go there – economic independence needs to change that.

Regarding import, the collapse and subsequent re-establishment of supply chains in the Corona crisis, and following Brexit, has shown that import substitution is indeed possible while some more proximate production in regional clusters is helpful for enhanced resilience. But finding new export markets is a serious challenge and will take time – if you assume, as the LSE did, that the portfolio to be sold remains the same. This implies that structural change, happening anyway all over the world, must be given a direction supporting both sustainability and enhanced economic independence.

To make an independent Scotland truly independent, it must gain economic self-determination as well – which of course would not be a splendid isolation from the outside world, no 'Scotland first' as some opponents might assert; the dedication to join the Single Market again demonstrates how nonsensical such suspicions are. But is should have its own industrial policy and development, and beyond fishing, tourism and whisky an economic portfolio which is attractive to EU partners, oriented towards the 2050 vision of the 7th Environmental Action Programme (7th EAP) titled 'Living well, within the limits of our planet', motivated by the 8th EAP 'Turning the Trends Together' and in compliance with the European Green Deal.

Both tasks are deeply intertwined. A big income source of the past has been the oil industry, which is in decline since the beginning of the century and must be phased out by 2050 in a climate neutral EU – 2040 would be a better target line from a climate policy perspective. This means that not only a significant number of jobs will be lost in that sector, but it is very well paid jobs – something to have in mind when looking for substitutes.

This is also the challenge when jobs in the financial industry sector are lost. Although having been shrinking significantly in the last decade, and although in Scotland financial services have a lower share of GDP than for the UK as a whole, the sector is still outsized for Scotland's own economy, and a risk for its economic resilience. By 2020, Edinburgh was ranked 17th in the world for its financial services sector, and 6th in Western Europe, according to the Global Financial Services Centres Index, with more than 80,000 professionals employed directly by Scottish financial services industry.

Throughout history, the financial sector has been an assertion of national identity, a source of some pride and a bulwark for the Scottish economy against being run from London. However, since 1979, management of the UK economy (including Scotland) has followed a broadly laissez-faire approach, including the financial sector and the Bank of England as Scotland's central bank. The thrive for deregulation the economy, including the banking sector, was one of the reasons doe the financial crisis starting 2008 – Adam Smith, having experienced the 1772 banking crash in Edinburgh, had warned not to include banking into the deregulation processes he favoured. In a currency union with the rest of the UK, the Bank of England would remain the lender of last resort (an option the Tories reject) – but an independent Scotland would have to turn to the Bank of England and the Treasury to protect its savers. In the longer turn, despite its strength in fintech and multiple start-ups, an oversized and vibrant financial industry is a risk as much as an asset, and to become rather dull and conservative again would safeguard the Scottish economy against the risks of volatile financial markets Hence a capable central bank acting in line with Scottish interests is required to avoid threats to the national budget. Let the banks move their headquarters, their top management and with it the risks and responsibilities – but keep the back offices jobs in Scotland where rents are a little more than half the price of London, and qualified personnel is abundant. However, that implies a new strategy: not growth of volume and risks, but degrowth of the sector.

Finally, there is another sector to be mentioned which is hardly compatible with a sustainable, environmentally benign future development: mining and quarrying. Globally mining

"A European Scotland must be prepared to re-enter a changed community, and for the role to play within it. Striving for economic independence

is one of the most destructive industries, causing massive energy consumption, material flows and biodiversity loss. Scottish industrial policy should aim at phasing out such dinosaurs as mining zinc, and minerals, even if that due to their local economic importance may require targeted measures to provide alternatives.

As the English navy will not have its ships built in an independent Scotland, Glasgow as the hub of the UK's shipbuilding industry must look out for new niches (anyway, the Westminster U-turn to increasing the stock of nuclear missiles and placing them in Scotland is a toxic gift). Fortunately, there are alternatives: take for instance ship recycling which is so far mostly done under horrible environmental and working conditions in South Asia. It could turn into a clean source of employment and resources for the industry, in particular when 'ships' includes the oil platforms and installations being dismantled and recycled when the North Sea oil production is phased out, and the offshore wind and wave power installations when they meet their time.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

EUROPE IS UNDERGOING massive societal and industrial change, with the European Green Deal just the tip of the iceberg (a large tip, admittedly). A European Scotland must be prepared to re-enter a changed community, and for the role to play within it. Striving for economic independence for Scotland implies pursuing a productive, resilient and fairer economic model, delivering long-term sustainability and economic opportunity for all. Fortunately, the prevailing structure of the Scottish industry offers a variety of opportunities for this, and for playing an important role in a changing Europe.

Scotland was one of the industrial powerhouses of Europe from the time of the Industrial Revolution onwards. This left a legacy in the diversity of goods and services which Scotland produces, from traditional ones like textiles and whisky to jet engines, buses and ships, computer software and microelectronics, as well as banking, insurance, investment management and other related financial services. This history, if modernised, offers opportunities for the future (but the 'modernised' is crucial – think of the huge tracks of land for hunting and shooting for a tiny percentage of people, often at the expense of Scottish biodiversity). For instance, the food industry sector is a quality producer, and with the EU "Farm to Fork" strategy, the Chemical Strategy and the Zero Pollution aiming at reducing pesticide use and toxicity by half in the next decade, moving to sustainable farming now, or even already being doing so, is a clear first mover advantage. This is an opportunity to reduce inputs, a physical degrowth, which need not imply economic losses due to quality premiums consumers are ready to pay. Scotland already has a vibrant food industry, and home-made brands which have – or could have – European and international appeal. The sustainable production of beef and mutton with grazing rather than agro-industrial mass production generates premium products and is not only well-suited to the Scottish landscape, but also caters for health food trends all over Europe (the still neo-feudalistic land ownership structure may require further measures than the competencies given to local authorities half a decade ago, also to enhance reforestation where appropriate instead of wood export). Refraining from importing protein-rich feedstock is not only good for the nutrient balance ≫

of national lands and rivers, but is also a significant contribution to future-proofing the system be dematerialising it. Agriculture may be of minor importance for the Scottish GDP (about 2%), but it affects ¾ of Scotland's landscape and thus its biodiversity, making it a crucial sector for a sustainable Scotland. Other high quality food, from salmon and other smoked fish to cheese and fruit contribute to the domestic quality of life, but are also promising export goods – already the food industry earns more revenues than oil, and the Scottish smoked salmon industry is worth more than all of the UK fishing industry. Whisky is probably the best known of Scotland's manufactured products. Despite international competition (now even from English whisky) production soars with new distilleries coming to the market, supporting about 35,000 jobs. Exports have continuously increased, and Scotch whisky is now one of the UK's overall top five manufacturing export earners. As a dedicated Scotch malt whisky enthusiast, this is the one sector I personally consider degrowth undesirable…

