



Fig 1. Zen Ensō painted by Peter Culter¹

Zen and the Art of Doughnut Economics:

When limits are strangely liberating

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WPSA – Mindful Revolutions

In meditation we simply offer ourselves – all our attention-energy – to appreciating the moment in which we find ourselves. It is attending in the sense of vigilant caring – our most primordial mode of contribution...Meditation can be seen, then, as an alternative technology – an alternative to our technological bias toward control. Meditation breaks down the cycle of our wanting (Hershock 1999:280).

[Note: on 'limits' and degrowth: Byung Chul-Han on the 'achievement subject' comments on the post-disciplinary subject, which no longer operates under the sign of negation. The achievement subject must re-negotiate with notions of 'freedom' from a fresh standpoint: a point of cultivation and interruption rooted in the *vita contemplativa*.

Kate Raworth's 'doughnut economics' or economics for the 21st century are predicated on more than a wholesale policy shift. They will require a breakthrough in individual and collective mind-sets: 'a breakthrough in the

¹ Used with permission from the artist, Peter Cutler. See: <http://zenbrushgallery.com/>. Accessed 27.09.18.

ceiling of our imagination' that will lead to a new political economy that drives regenerative and redistributive economy *by design* and with intention.

In an era dominated by the 'attention economy', where commercial actors have come to regard our 'attention' and time as a scarce commodity, the new economics to which Raworth aspires will demand – among other things – a reversal of the colonisation of our attention by the corporate imagineers of consumerism, which has become one of the most powerful and pervasive ideologies of our time. It is an ideology that is largely invisible in its effects because it is now deeply implicated in how modern subjects have come to understand their pre-packed way of being in the world. The earth and the world have been reduced to two dimensions under the rule of 'having' over the plural possibilities of being.

In the far-reaching words of the pioneering ecological architect, Thomas McDonough, design is the first signal of human intention. It is into a world of mass attention-deficit that Raworth and a growing network of academic activists are making the case for a profound shift towards a mindful and deliberative revolution in how we design our economies: for regeneration. Mindful because, in many ways, much of what has gone before has amounted to little more than a myriad of largely unplanned and uncoordinated incremental and fragmented public health experiments masquerading as industrial, economic and financial innovation, though with one defining characteristic under the sign of Capital: the accumulation of *power* by a progressively narrow band of beneficiaries that has been deployed to socialize the risks (so called 'externalities') at the expense of our individual, social and planetary wellbeing. Much of the regulatory attention committed to economy and finance has been compensatory and protective rather than the driver of system design in pursuit of collective human and ecological interests.

The logic of carbon-based neoliberal capitalism is the logic of modern power: the power of the few to enclose land, forests, bodies and labour while concealing that logic by transferring responsibility to the many. One of the most powerful

ideologies used to obscure patterns of global and national accumulation and systemic inequality is the ideology of 'growth', an open-ended promise by governments who have simultaneously handed over the power to address inequality to the architects of exclusion. Late stage neoliberal forms of carbon-driven capitalism are further empowered by attempts at the enclosure and colonisation of the human imagination and emotion by forces of consumerism, advertising, celebrity culture and the manufacture of our consent engineered through the use of neuro-algorithms and a plethora of therapeutic industries.

Consumerism is more than a set of material practices, at the end of a capitalist value chain. Consumerism is the bearer of a modern ontology, a way of being-in-the-world of subjects and objects, a legacy of our troubled relationship with modernity and its temporalities. As such, our debates about transforming economics are also debates about contested meaning and meaning itself. As Ray Scranton (2015) has usefully observed in his *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of Civilization* (2015), the systems that structure our political desires and constrain our political will have a material history. As the human animal developed increasingly complex social technologies for producing power, from hunting bands tracking migrating herds of giant elk and mastodons to agricultural empires harvesting grain to fossil-fuel-burning global capitalism...

...we also developed increasingly complex technologies of collective life. As our technologies of producing power changed, so did our technologies for distributing and controlling it. Today, global power is in the hands of a tiny minority, and the system they preside over threatens to destroy us all...Progressivist belief in the infinite perfectibility of the human animal depends significantly on carbon-fuelled capitalism's promise of infinite economic growth. Accepting our limits means coming to terms with our innate violence and our inescapable mortality. (Scranton 2015:26)

The temporality of consumerism

In his remarkable *The Scent of Time* (2017), Han draws on the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger to reflect on the importance of a 'temporal tension' that can remove the experience of the present from its passing without end or direction and which infuses it with meaningfulness:

The right time, or the right moment, only arises out of the temporal tension within a time that has a direction. In atomized time, by contrast, all temporal points are alike. Nothing distinguishes one point in time from another. The decay of time disperses dying into perishing. Death puts an end to life, life as a directionless sequence of present moments, and it does so in non-time. This is the reason why dying is particularly difficult today. (2017:3)

Han (2017) associates the 'decay of time' with the rise of mass society and increasing uniformity, a uniformity in deep disguise behind the re-presentation of living diversity as consumerist variety (Hershock 2016). Han believes that 'authentic existence', or the individual in the emphatic sense of the word, is an obstacle to the smooth functioning of the 'they' of the masses. The acceleration of life prevents the emergence of deviating forms, of things developing and taking on distinct and independent forms (Han 2017:4). Han goes further, explaining that the cause of the shrinking present, or the disappearance of time as duration, is due to a much more complex set of factors than acceleration.