Fisheries is another traditional sector of low economic but high cultural and social importance, at least in coastal areas. The waters surrounding Scotland are some of the richest in Europe; however in the last decade permanent overfishing has led to historically low abundances of commercially valuable fish in the North Sea and parts of the North Atlantic, although cod is now relocating from English to Scottish waters due to climate change. European fishing ministers are to blame for much of that loss as they have set quota continuously higher than the maximum sustainable ones determined by science – here the only potential positive impact from Brexit, significantly reducing the overall quota to let the fish stocks recover, has been spoiled by Westminster. Britain has two specific problems with fishing quota the UK government does not address, failures the Scottish government should emphasize and push to revert as soon as possible, independent or not yet. One is that free-market Britain, unlike others, let fishers sell their quotas abroad. In 2018 the Dutch ship Cornelis Vrolijk, registered in Caterham, owned 23% of the entire UK quota – not an issue caused by the Fisheries Policy, but a property deal. The other one is that in Britain, 77% of the boats are less than ten metres long, employing most of the UK's 12,000 fishers, yet owning just 4% of local quota. The British government could have changed that, redistributing quotas between British big ships and small boats. Such a change was even advocated by the EU's Common Fisheries Policy which called for including "social, economic and environmental criteria" in quota allocation, but it was not implemented in Britain. As small boats matter most for coastal life and do least environmental harm, they should take priority, with quota taken from the big boats and given to the under-10m flotilla – a measure to degrow the fishing industry in a socially and environmentally sustainable way. Besides reducing catches, to let stocks recover, scaling down is advisable: banning large swimming fish factories, banning dredging and other unsustainable forms of fisheries. Most of this would be possible under the current legal situation – the villain sits in Westminster, not in Brussels, and should be exposed to more pressure to address the real reasons of small-fishers' problems.

Like in all industrialised economies, over the last 40 years both manufacturing and extractive industries have been losing importance. This applies for instance to the textile industry, which surprisingly is still a major employer in Scotland, with a workforce of more than 20,000. Here again the key to survival besides modern production technology, qualified jobs and good work is occupying a niche in the high quality sector – producing not necessarily more but continue earning a decent income from the high end of the textile market is a strategy in line with past efforts. Not growth of volume, but of quality is future-proof option. However, in this sector as well it should be accompanied by branding, maybe stimulated and coordinated by the Scottish government, making 'Scottish quality' a household name all over Europe and beyond.

"Scotland's continental shelf area, where the sea is shallow enough to build sea-floor anchored wind energy installations is huge, and the wind is strong and

One of the growing economic sectors in Scotland is the services sector (including hospitality), representing already three-quarters of the Scottish economy. From a sustainability point of view, this is a positive trend, as the energy and resource intensity in services is lower than in the average industry (but less than many suspect as services depend on material and energy intensive infrastructures). The open question is the way services are provided: by profit-oriented companies, by the state or by the third sector of local initiatives and not-for-profit businesses? In a country with less dense population and only few big cities, the latter appears to be the most effective way to bring services directly to the people – again a question of appropriate structuring of local administrations, and of providing them with the financial means to do so, e.g. by local taxes for local services.

Part of the services industry is tourism. While battered by the COVID crisis and in urgent need of recovery (like many of the hospitality businesses for domestic enjoyment), tourism is a double edged sword. Witness the anti-tourism sentiments and campaigns in Venice or Barcelona, and tipping points become obvious, with tourism going from a blessing to a nightmare when crossing them. Arguably, the "disneyfication" of Scotland's capital city has reached and occasionally crossed that threshold, with disneyfication meaning to take culturally significant stories, trivialising and marketing them, depriving them of meaning for increased profit. Beyond Edinburgh, hiking in the Highlands would be less of an enjoyment in an overcrowded landscape, and the Ring of Brodgar as overcrowded as Stonehenge would be a nightmare. So sure there is an opportunity for growth in tourism, in certain place and at certain times, but it should be focussed on sustainable, culturally embedded tourism, and it has its limits.

The most modern sector, and rather unknown to European customers, is the IT and high tech industry – who knows how large a share of tablets, laptops and equipment bought in Europe comes from Scotland? High quality research, not only in Edinburgh, and multiple spin-offs promise solid economic prospects in the digital age. However, given the limitations of resource supply, the escalating energy demand of the IT infrastructure, and the need for digital sufficiency, many of the growth prognoses appear overblown. Again most promising are market niches – for instance, the idea of the circular economy, not central to the EU's industrial policy, has not really penetrated the hard- and software industry, while in the field of energy saving incremental progress has been made but disruptive new ideas are lacking. Such concepts could reconcile physical degrowth, zero carbon targets, and good work in a profitable industrial sector. Will Scotland offer solutions?

Finally, there is the energy sector, probably the most promising one despite the transformation it is undergoing. While oil and gas will be phased out rather soon, they will in many applications – while having the structural change in mind – be replaced by electricity from renewable sources. Scotland's continental shelf area, where the sea is shallow enough to build sea-floor anchored wind energy installations is huge, and the wind is strong and quasi-permanent. Scotland could provide a quarter of the EU's off-shore wind electricity production, and a comparably reliable one part of it. Beyond the continental shelf, sea floor based wind turbines cannot be built; wind energy farms would have to be floating – and Scotland hosts the world's biggest floating offshore wind farm, the 50MW Kincardine installation. Wave Energy Scotland, formed at the request of the Scottish Government, is a world leader in the development of marine energy – so who now rules the waves? Besides the up and down of waves, the

coming and going of tides is another reliable and regular natural process which can be exploited for energy generation; one of the world's oldest tidal energy power plants is located on Islay. Although in terms of direct solar energy, Scotland is not really privileged, in exploiting its indirect effects it has huge potential – given its on shore and off shore potentials, Scotland has the capability of becoming one of the biggest clean energy suppliers in the EU.

But being an electricity producer is not the end of the line – on the input side, green energy requires the mechanical work of building turbines and other installation, which is already a relevant sector of the Scottish economy. Extending the capabilities to producing, maintaining and recycling all these marine installations offers opportunities for a plethora of qualified and well-paid jobs. Add to this the up- and downstream potentials, and the effects can be enormous.