In an observation that touches on the discourses of wellbeing, Han (2017:10) questions the widespread assumption that an acceleration of life multiplies life and brings a person closer to the goal of having a fulfilled life. Life, he holds, cannot be explained on a quantitative basis: lest we confuse fulfilment with mere plenitude:

The acceleration thesis does not recognise that the real problem today is the fact that life has lost the possibility of reaching a meaningful conclusion. It is this fact that leads to the hectic rush and nervousness which characterize contemporary life. One begins ever anew; one zaps through "life possibilities",

precisely because of an inability to bring any single possibility to a conclusion...It never achieves rest – that is, completion. (Han 2017:11)

Because of its dissipation, time no longer exerts an ordering force; and this experience is intensified by individualization and atomization. Formative or decisive caesuras are absent from life, according to Han. The time of life is no longer structured by sections, completions, thresholds and transitions. Instead, there is a rush from one present to the next and an aging without growing old. Finally, one perishes in non-time.

Byung-Chul Han and the *Vita Contemplativa*

In a reflection that brings together insights that touch on wellbeing, our understanding of the realm of the economy (and labour), a lost notion of true freedom, and learning to live and die well in the Anthropocene, Han (2017:85-114) offers a profound series of reflections on the value of restoring our appreciation of the *Vita Contemplativa*.

For Han, the relationship between rest (*schole*) and non-rest (*ascolia*) has been reversed (Han 2017:98); rest now is a time of recreation or relaxation that is necessary for the sake of work. We can observe this absorption in the wellbeing debate and even in the co-option of practices such as mindfulness, where the concepts are co-opted and instrumentalized in pursuit of human capital. Wellbeing and mindfulness are absorbed into an understanding dominated by work and productivism; and are valued only insofar as they add to the productive output of the macro-economy.

Han (2017) recalls that, for Aristotle, philosophizing (*as theorin*) owes its existence to an understanding of leisure (*schole*) as freedom, without coercion or necessitation, without toil or care. This is in contrast with 'work' because work implies a lack of freedom and the coercion enforced by the necessities of life:

*Aristotle divided life into two areas, into time employed for non-leisure (a-scholia) and time of leisure (scholia), that is, into non-rest and rest. With regard to activities (prakta), Aristotle also situated the beautiful and noble outside of what is useful and necessary, that is, outside of work. Only need forces work upon us; work is therefore need-ful. Leisure, by contrast, opens up a space beyond the necessities of life that free of compulsion and care. **According to Aristotle, the nature of human existence is not care, but leisure. Contemplative rest enjoys absolute priority. All activities have to be carried out with the aim of this rest in mind and have to return to it.***²
(Han 2017:86)

Han recalls that Aristotle distinguished between three forms of life of the free man: the life of striving for pleasure (*hedone*), that of producing beautiful and noble deeds in the polis (*bios politikos*), and that which is dedicated to the contemplation of truth (*bios theoretikos*). Notably, all three are free from the 'needs' and 'compulsions' of life. Aristotle set aside the life dedicated to making money on account of its 'compulsive character'. Han observes:

The highest form of happiness has its source in the contemplative lingering on beauty, the activity that used to be called theoria. Its temporal dimension is duration. It turns towards those things that are imperishable and unchanging, the things that rest entirely in themselves...Leisure is a condition in which there is no care, no need, no compulsion. A human being only becomes properly human in this condition. (Han 2017:86)

As Han notes, the ancients' notion of leisure is inaccessible and even unintelligible to moderns because we live in a world that is absorbed by work, efficiency and productivity. Leisure, for Aristotle, being *schola*, lies outside of work and outside of inactivity (mere rest that punctuates labour time). It is more than 'relaxation' or 'switching off'. Rather, leisure, in Augustine's eyes, required a special ability and specific formation or education. Augustine's understanding of leisure (*otium*) refers to the chance for the pursuit of truth, an active, restful

² My emphasis.

alertness that predisposes the individual for the pursuit of truth, a lingering that presupposes a 'gathering of the senses'. (Han 2017:87)

Han traces (2017:88) the eclipse of our understanding of the *vita contemplativa* – from a period in the Middle Ages when the *vita activa* imbued by the *vita contemplativa* – through to the Reformation, when work began to acquire an importance beyond fulfilling meeting the necessities of life and 'the economy of time and that of salvation intermingled' (Han 2017:89). Later, Max Weber would see the spirit of capitalism prefigured in Protestant ascetism. For Han (2017:90) the process of secularization did not lead to the disappearance of the economy of salvation:

The compulsion towards accumulation is based on a striving toward salvation. The latter is still alive in modern capitalism. Material greed alone does not explain the focus on the acquisition of money, which appears almost irrational. The compulsion towards accumulation is based on a striving towards salvation. The latter's content can take diverse forms. Apart from the desire to have infinitely more time at one's disposal that one's limited lifetime through the endless amassing of money as congealed time, the urge towards accumulation is also produced by the striving for power. (2017:90-91)