Upstream, smart IT solutions are sought, and offer opportunities for start-ups and established firms, with personnel available from Scotland's first class academic faculties. Downstream electricity is the basis of the emerging hydrogen and Power to Liquid (PtL), industries which supply their customers with renewable ("blue" or "green") hydrogen, i.e. not based on processing methane or other fossil fuels. Hydrogen as such, or hydrogen-based synthetic fuels are one of the big hopes of the aviation and hauling sectors where some fossil fuel applications are otherwise hard to replace (probably less so for the private car market), and if produced locally and shipped by boat or pipeline, a significant share of the value added could remain in Scotland. This is all the more the case when basic chemicals produced by using "green hydrogen" are processes to higher value chemical products – an option the Scottish chemicals industry to transform itself into a carbon-negative post-fossil industrial sector, in line with dematerialisation and sufficiency criteria.

ANCHORING SCOTLAND IN EUROPE

AS MENTIONED BEFORE, an independent country needs a distinct profile, a brand – 'Scottish quality' may be an example, communicating both identity and a dedication sounding attractive to potential customers. However, beyond a marketing and branding campaign to be initiated and supported by the Scottish government involving all sectors, there are more outreach measures Holyrood could consider for profiling. If there were Scottish cultural centres in major cities, offering music performances, fashion presentations by Scottish designers and art exhibitions of Scottish artists and museums, poets and writers, philosophers and scientists, but also cooking courses for Scottish cuisine, the profile would be diversified.

But as important for a lasting relation as presenting oneself frankly is understanding the other side, and that begins in education, in learning about history, philosophy, literature, arts, science, politics. For instance, history book chapters jointly authored by French and Scottish authors about the Napoléon wars, or by German, French, Russian and Scottish authors on the world wars would help put national narratives in a broader context. The same applies to philosophy: without knowing the difference between European consequentialism and Anglo-Saxon utilitarism it is hard to understand the different modes of governance, and without having read at least a bit of Dante, Cervantes and Schiller it will be difficult to understand the imaginaries motivating European citizens – who in turn should read Burns and Common Sense Philosophy. Reading such authors, but also the daily news works much better when understanding the language. In Switzerland or Luxemburg, three languages are mandatory, four usual, and three to four in Portugal. In Germany only two to three, sadly. Offering incentives to take language courses would be a great step, as would be a replacement for the Erasmus Programme with a more European focus than the Westminster suggestions. Such programmes are the launch platform for lasting private networks, complementing the institutional European networks with Scottish members, for cultural associations, consumer organisations (BEUC), professional organisation in all fields, trade unions (ETUC), environmentalists (e.g. European Environment Bureau, FoE Europe) and bird watchers (Birdlife Europe).

On the government level, there are non-regulatory European institutions which are not part of the EU apparatus and welcome non-EU members like the Dublin Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions run by employers and unions, or European Environment Agency EEA which has members from the EU, EFTA and the Balkan countries. Interestingly, the EEA is open to membership for all European countries, and as "country" is the legal state of Scotland, the EEA Scientific Committee has already encouraged Scotland to join the institution.

IN OLD FRIENDSHIP to Scotland's southern neighbour, Scots might be willing to do the English a big favour by saying farewell: a UK having shrunk by a third would (hopefully) enable England to first time reflect on its own identity, its potentials and their limits, beyond imperial fantasies. It might be painful, but would be a healing process. ■

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Notes

1 *The Guardian, Feb. 25th, 2021*

STORY OF STEEL AND THE LETTER M

Words: Juana Adcock; illustration: Fadzai Mwakutuya; photo: Ewan Bush

STEEL

I place my palm en la reja called border wall.
Let its steel enter my body: iron alloyed with carbon
hardened to prevent *the movement of dislocations*.
I am in Tijuana, looking at California through the bars
though it isn't clear where the prison lies.
To my left the bars peter out into an ocean
whose waves refuse to be contained.

The body of an adult human
contains about four grams of iron;
all four of mine rush to meet la reja imantada.
When we speak of magnetism,
we think of love, or charisma,
or crowds of faces all in one direction.
But never of iron as the metal
at the active site of many enzymes
dealing with cellular respiration
or the pull towards a 'better life'.

Glasgow's sandstone tenements, incidentally,
are red because they contain iron.
Our blood stone is iron ore.
It emanates its own light.
We are the blood, migrating
bringing cargo
from one cell to the next
keeping the body alive, we transport
mercancía
maquinaria
manos
más.

The iron for the wall was mined in the M states
bordering with Canada.
Not that long ago, the land was cleared
of its people, wildlife and forests.
Migrants from Europe fed the logs down the rivers
laid the train tracks
peeled away life on the topsoil
bloodlet the earth to build
this line of steel
marking the limits of possession.

Praying from Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth*
which built an empire of steel
repeating that this was progress
away from universal squalor
we were able to steal our eyes away
from the impoverishment
of the lands
—now empty red pits
gaping red wounds
as far as the eye can see.

THE LETTER M

With a guru's moustache and a penchant for conspiracy
the madman explains to me that language is a form of mind control
the grammar itself holding us in a bind
– an incantation muttered over millenia
shaping our thoughts.

I want to master the art of the pictogram, he says.
It is the earliest form of writing
is uncontaminated by the misers, the drive for accumulation
created with the rise of agriculture.

The letter M, for example, is the pictogram of a wave
we forget where it comes from, it loses all meaning
we write it over and over without ever thinking of water
or how maritime and motherly,
muro y morada are of one essence.

As he speaks, I watch the surfers glide along the lip of the perfect breakers
almost for the whole line of the horizon
before they topple over into the sea
like tiny plastic soldiers.

That night we slept hearing the waves crash onto the rocks
and in the morning, we knew we were rocks too.
Our hearts, hardened lava.

The Pacific had smoothed round windows through us
and like a Barbara Hepworth sculpture
we were made whole
by what we lack.

STORYLINES

Roads are heavier on the rich side of the line.
Asphalt mixed with cement is whiter
loudening under car wheels, it hardens over time,
requiring little maintenance.
Such are the roads of the first world.

But the dwellings there are transient
wooden-framed and lighter
as if to be filled with
cushions and the crinkle of food wrappers
and some child's quiet voice in a corner of the room
mouthing
and I'll huff
and I'll puff.

On the other side of the line
the asphalt grows crocodile-skinned.
Pockmarked and permeable,
it can cope with earthquakes
and melt in the sun.
Initially it's cheaper to lay
but has a shorter lifespan.
Such the roads of the third world.

But here, our houses
you can tell by just looking at them
are made of cement, heavy as pyramids
as if to hold us at home
for longer.
■

BETWEEN LIMIT AND DESIRE: STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS IN THE COLLAPSE OF INDUSTRIAL CIVILISATION

Adrián Almazán and Luis González Reyes argue that hardly anyone has understood the Covid-19 pandemic not as an isolated and exceptional event, but as a single moment in a much broader process: ecosocial collapse.