The word 'wealth' (from the German word *Vermögen*) denotes an increase in the range of what is able to do. So for Karl Marx money brings about de-facticization, a suspension of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) in favour of projectedness. Han argues that 'with the process of industrialization as mechanization, human temporality approaches the temporality of machines. The industrial dispositive is an imperative of temporal efficiency that has the task of forming the human being according to the timing of the machine,' and life dominated by work is a *vita activa* 'entirely cut off from the *vita contemplativa*.' As the human being loses all capacity for contemplation, it degenerates into an *animal laborans*. (2017:91-92)

For Han, the society of consumption and leisure is characterized by a particular temporality: surplus time, the result of a massive increase in productivity, filled with events and experiences that are feeling and short-lived. It is a temporality in which 'nothing binds time in a lasting fashion' so the impression is created that 'time is passing very quickly, or that everything is accelerating. (Han 2018:92-93)'. For Han, consumption and time as duration contradict each other. Consumer goods do not last:

They are marked by decay as their constitutive element, and the cycles of appearance and decay become ever shorter. The capitalist imperative of growth means that things are produced and consumed with increasing speed...In the consumer society, one forgets how to linger. Consumer goods do not permit a contemplative lingering. They are used up as quickly as possible in order to create space for new products and needs. Contemplative lingering presupposes things which endure. But the compulsion to consume does away with duration. Neither, however, does so-called deceleration found duration. As far as the attitude to consumption is concerned, 'slow food' does not essentially differ from 'fast food'. Things are consumed – no more, no less.(Han 2017:93)

Han draws an important distinction between mere deceleration and the characteristics of the *vita contemplativa*. He points out that a reduction in speed does not by itself transform the *being* of things. The 'real problem is that all that endures, all that lasts and is slow, threatens to disappear altogether, or to be absent from life.' (2017:93) In stark contrast, forms of the *vita contemplativa* are also 'modes of being' such as 'hesitancy', 'releasement', 'shyness', 'waiting' and 'restraint.' These characteristics all rest on an experience of duration. This is in contrast to the 'time of work', which is without duration but 'consumes time for production.' That which lasts and is slow evades being used up and consumed: it founds duration, and entails a practice of duration.... 'interrupting the *time of work*.'

For Han, the labourer and the consumer are related to each other. Both 'use up time' and have no access to the *vita contemplativa*:

The production and consumption of things as the only possible activities of the labouring subject is opposed to the contemplative lingering on things. Today's society, in particular, is proof of the fact that a human being that has become nothing but a subject of labour is incapable of engaging with that free time which is not a time of labour. Although increasing productivity creates more and more free time, this time is used neither for higher activities nor for leisure. Rather, it serves the purpose either of recreation outside of work or of consumption. (Han 2017:100)

For Han, the franticness and restlessness of modern life has a lot to do with the loss of the contemplative faculty. The totalization of the world of work, including the *vita activa*, contributes to this loss of a vital dimension of human experience. Han reminds us that 'just being active impoverishes [your] experience...' 'whoever is not capable of stopping and pausing has no access to what is altogether different. Experience transforms. It interrupts the repetition of the ever same.'(2017:104) Han holds that one does not become susceptible to the making of experiences by becoming more active. Rather, what is needed is a particular kind of passivity:

You need to let yourself be concerned with that which evades the activity of the acting subject. (Han 2017:104)

Han invokes Heidegger's *On the Way to Language* (Heidegger 1971:57-108, cited in Han 2017:104) on the requirement that if we are to truly undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us and transforms us. With Heidegger (up to a point), Han resists the reduction of *being* to acting, for acting must itself contain moments of pausing in order not to freeze into mere labour. Commencing with a quotation from the poet Celan (2006), Han writes:

In the breathturn [Atemwende] of acting lies a stillness. Upon pausing before an action, at the moment of hesitation, the acting subject becomes aware of the immeasurable space that lies in front of the decision to act. The contingency of an action impresses itself fully on the acting subject only at the moment of its hesitating retreat from the action. A determination to act that does not know how to hesitate is blind. It sees neither its own shadow nor the other of itself...what distinguishes acting from labouring is not a surplus of activity, but the capacity to pause. Whoever does not know how to hesitate is a labourer. (Han 2017:104-105)

He warns that the *vita activa* has become more and more intense at the expense of the *vita contemplativa* since the beginning of modern times, contributing substantially to the modern compulsion to accelerate:

*The degradation of the human being to an animal laborans can also be interpreted as an effect of this modern development. The emphasis on labour and on acting are both based on the primacy of the *vita activa* in modern times and modernity...Only a revitalization of the *vita contemplativa* would be capable of liberating human beings from the compulsion to labour. In addition, the animal laborans is related to the animal rationale because the pure exercise of the faculty of understanding is labour. (110)³*

After Thomas Aquinas, Han holds that life is impoverished and becomes mere industry (*Gewerbe*) if it loses all contemplative moments. Contemplative 'lingering interrupts the time which is labour.' (2017:111) The *vita contemplativa* elevates time itself:

*A *vita contemplativa* without acting is blind, a *vita activa* without contemplation is empty. (2017:112)*

³ Engaging with Heidegger's work, Han (2017:111) points out that, for all his association with mysticism, Heidegger did not address the mystical dimension of contemplation, understood as a lingering with God in loving attentiveness, and free from the categorizing and securing intentionality.