THE GREAT SHOCK caused by the total lockdown in spring of 2020 becomes more distant with each passing day. For months now, we have been living a "new normal" which is neither new, given that it continues to put capital and growth before life, nor in any way normal. Rather than grasping the opportunity presented by those months of lockdown when everything came to a standstill to undertake a radical change of direction, our societies have held on to fear and continuity, desperately struggling to ensure that everything remains the same and – as soon as possible – returns to normality, regularity and stability.

We empathise with the suffering of many families and businesses which have found themselves obligated to confront situations of tremendous precarity due to the policies of governments such as the Spanish State. Nothing could be further from our intention than to suggest that these should be abandoned or left unsupported. However, it would be a serious mistake were we to fail to see that if the particular ways of living, producing, consuming, transportation etc. generated by industrial capitalist societies are to continue, then suffering in the near future will be much greater and probably affect all of humanity.

The great problem we face is that, at a deep level, hardly anybody has understood that the Covid-19 pandemic is not an isolated and exceptional event, but rather a single moment in a much broader process: ecosocial collapse.

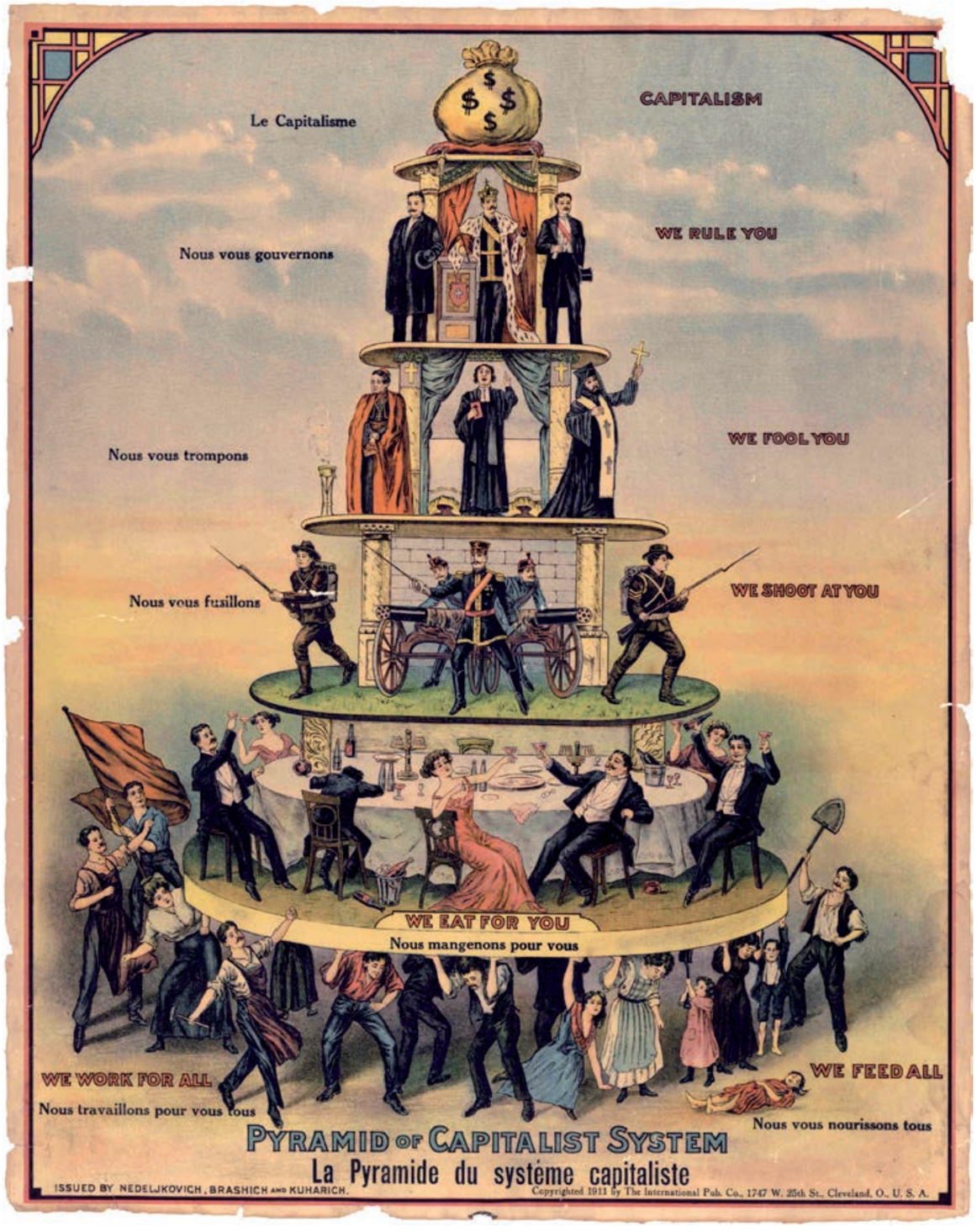
"We struggle to see that the supposed normality constituted by the western societies of the second half of the 20th century are the true exception."

Although nearly everything which has happened in recent years makes it clear, we struggle to see that the supposed normality (opulent societies, which grow perpetually and have guaranteed access to fossil fuels) constituted by western societies in the second half of the 20th century are the true exception.

It is these wealthy and unthinking societies which have squandered our fossil patrimony in order to support a Great Acceleration which has in the process devastated ecosystems, modified the climate, eroded the soils, contaminated water… And the massive wildfires, extreme weather events, droughts, economic crises and many other things which today flood our newspapers are no more than symptoms of that grave terminal illness which is the collapse of our civilisation. A collapse which we should not understand as a one-off or single event, but rather as a long process of decomposition which will affect different countries unequally, and within those, will be felt much more by the most vulnerable parts of the population.

Without understanding this, it is very unlikely that we will be able to really build a politics that puts life, freedom, equality and the stability of Gaia before everything else. At the end of the day, trying to return to a normal which never was is the very opposite of what we need today. Stability won't return, growth will not continue and our way of life is taking its dying breaths. We are facing limits and damages caused by our dynamics of overshoot which make it not only undesirable, but impossible to carry on as though nothing were wrong. And ours is not merely a technical problem. The experts will be not be able to discover a new technology that can resolve this, nor will State bureaucrats find some fail-proof policy which will allow us to continue with our lives as usual. Ours is a global and profoundly political problem. What is at stake is our way of life (which necessarily will have to change radically), and those who will bring about that change are people, organised collectively.