Han, drawing from Heidegger's essay on 'Science and Reflection ()', comes very close to an observation common in Zen teaching, about the cultivation of a certain spaciousness that permits the meditator to watch the process of thinking emerge. Han notes that reflection begins when thinking that labours stops in its tracks:

Only at the moment of pausing does it traverse the space that lies in front of 'formation'. (Heidegger in 'Science and Reflection', p.180; cited in Han 2017:113) Only reflection has access to what is not an image, not an idea, but provides the place in which they may appear. In its 'surrender to that which is worthy of questioning' it opens itself up to what is slow and takes long, and what evades any quick capture. Reflection widens its gaze by raising it above the present-at and ready-to-hand with which labour is concerned. Where the hand stops in the act of capturing, where it hesitates, it acquires a vastness. (Han 2017:112)

Drawing on an image from Heidegger's writings, conjuring up a hand resting on another, Han concludes that only in hesitation does an immeasurable space open up for the hand. Only with the hesitating 'step back' of pausing can 'stillness' be heard which shuts itself off to the linear progress of the labour process. Contemplative lingering is also linked to the practice of gentleness or friendliness (*schonend*). For Han, it...

...lets happen, come to pass, and agrees instead of intervening. Active life without any contemplative dimension is incapable of friendly gentleness. It finds expression in accelerated production and destruction. It uses up time...Contemplative lingering gives time. It widens that being that is more than being-active. When life regains its capacity for contemplation, it gains in time and space, in duration and vastness. (2017:113)

Han observes that if all contemplative elements are driven out of life, it ends in a deadly hyper-activity. The human being risks suffocating among its own doings.

He ponders, 'perhaps the mind itself owes its emergence to an excess of time, an *otium*, even to a slowness of breath.' (2017:113)

Doughnut Onto Others...

Raworth's concentric circles of the "doughnut" illustrate two sets of nested boundaries: social (inner circle) and planetary (outer circle). The Raworth's thesis is that humanity's task for the 21st century is to find the middle way: a shared prosperity path for humanity and all life forms that is compatible with the sustainability and regeneration of the social and ecological boundaries that make life possible for all in dignity, approximated by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. Raworth is invoking more than a schematic representation of the need to bring societal design within the 'planetary boundaries,' a concept involving Earth system processes proposed in 2009 by a group of Earth system and environmental scientists led by Johan Rockström from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and Will Steffen from the Australian National University. Raworth's visual framing appeals to a much more

nuanced and profound idea that has echoes in many of the world's most ancient wisdom traditions: a restoration of a delicate 'dynamic balance' between human life (and the principles for the design and organisation of our collective systems of reproduction) and the safe ecological space where we must not only encounter conventional limits but enter into an intimate dance of *identification, care and self-regulation*.

A reconciliation of our design principles for society and the economy with the rhythms and tolerances of ecological systems will demand something akin to a new axial revolution: one that will have to be experienced as much in the body and in intimacies of a renewed care and appreciation for our relational and ecological self as in the re-design of our societies and collective provisioning.