"Stability won't return, growth will not continue. We are facing limits and damages caused by our dynamics of overshoot which make it not only undesirable, but impossible to carry on as though nothing were wrong." »



Despite the fact that those in power refuse to recognise it, major social and metabolic shifts await us in the near future. The Covid-19 pandemic has helped us to understand what these disruptions might look like, but the worst is yet to come. In the coming years, everything points to us living through energy scarcity which could transform into food shortages, problems accessing fuel, industrial shutdowns etc. We will also have to live with an increasingly unstable climate which, no matter what we do, will never return to the state of equilibrium which all agrarian human societies enjoyed until the present day. Heatwaves, droughts, super-storms and hurricanes, scarcity of fresh-water, melting glaciers… All of this has come to stay, and to challenge our urban model, our industrialised food system and our management of water.

Faced with all this, what will we do? Move ahead as though nothing were happening? Keep alive at all costs a suicidal industrial capitalism? Our obligation is to articulate a politics which navigates between limits and desire. Although it seems that we may have forgotten, last spring taught us something: it is possible to put people before capital. And that teaching is essential if we want the opportunity to collapse better, to guarantee dignified, free and equal lives in the new balance we have pushed Gaia towards. But that is not enough, because we have to put life before people. Life is not only human, it encompasses all the other animal and plant species. Only in that whole, the life of every single species is possible. We urgently need to dissolve our deeply-rooted anthropocentrism to put Gaia as a whole front and centre; as Jorge Reichmann says, we need to construct a political ethics capable of looking beyond the walls of the human city.

"Our obligation is to articulate a politics which navigates between limits and desire. Although it seems that we may have forgotten, last spring taught us something: it is possible to put people before capital."

Let's begin with the "easy" part: putting human life ahead means, in the first place, assuming and interiorising the limits of Gaia. Understanding that the illusions of infinite growth, unlimited abundance and nature as an inert object are inadequate frameworks for understanding what is happening to us: we need a New Earth Culture.

But that limit is also a limit to our own action, which must become a form of collective self-limitation. This is the best recipe to avoid all forms of authoritarianism, including that which has accompanied the State of Alarm [translator's note: decreed by the Spanish State in response to the Covid-19 pandemic]. Are we capable of making choosing that which is indispensable for life a collective undertaking? Frugality and modesty are values which must come to substitute competition and ambition. Living well with less, we say in social ecology. At least with less energy, less consumption, less inequality, less injustice, less socio-ecological destruction.

This also means placing limits on those who condemn us with their disproportionate hubris. We must unite amongst equals to build autonomous institutions that, on the one hand, free us from the expropriation which the elites impose on us through salaries and management. But which also force a redistribution of all the wealth unjustly accumulated by these elites. Therefore, ending wage work and constructing food, energy, technological and political sovereignty. The more autonomy we have, the more capable we will be of guaranteeing social needs without destroying and fighting, to self-limit ourselves in the embrace of Gaia, and at the same time, we will be better able to defend ourselves against the inevitable attacks of the elites and the States. Therefore, expropriating, sharing work and wealth, occupying or guaranteeing a living minimum for all who need it are basic policies. Lighting the way towards a force which constructs but also defends, setting in motion an exercise of collective self-limitation which can come to be an expression of freedom and social autonomy. In this study, we have outlined a route map for how this could be done for the Spanish economy during the decade 2020 – 2030.

"The more autonomy we have, the more capable we will be of guaranteeing social needs without destroying and fighting, to self-limit ourselves in the embrace of Gaia, and at the same time, we will be better able to defend ourselves against the inevitable attacks of the elites and the States."

But this limit will never arrive if it is presented as a logical argument, as an unquestionable political conclusion. Our action has to navigate between limits and desire, because the latter is the only thing capable of activating and moving us. A desire which, in turn, will be found at the root of the conflict necessarily entailed by the scenario which we are outlining.

We cannot assume that power, neoliberalism, industrial capitalism have won once and for all the battle of desire, making us into beings capable only of desiring that which the State and the market offer us. We cannot because a true evaluation of limits prevents us from doing so, but above all, because the human being has shown throughout their history (as well as in the present) that they can live with dignity and in harmony with nature. That, therefore, is a horizon of desire anthropologically possible and a reality for many human societies, such as for example some Indigenous Peoples.

Why are the siren calls of new proposals such as the Green New Deal (GND) so persuasive? Precisely because they claim to be able to bring together the need to accept limits with the widespread desire amongst western "middle classes" that almost nothing in our way of life need change. By all accounts a false solution, since the reality is that our desire to not have to change ourselves leads us to underestimate the scale of the exercise in self-limitation which we have before us, even the exercise of self-limitation which would be involved in any minimally realistic GND. As we explore in this study, a GND which approaches the emissions cuts recommended by the IPCC (which we know are ecologically insufficient), as well as promoting renewables would also have to invest in agroecology, decimate the private car, strongly restrict international aviation (tourism)… In short, an authentic overturning of neoliberal subjectivity.

For that reason, it seems highly improbable that a minimally realistic GND, which implies profound transformations in our way of life, can become an option for parliamentary majorities in the short term (we will see what happens in the mid-term in a dramatically changing scenario such as that which we are living in). It is even less probable that any State will have the capacity or desire to make it reality, because not for nothing do they depend for their functioning on taxes and financial markets which, in turn, can only divert funds as a result of the reproduction of capital. What is even more important, the ecological struggles advocating for austere sufficiency and redistribution seem to be far from being in a position to set the rhythm for social coordination.

"The construction of emergency landings in the collapse will have to navigate between the cracks and grey zones of the system, through disputes, and take as given that conflict is inevitable."

Thus, the construction of emergency landings in the collapse will have to navigate between the cracks and grey zones of the system, through disputes, and take as given that conflict is inevitable. On that path, there is no single or good solution. Nobody has an infallible solution. For that landing to succeed, we cannot assume that the transformation of desire, and therefore ways of life, are beyond possible or realistic political action. Our obligation is, instead, to politicise desire and connect with the old aspiration of social emancipation. Ours must also be an anthropological transformation, and thus we cannot accept that the triumph of neoliberalism in that sphere is irreversible. Or, if we do so, we will have to accept that the ecocide followed by genocide which could unfold under the worst scenarios of ecosocial collapse are also inevitable.

Only if we are capable of longing to live in another way, only if we place the weaving of close social relations, time, fresh air, nature, meaningful work, and contact with the land before consumption, money or commodities will we be able to land in the least traumatic way possible. We need to work to reconstruct that which Mumford called the neolithic, and which today we can understand as a way of life that is communal, sustainable, just and autonomous. That is a key battle at the level of desire. In the report we cited earlier, the only scenario capable of respecting ecological limits was that in which we worked fewer hours in total. Of that work time, we would spend more time doing caring work in the household and less time in paid employment, either in the public or private sector. Morever, in that scenario a new kind of work would also emerge, one which is today almost non-existent, of communal work geared towards satisfying basic needs. A type of work which, potentially, has much more life-giving meaning than paid work. From our point of view, a scenario capable of stimulating desire for many people.

At the moment, desires for the most part still pivot between continuing as usual in the economic sphere, but accompanied by a consciousness that times are changing, and an ecological transition that would enable us to live more or less as we do currently, exemplified in the public discourse of the GND (if not in its hypothetical materialisation). The Trumps bet on the fossil economy, which is without doubt the most productive, at the same time that they strengthen the borders and imaginaries of confrontation which are essential to maintain their power in a structure which is cracking. They know how to read our times, according to their own interests, better than it would appear. Those who defend the GND start from a consciousness, at least partial, of the socioecological crisis, but they make promises impossible to fulfil and which do not match up to the ecological challenges, which are not only about energy, but much more complex. They deploy a horizon of desire with a very short range and high potential to cause disenchantment.

"The great battle in the field of desire in the coming years or decades is not going to be over whether there is a transition towards a sustainable economy. That will happen inevitably. The dispute will be what kind of transition triumphs."

The great battle in the field of desire in the coming years or decades is not going to be over whether there is a transition towards a sustainable economy. That will happen inevitably. The dispute will be what kind of transition triumphs. On one side, the ecofascist or ecoauthoritarian: maintain high living standards for the elites, for which they will embrace conservationist discourses and the defence of "our own". This is what the Nazi party did and what the European far-right is starting to do. The Handmaiden's Tale would be a horizon of desire (for the elites) in a territory rendered lifeless by the Capitalocene.

The other great horizon of desire is that which is made up of the sharing of work and wealth, simplicity, slowness, pleasure derived from dense social fabrics or intimate connection with nature. That connection based in knowledge, work and the love derived from both, as the neo-rural movements teach us. It is that which would enable us to materialise a socioeconomic transformation inspired by degrowth, relocalisation, integration into natural cycles (which is to say, an agroecological rather than industrial economy) and the distribution of wealth and power. This is the horizon of desire which is currently most hidden, least articulated and most interlaced with other contradictory desires, but which probably exists more than we think. It is that which drives those who long for early retirement or who use their holidays to go on pilgrimage. It is the desire which leads many to abandon the city and return to the land. It is also the desire of those who decide to work in cooperatives and escape the absurd impositions of growth. This will be the only desire compatible with what we might consider good lives when the lives which we previously called good (those of consumerism) are no longer feasible.

It is vital to make that horizon of desire grow now. Failure to do so will leave a gap in which the ecofascist desire can grow. And nothing makes desire grow more than seeing other people living happily. We need to encourage broad social sectors to want to imitate those who work in a cooperative with dignified working conditions doing socially necessary work, those who live in ecological buildings designed to maximise friendship and mutual aid, or those who eat delicious fruit picked directly from the tree they care for.

But that is not enough. We need to encourage desire recovering our capacity to dream of other economies and societies, something which today seems almost impossible because capitalism and the State, having enclosed our economic and political autonomy, have also cut the wings of our capacity to imagine other worlds. For that reason, in order to be able to dream big we must at the same time materialise our dreams. That is, construct autonomous lives which enable us to fantasize about autonomous societies and, on the way, position ourselves better to defend them when the moment arrives to do so. ■

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ON DEGROWTH AND AN ECONOMY OF CARE

In times of Brexit it is more important than ever to share ideas between grassroots movements in Scotland and the rest of Europe to understand the challenges we face in late stage capitalism, identify opportunities to resist these and develop practical solutions. LESS editor Svenja Meyerricks spoke to academic, author and activist Andrea Vetter. Illustration by Tarneem Al Mousawi

DEGROWTH THINKING AND ideas largely evolved in a European context. At LESS, we believe that in times of Brexit it is more important than ever to share ideas between grassroots movements in Scotland and the rest of Europe to better understand the common challenges we face in late stage capitalism, and to identify opportunities to resist these and to develop practical solutions. LESS editor Svenja Meyerricks spoke to academic, author and activist Andrea Vetter about her work and thinking in relation to how degrowth ideas evolved in Germany and beyond.

LESS: Tell us a bit about your current work, and what you are passionate about.

AV: For more than ten years now, my work has been centred on socioecological transformation – thinking about critical ecofeminism and degrowth and our economy, and also trying out positive ways of being together in community. I am always trying to combine theoretical work with practical and activist approaches and balance them in my life.

Currently, I'm teaching on an interdisciplinary Masters programme in radical participatory transformation design. The students all want to bring about change, which makes it inspiring to work with them. I'm also thinking about how to implement transformation studies more broadly in a German university landscape, because I think that this is now very much needed. I realised this when I was writing the book *Degrowth/ Postwachstumi* together with my long-time friend, Matthias Schmelzer. It's an introduction to degrowth which was now translated into English and will be published by Verso in 2021.

I don't think that what we need now at this point in history is more in-depth analysing of what's going wrong, because already we know so much about that. In a nutshell, our whole society and economy is centred around profit, and that is killing everything. From there, you can go into different directions and try to change that very principle, and we will arrive at many different systems. So I really like it now to work on trying to design and bring about new solutions, and also to re-establish older ones – to really take action, which I feel is very important.

LESS: In Scotland and the UK, there has not been the same level of debate around degrowth as there has been in Germany, France, Spain and many other European countries. Although this has changed somewhat recently – last year before covid hit, a Degrowth UK Summer School was going to take place in Leeds, and the International Degrowth Conference in Manchester – which is now happening online this year. But overall, there has been a relatively slow uptake of these ideas. Perhaps you could tell us more about how the debate has been shaping up in Germany and continental Europe?

AV: My own dissertation research was about convivial and degrowth technologies. I read a lot of articles and stuff from the 1970s. Even then, there was a very lively kind of degrowth debate in German speaking countries which, of course, didn't happen under the term "degrowth", but as growth critique and alternative living. It was basically very close to what we discuss today as degrowth. And it also was one important strand that led to the establishment of the Green Party in Germany, which in the beginning of the 1980s was a movement for alternative living not based on ideas of growth and profit. But then, this more radical part of the party "lost" and the more reformist powers gained more power in this party, and these ideas were dismissed then.

I think the events in 1989 played a big role in the slowing down of this early growth critique debates. The Soviet bloc crashed, so there was no more belief in somehow taming this capitalist society. Also, in the 1980s there was a turn towards neoliberalism in the UK.