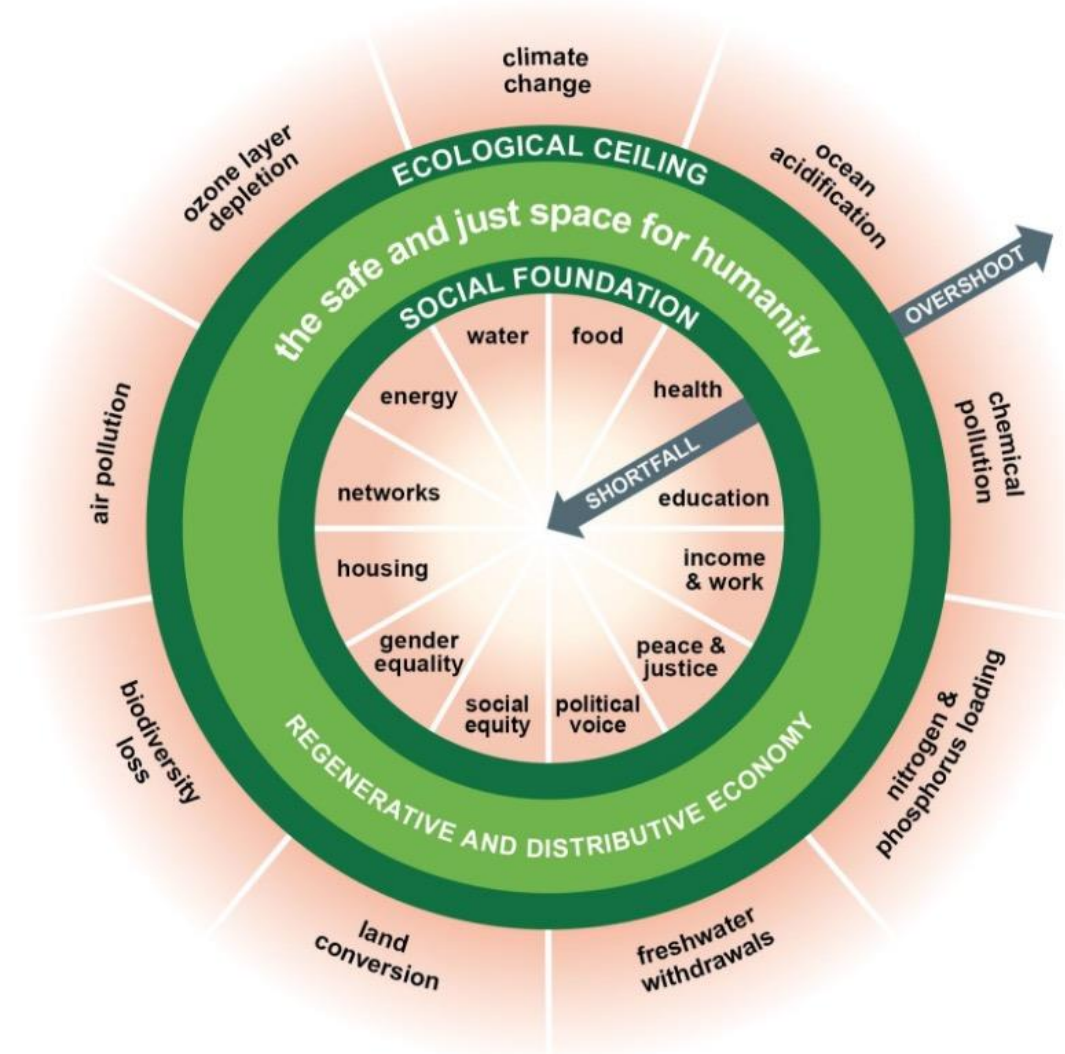


Fig 2: Kate Raworth's compelling 'Doughnut' visual frame illustrates 'safe and just space' within the ecological ceiling defined by Rockstrom et al.'s 'planetary boundaries' (2009) and underpinned by the 'social foundation' or human needs and rights for a life in dignity for all. ⁴

The middle way set out by Raworth is a manifesto built on the insight that the defining dance of civilizational fate that we have designated, *The Anthropocene*.

⁴ Illustration taken from Kate Raworth's 'doughnut economics' website at: <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>. Accessed 25 September 2018.

In his eulogy to 'carbon-fueled capitalism', Ray Scranton describes the system that we must undo – an undoing that poses existential questions for our dominant civilization and our ethical lives - a 'zombie system' and an aggressive human monoculture that has proven astoundingly virulent, toxic and cannibalistic:

Humanity's survival through the collapse of carbon-fueled capitalism and into the new world of the Anthropocene will hinge on our ability to let our old way of life die while protecting, sustaining, and reworking our collective stories of cultural technology. After all, our capacities to innovate and adapt depend on our being able to draw from our immense heritage of intellectual production, living and dead, exotic and close at hand...(2015:23-24)

Citing the world's deposit of ancient and living wisdom traditions, Scranton suggests that the 'truly marvellous achievement' of liberal multicultural tolerance must now yield – if we are to escape the death-throes of carbon capitalism and embrace the Anthropocene – to an acceptance of human limits and transience as fundamental truths. He adds: 'Learning to die as an individual means letting go of our predispositions and fear. Learning to die as a civilization means letting go of this particular way of life and its ideas of freedom, success, and progress. These two ways of learning to die come together in the role of the humanist thinker: the one who is willing to stop and ask troublesome questions, the one who is willing to interrupt, the one who resonates on other channels and with slower, deeper rhythms.' (2015:24)

Zen: Ensō

As Raworth observes in *Doughnut Economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st century economist* (2017) the concentric circles of her 'doughnut' graphic have chimed in a world-in-search of a new metaphor: one that can help guide us out of a linear image of economic progression and into an appreciation of 'dynamic balance'.

Raworth is conscious of the power of her use of the concentric circles as a 'visual frame' as it appeals to a primordial insight into the nature and value of acknowledging a universal principle that lies behind all living systems. The resonance is as recent as calls by Barbara Ward for global action to tackle both the 'inner limits' of human needs and rights and the 'outer limits' of the environmental stress that the Earth can endure, and as ancient as the wisdom traditions and iconography of Greece, the Maori and the Andes. On a contemporary note, we are facing a dual and collective experience of exhaustion: an exhaustion of ecological capacity for the sustainable reproduction of the conditions of human life on earth, alongside symptoms of an inner exhaustion brought on by the reduction of our possibilities for 'being-in-the-world' to the stripped down experiences of consumerism.

One of the ancient symbols invoked by Raworth's visual framing of the concentric circles is the painted Ensō circle (Fig. 1), a sacred symbol in the Zen school of Buddhism and one of the most common subjects of Japanese calligraphy. The two Japanese Kanji symbols that make up the word Ensō can be translated as 'Mutual Circle' or 'Circle of Togetherness.' Its symbolism refers to emptiness or fullness, presence of absence. It can symbolize the perfect meditative state, strength, the universe, single mindedness, and the state of mind of the artist at the moment of creation and the acceptance of imperfect as perfection.

The world was transformed into a legible surface. The new *objects* of the 'State', the 'economy', and the modern 'subject' could not and cannot exhaust *the real*, but we are confronting the very real prospect that the ultimate 'ground plan' (Heidegger) of consumer-led development now threatens to exhaust the complex ecosystems on which it has been imposed in a violent assault on being. The unprecedented global risk presented by climate change recalls Foucault's (1987) warning that modernity stands at a threshold where the life of the species is now wagered on its own political strategies. The threshold signals not only a unique level of risk but also a challenge to investigate the individual and collective consequences of a decision to buy into a self-imposed closure of a privileged 'world-view-as-destiny' associated with a socio-economic model of development

defined in the image of the 'West' (Latouche 1996; Swazo 1984). Foucault's observation about our arrival at the threshold is a challenge – above all – to participate in a critical reworking of the 'unconscious' crisis of modernity itself.

Michael Zimmerman (1990) appealed to Zen Buddhism in his search for an explanation of Martin Heidegger's understanding of the path that may lead us out of the enclosed spaces of Western modernity via a restored mindfulness. Comparing the contemporary world condition to a Zen Koan that must be studied, Zimmerman explains that Heidegger's account of the person 'released' from the 'claim' of *Gestell* is reminiscent of what Eastern thinkers have described as an enlightened person: someone no longer driven by the compulsion to control and master. Heidegger used the word *Gestell* to conjure up the image of the technological disclosure of all things under the sway of instrumental rationality. Informed by being as technology, people force nature to conform to their subjective needs and expectations. Whenever nature proves unsatisfactory for human purposes, people are invited to reframe it as they see fit. Heidegger saw that this drive towards a technological reframing inevitably compels entities to be revealed in inappropriate ways. These transgressions have begun to rebound in a multitude of environmental crises as the limits of natural systems have been overwhelmed in a tide of technological hubris concealed by a corporate-sponsored ego-centric forgetfulness that the world it (the ego) encounters is but one possibility among many forced disclosures.

Heidegger also saw the courageous affirmation of mortality and finitude as necessary for letting entities be, a form of meditative thinking to cultivate a capacity for living a resistance to the totalising compulsion for a transparent and fully legible world where we meet only reflections of ourselves and our all-consuming dreams.

Hershock (1999:105) has applied his considerable scholarship on the Chan Buddhist tradition and thought to the pressing question of how our preferred technologies affect the structure of our awareness and the manner of community or life together. He offers the Buddhist 'middle way' as an ethics of resistance to

the colonization of consciousness and as a source of concepts for the evaluation of the extent of our complicity in what he describes as the market-driven canonization of ignorance. Hershock identifies 'control' as the key strategic value that has informed the explosion of technological development that began in the European West and which has spread globally from the 16th century onwards. He specifies that what we refer to generically as "technology" is actually a particular family or lineage of technologies that has arisen and been sustained through a complex of political, social, economic, and cultural forces focused on the value of *exerting control over our circumstances to enhance felt independence*:

Technologies biased toward *control* have made possible and practical the institutionalization of previously unimaginable freedoms of choice. (2006:90)

From the Buddhist perspective outlined by Hershock, however, intentions to control our circumstances and enhance felt independence can be seen as a crucial nexus of conditions for suffering that the Buddha gathered under the so-called conceit that "I am." In other words, to the extent that I insist upon *being independent* – or *being dependent* – I forcibly ignore my interdependent origin among all other things.

In effect, the individual establishes a horizon of relevance inside of which is an experience of "me" and beyond which everything else is explicitly "not-me" (2006:90).

Central to Hershock's thesis here is the observation that although we remain related to others and to our environment, the prevalence of control fosters a dichotomous perspective on that relationship – a splitting into the objective and subjective – that then facilitates treating our relations with others as either actually or potentially instrumental. This is a particularly important observation when it comes to understanding how we are invited by communications and media technologies to dispose our attention:

No longer intimately continuous with all things – that is, related internally – gaps open in what I can attend to or hold in careful awareness. By ignoring

what intimately connects who “I am” with what “I am not”, I render myself liable to being blindsided – subject to accidental or fateful events of the sort that cause the experience of trouble or suffering. Asserting independence through exercising technologically mediated control almost paradoxically renders us subject to new vulnerabilities (Hershock 2006:90-91).

The Middle Way as taught by the Buddha is a way of balance, based on instructions to eschew the extremes of asceticism and the pursuit of pleasure. Given the responsibility assumed by the individual in Buddhist teachings, the technologies designed to address forms of suffering in all its guises are what Peter Hershock describes as ‘social technologies rooted in the training of awareness, the perfecting of attention.’ (Hershock 1999:111)

He continues:

Instead of stressing increased control over our circumstances, Buddhist technology has aimed at opening up our capacity for improvising with and appreciatively contributing to those very circumstances. Rather than focusing on explicitly altering our situation, techniques like sitting meditation, the use of mantra, bowing, and guided visualization are part of a system for reconfiguring the value complexes that implicitly condition the topography of our experience (Hershock 1999:112).