The debates of alternative living and growth critique in the late 1970s until mid 1980s were followed by a big gap. And then they were taken up again in the beginning of the 2000s through the degrowth debate in France. And in between, there was only the ecofeminist debate that went on with thinking about societies without growth in a very productive way, but this was not taken up in the newly launched degrowth debate coming from France and Spain in the beginning of the 2000s. Because of course they were mainly driven by men like Serge Latouche who, like it often happens, didn't know about these feminist works or just didn't engage with them – works like that of Ariel Salleh, Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Vandana Shiva around the notion of ecofeminism and subsistence.

I think these are very important contributions to the roots of degrowth thinking, and the idea of what another economy could be centred on. It could be centred around care – such as land care and care for people. And in Germany, that debate really gained momentum, in the year of 2010 , when two female economists, Swiss Irmi Seidl and Angelika Zahrnt, who was chairperson of BUND or Friends of the Earth Germany, published a book about *Postwachstumsgesellschaft*[1] or post growth society.

LESS: The connection with feminist economics is interesting. In Scotland, feminist economist Ailsa McKay emphasised care in economics and challenged the dogma of growth at any cost. She brought this perspective to the 2014 independence campaign, although she sadly died before the referendum. The Scottish Government has been engaging with some of the ideas around wellbeing, although the official trajectory is still on "sustainable economic growth", this somewhat diverges from the neoliberal hardliners of the Westminster Government. And now there's the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, who campaigns for softening Scotland's economic goals further at a policy level. Could you tell us a bit more about how degrowth ideas were engaged with in Germany – in academia, in wider society and in activist movements?

AV: We organised a big conference in 2011, with alter-globalisation network Attac[2] and over 50 other organisations, and 3000 people attended. It was more of a political debate in the beginning. It was not so much a debate that happened at the universities. I think that came more from Spain when the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona was established, which hosted research and teaching around degrowth, and also from France. And slowly it was possible to talk about these things in German ≫

universities, too. But at the beginning, it was not an academic discourse.

Only recently degrowth got some academic merits, because people the age of Matthias and me, who are now around 40, did their Masters thesis or the doctoral thesis on the topic, somehow advanced this debate in this academic system and made it possible to talk about it. But it was only very rarely taken up by older people, or it's just that we grew up and brought it there. And I think in all European continental countries, as I can see so far, the movement has this double character of being discussed in academia and being very closely linked to political movements. Also at the Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie, we try to connect some political or social movements with the degrowth debate – for example, we connected the climate justice movement with the degrowth debate, which I think succeeded really well.

LESS: Among Scottish activist groups and in parts of academia, the idea of degrowth is being adopted from other parts of Europe, and contextualised in the history of thought and activism in Scotland. Here there's a big contrast between the Gaelic speaking Highlands, where conversations have perhaps more of a focus on regeneration and on preserving indigenous practices such as crofting, and places like the Central Belt, where there's a focus on downscaling the economy beyond Green New Deal narratives.

AV: In Germany the context is also very different depending on where you are located. I live in a small village between Berlin and the Polish border. I live in a community and arts project called *Haus des Wandels*[3] [house of transformation]. This is a very marginal region, and the topic of social justice and inclusion is very important here, because people had very bad experiences during the last few decades when a lot of infrastructure was just shut down – buses or public services, and a lot of cultural institutions after the end of the GDR.

Although these institutions were led by GDR officials enforcing an official culture, nonetheless there was dance, music and literature in nearly every village. And then there was almost nothing left – less work, less public services, less culture. This is really something we have to deal with, and which also leads to problems with the far right. I think all these issues are very much connected. In our house, we do a lot of regional networking with other projects and other people wanting to establish some kind of social ecological regional development.

This is a topic that I've been very much interested in the last year or two. What can socioecological development or transformation mean on a regional level? Because I really think that the region, and the communal or city level – these are the levels where even a few dedicated people can really make a difference. Because we've seen in the last years all these bigger bodies of nation states and international coordination failing badly on topics like climate change and social justice. And emissions going up and resource extraction going up.

Despite all these talks and all these meetings, the system change we need just doesn't happen. For me, it really feels more empowering and like having more impact to work on this scale, where it's very much about finding new alliances – with local enterprises, for example, like small handicraft enterprises. Many of the problems we face are very similar, even if we come from different political ideas. Also in the former GDR, there's such a vast backdrop of subsistence knowledge, because it was an economy that was not very abundant. And so people are very used to making the best of what is there, and they very much appreciate if younger people do this. So there are interesting alliances between elderly people and younger people in this post socialist environment, which I think is really interesting. But we also struggle with right wing issues, and now we founded a campaign called *Dörfer Gegen Rechts* [villages against the far right]. Because there were a lot of right wing extremists meeting in a nearby village from the AfD [*Alternative für Deutschland*], our far-right party.

I am convinced that fighting climate change has to come together with fighting sexism and racism. This is what degrowth is about: to help building a good life for all.

LESS: It would be interesting to hear your perspective on how to build alliances across different places. Particularly in the context of Brexit, there's a lot of scope to build grassroots alliances among people who work on similar issues across the continent. And there's arguably more need for that now, because the old institutional connections have been severed and we have to build our own European alliances now, from the bottom up.

"What can socioecological development or transformation mean on a regional level? Because I really think that the region, and the communal or city level – these are the levels where even a few dedicated people can really make a difference."

AV: Yes, actually I'm thinking a lot about the question whether it is possible to transform institutions that are already there, or whether it is necessary to build up new institutions everywhere.

Of course it's not a yes or no question; we have to do both. I definitely find more joy in building up new alliances and institutions than in transforming the old ones. But this is maybe a question of personal taste, of what's nearer to your heart. So I can't answer that question for everybody, but I really feel that there's a lot of power in connecting different places, and people on the grassroots who are trying to build up new kinds of networks, interpersonal relationships and the economy in their places. And it's so interesting to ask how we can build reliable networks between places. Also because it's not small things we're dealing with, if we are taking the scientific forecasts seriously of what will happen with ongoing climate change. I mean, it's likely that in a decade or two, a lot of places where we now live won't be habitable in the same way as they are now.

There are some scenarios where, for example, the region we live in in Brandenburg will get so dry that the harvest of the crops and harvest will shrink by 80% from what we have now – which really means that there's nothing to eat. And we don't know if this scenario will come true, or if the other scenario will come true that the Gulf Stream will collapse, and then it will be so cold that nothing will grow either.