In contrast with an all too typical response to trouble – whether in private or public life – where we are likely to do more of what we’ve already done, to effect ever greater control (new laws, more tools, institutions), the ideal Buddhist practitioner aspires to cultivate unlimited capacity for ‘skill-in-means’ (upāya). Such a person is able to improvise with any situation to orient it (with a minimum expenditure of force or energy) away from blockage, stalemate, rigidity, and frustration and toward freedom, harmony, flexibility and joy. Rather than forcing the situation to change, the practitioner cultivates an ability to appreciate the unique qualities of a situation and draw them out in an appropriate direction. The Chan tradition has adopted the Taoist term *wu-wei* to

connote this disposition: 'conduct without precedent, referring to a capacity of spontaneous conduct or virtuosic improvisation that removes blockages to the natural course of things (*tao*). Hershock (1999:114) explains that in both Chan and in the Taoist traditions, *wu-wei* refers to something slightly more subtle than improvisation: it is associated with the free circulation of energy – that is, with a situation in which we need not control a thing because all things are able to take care of themselves. This demands recognition of a sense of order in situations that is an-archic, or centreless, and without overarching principles or precedents. Unlike Western notions of order – predicated on universal, eternal laws and regularity – the Chinese cosmos pivots on the irruption of the unexpected (Hershock 1991).

From the Buddhist perspective, exerting control and amassing power to effect change has severe limitations. The more power we amass, the less freely energy circulates, the less things take care of themselves, the more we are obligated to act on them, and so on in an endless spiralling that effectively seals us off from simply 'according with the situation, responding as needed.' (Hershock 1999:115) With such strategies we will ultimately only succeed in crossing a series of thresholds of utility.

Instead of concentrating on building a perfectly predictable or orderly world, Buddhist technology, according to Hershock (1999:115), emphasizes training ourselves to creatively appreciate – literally impart value to – whatever is present. It is concerned not with 'things' or 'situations', but with the direction in which our narration is moving. This means opening up an unprecedented path between any present trouble and the harmonious interpenetration of all things:

Instead of freedom being identified with an absence of restrictions on our ability to choose this or that, Buddhist freedom is understood in terms of virtuosity as such – virtuosity in the art of contributing (Hershock 1999:115-116).

For Hershock, relinquishing our obsession with objective control and practicing instead the art of seeing things as enlightening and worthy of limitless

appreciation directly orients us away from a world of 'things' toward the originally ambiguous narration of which they are but conceptual, emotional, or perceptual abstractions. In Buddhism, things are what they *are* only because our attention has circumscribed them, established at least relatively fixed horizons for their definition. Shifting our attention by relinquishing these horizons is thus our most immediate way of releasing the energy bound up in form. Practicing emptiness – relinquishing our horizons for what is admitted as relevant – is liberating not because we get anything, but because we are removing blockages to the spontaneous and creative circulation of energy by freeing attention from its customs, habits, and obsessions.

Freeing all beings, Hershock (1999:131) adds, means releasing them from the boundary conditions imposed on them by our values.

The Buddhist technology of meditation training attention is steadily directed away from the habits of thought, speech, feeling, and deed that normally maintain the identity or fixed horizons of our egos. Robbed of their normal diet of physical and psychic energy, these habitual systems naturally atrophy, freeing up energy for both deepening the meditative training and realizing new levels of improvisation in conduct. Skilled meditation is not a process of controlling attention but arises as the unreserved offering or contribution of our attention to the liberating movement of a present and shared narration. Hershock explains:

In meditation we simply offer ourselves – all our attention-energy – to appreciating the moment in which we find ourselves. It is attending in the sense of vigilant caring – our most primordial mode of contribution...Meditation can be seen, then, as an alternative technology – an alternative to our technological bias toward control. Meditation breaks down the cycle of our wanting (Hershock 1999:280).

Hershock also uses the word 'care' to describe the disposition summoned up by the meditative practice. He notes that, in meditation, we simply offer ourselves –

all our attentive energy – to appreciating the moment in which we find ourselves: ‘attending in the sense of vigilant caring.’ (Hershock 1999:280)

Meditative technologies and the associated teachings can only form part of a collective and systemic transformation of consumer capitalism. They can, nevertheless, provide a first moment of insight and opposition and help to identify the nature of consumerism as biopower. Jackson (2016) notes the importance of Michel Foucault’s work on governmentality for helping us to understand the way in which Government institutions – driven by the growth imperative – inevitably design consumer society to favour a particularly materialistic individualism and to encourage the relentless pursuit of consumer novelty because this is exactly what is needed to keep the economy going:

The governmentality of the consumer society demands it. (Jackson 2016:197)

It is interesting to note that a systematic erosion of ‘commitment’ is part of that structural requirement for the reproduction of consumer capitalism, according to Jackson (206:197). He notes that growth calls on us to be myopic, individualistic novelty seekers, because that is exactly what is needed to perpetuate the economic system. It propels us in this direction by undermining the commitment devices that support more altruistic and more conservative values. Governments play an active role in creating this paradoxical set of societal dynamics because it bears ultimate responsibility for the stability of a macroeconomics based on endless growth, which in turn, demands the stimulation of consumerism. An individualistic pursuit of novelty is regarded as a key requirement for consumption growth and economic stability.