All these different apocalyptic scenarios have a certain likelihood. And I see nothing on a political international scale or state scale that will stop this development of heading for three degrees or four degrees or whatever. I can't see anything. Maybe I am pessimistic – I don't know.

For me this is also a question of really being able to look into the future somehow in a good way, to build up trust and relationships between each other and between our places and find, "Okay, I know there's places I can go and you can go", basically. Because we just don't know what will happen and which of our places will still be habitable.

I don't want to sound like a prepper! I think what really distinguishes also degrowth thinking about being realistic around these scientific climate scenarios is that it's about stopping the cultural narratives underlying our society that there are only individualistic people seeking out their own interests and fighting each other all the time. Which brought us into this kind of mess, and in popular scientific and dystopian narratives, like the preppers use them, it is just prolonged into an apocalyptic future that still has the same narrative, just with climate chaos on top. And this doesn't make any sense. Because this is the story we have to get out of, and we have to see what else there is. I think a lot of it is about building trust and new economies centred around care work, and about seeing the abundance that is still there. Even if some ecological systems will collapse, not everything will collapse, of course – and a lot of places in the world, a lot of systems already collapsed.

So it's not about that there will be a collapse in like 20 years. I'm also a bit irritated by these discourses about deep adaptation that predict near-term social collapse, where a white guy who thought that everything is open to him, because he's a white academic guy, suddenly realises, "Oh, there are forces bigger than me. Now I'm falling into a deep depression, and can do nothing!" And I think, "Oh dude, what did you think this world is about?"

You know, feminist struggle has been going on for several thousand years now, since patriarchy was established. There were ancestors fighting it before us, and there will be our children fighting it after us, and we are just a small piece in this big chain of people trying to live a decent life, bring some justice and be good mothers to the beings around us.

I think it's about stepping out of both of these narratives. Of this one narrative that everybody just seeks out their own interest, and there will be big fights, and we should gather guns. And the other narrative that we can succeed or fail, and now it's about succeeding to stop global warming. And it's only about "yes or no". There won't be a yes or no – we will maybe succeed in slowing it down a little bit.

LESS: Yes, I think a lot of the time there's the perception that if we cannot sustain a privileged life, then we have nothing left. And that means to talk from a point of extreme privilege. But now there will be COP26 negotiations in Glasgow this year. And while there's rightly a lot of cynicism around this – do we totally disengage from these sorts of pressure points? Or perhaps it's not about all or nothing?

AV: Yes, of course. We don't know anything about the future. In this society, or all societies, we're at a point of not knowing. And I think we should acknowledge this and not pretend to know what the best next step is. We just don't know – and that's okay. So it's good to fight the tides and to do the things that need to be done. Because they all could make a difference, and maybe will. But we can't identify that there is now the one thing that we should all unite under.

There is a discussion around Andreas Malm, a very productive author from Sweden, who is bringing forth a debate about ecoleninism – that there should be an avant garde of people who should be pressuring and fighting forces of destruction.

In Leninism, there is an avant garde of people who know what to do. And I really think this is wrong – these are new forms of patriarchial ideas that do not lead to the pluriversalistic world that we so deeply need. And I think we should engage as a degrowth movement in fighting against coal, and in fighting against burning oil.

"...the more important question is not, where should I start taking action, what has the biggest effect, but: am I willing to give all my life to work for this transformation that is deeply needed"

We should definitely take action, but we should also tend to our gardens, and we should also build our local alliances with our neighbours. And we should also work for different procurement laws that make it possible that, for example, when there is communal money spent, it is not spent on the cheapest companies, but on organisations or enterprises that work towards social or ecological goals.

We should also go into these very technical points, because they are important, because they decide what is happening with the available money. All the divestment campaigns – I think they're absolutely good ideas. And this may seem complicated, because there are so many tiers to engage in. But it also makes it very easy, because from where you are, you can just begin to act. I think the more important question is not, where should I start taking action, what has the biggest effect, but: am I willing to give all my life to work for this transformation that is deeply needed, wherever I am, and with whatever means I do have?

Actually, that is what I'm expecting from myself and from other people as well – which is a lot to ask for.

LESS: The task at hand may be daunting – but in the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estés: "Do not lose heart. We were made for these times."[4] However, the ongoing pandemic certainly hasn't made it easier to connect to each other and make change happen. Beyond the trauma, what is to be learned from this collective experience for the degrowth movement?

AV: We have learned that when the state identifies something as a crisis, it will mobilise lots of money. It would be possible to really tackle the climate change issue if there were the political will to do so. But apparently it is not so.

The facts are very much out in the open, and there's a political discussion to not do anything real against climate change. I think this made it very apparent especially for young people of the Fridays for Future movement, for example, to see that there is an elder generation in the political sphere who can decide on things – and they are just ignoring the scientific facts on climate change. And I really think this somehow makes for a big debate shift for degrowth discussions to go into. Because now we can say, yes we have seen that it would be possible to bring about the necessary changes, but it is not done. What do we do with that?

It depends on whether we are socialists or anarchists or whatever position we take towards state action, but this is an interesting insight. And also all these billions that are spent now to prop up the old economy that could have been used for really important investments into a green and social economy – it just doesn't happen. The old fossil fuel subsidies continue as usual.

The covid crisis narrows down a possible political window that was in sight for the Fridays for Future movement. It was gaining momentum with broader parts of society all over Europe, and also in many other countries – to raise money and to think about things like the Green New Deal which, yes, is still aimed at green growth, but also from a degrowth perspective, we definitely need a lot of investment in green technologies. But this window of political opportunity now closed with covid, because you can't give out the money twice. And I think there will be such a big shutdown of cultural initiatives and a lot of things such as public money – it will be so hard in the coming decade, and I just don't know what will come out of it.

The list of system-relevant jobs was also interesting. For example, to get childcare in Germany during lockdown, there was a list that was updated every week – which kinds of jobs are system relevant. And this is a very interesting entry point for a degrowth debate in terms of, what kind of economy do we want? Do we want an economy centred around care?

Now we have entry points to say, everybody knows now that there are many jobs in the care sector that are very important for our economy – they are very system-relevant, because without them, people just die. And these are not the well-paid jobs, but the jobs of people in supermarkets, and of nurses, and so on. I think we should focus on care much more in degrowth debates, and also link it to other debates. This is a very interesting point that comes out of the covid experience: there is life-sustaining work to be done. How can we organise this, and how can we centre our economy not around the least important things, but around the most important things? ■

Notes

1 konzeptwerk-neue-oekonomie.org/english
2 attac.org
3 hausdeswandels.wordpress.com/about
4 mavenproductions.com/letter-to-a-young-activist

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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.

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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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