Hershock reminds us that wherever we’re disposed predominantly toward control, our minds, our lives, are not only focused on attaining closure – for our wants, our deliberations, our intentions. They are effectively closed to what is not wanted or unplanned. Control silences the things and people sharing our

world, making it impossible for them to spontaneously and dramatically contribute to our narration. (Hershock 1999:280)

Interrupting the Self Same: Love in the time of the Anthropocene

On the face of it, Raworth's work could be located within a lineage of reports, academic writing and activism on the notion of 'limits', notably the limits to growth movement established after the Club of Rome report in 1972. A team of researchers at MIT used a computer model to predict the impact of growth on factors, including agriculture, industrial output, and pollution. The Club of Rome and parts of the post- or de-growth movement are associated with a sacrificial paradigm in ecological activism, a message that can be difficult for governments to embrace, given the close links between electoral mandates, social stability, and the perceived need for governments to underwrite consumer confidence. This challenge has been well-rehearsed in the writings of Professor Tim Jackson at the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity.

In the latest edition of his highly influential book, *Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow* (2017:119), Tim Jackson recounts his pithy put-down of consumerism: 'a story of ordinary people spending money they don't have, on things they don't need, to create impressions that won't last on people they don't care about'. His chapter on 'Flourishing – within limits', Jackson challenges a myth that sits at the centre of our so called consumer-driven form of capitalism: 'What looks like a system in which the needs of the human psyche are cleverly aligned with the demands of the economy now begins to look like a system in which precisely the opposite pertains (Jackson 2017:120).' Rather, 'economic success relies on persuading people back out onto the high street to spend. But this demand no longer resonates so easily with ordinary people. Politicians and policy-makers and bankers and financiers and advertisers now find they have to work much harder to encourage the kind of spending that will "put the economy back on track" (Jackson 2017:120).' If prosperity is about more than material wealth and has just as much to do with our ability to flourish, physically, socially and psychologically, and to participate

meaningfully in the life of society, Jackson surmises that we can probably flourish and thrive with considerably lower levels of material consumption. Indeed we might even achieve better outcomes, with greater social cohesion and higher personal fulfilment. The challenge is to expose the myth that there is an essential homology between the structure of our growth-dependent macro-economy/consumerism and human nature: for 'We are not by nature helpless dupes, too lazy or weak to resist the power of manipulative advertisers. On the contrary, human creativity, emotional intelligence and resilience in the face of adversity are visible everywhere, even in the face of an apparently pathological consumerism (Jackson 2017:116).' Jackson, for example, cites authorities going right back to John Stuart Mill (1848) to challenge the necessity of a societal structure contingent on a macro-economic imperative of growth that requires 'the relentless role of selfish competition and the excessive commoditisation of everyday life (2017:125)'.

Jackson's work, however, raises more questions than it answers about the question of the subject's resilience in the face of powerful systems mediated – decisively – by the 'attention economy' that interpolates our subject-positions and colonizes ever more bandwidth in what once were those most intimate relations without minds and bodies. When we speak of the figure of the consumer we address a disposition that goes far beyond the act of choice, accumulation and exchange. Fundamentally, the figure of the consumer interpolates the capitalist complex – spanning a vision of 'knower', 'known' and the quality of the relationship between the two. For Parker Palmer (1993:23): '...the images of the knower, and their relationship are formative in the way an educated person not only thinks but acts...the relation of the knower to the known becomes the relation of the living self to the larger world...our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic.' Apffel-Marglin and Bush (1995:4) add that the ontological gulf between the knower and the known, this breach of faith between the two, leads to a way of life in which the known is controlled, mastered and used for one's benefit.

Jackson makes a passing reference to Plum Village but seems to radically understate the forces at work behind consumer capitalism insofar as they now inform and drive the “attention economy”. If we consider the United States as the vanguard of a global consumer culture promoted and consciously projected as an important dimension of Foreign Policy we begin to appreciate the pacifying role of consumer goods and a vast entertainment industry providing spectacles and appealing diversions within a wider political narrative, described by Sheldon S. Wolin as a form of ‘inverted totalitarianism.’ Describing the system of power in the United States, Wolin (2008) uses the term to describe a system that has succumbed to the anonymous power of the corporate state, where economics has come to dominate politics.

Transformation will require interruptions at both the macro-economic level, along the lines he has set out in his revised edition of *Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow* (2016), but also the sphere of culture and local practices. What Jackson under-states is the extent to which the attention economy – in the service of its own reproduction (in pursuit of consumer capitalism) – currently undermines critical and meaningful resistance due to the fundamental ethos of ‘control’ that has been embedded in social, economic and political cultures.

In his *Expulsion of the Other* (2018) Byung-Chul Han sets out just how deep these questions go in our contemporary moment marked by the Empire of the Self-same: a new totality wherein the culture of consumerism has left an ontological mark deep under our skins. The neoliberal capitalist system of macro-economic growth-as-fetish has an intimate counterpart in the production of the modern subject and her exhausted body:

The proliferation of the Same constitutes the pathological changes that afflict the social body. It is made sick not by denial and prohibition, but by over-communication and over-consumption; not by suppression and negation, but by permissiveness and affirmation. The pathological sign of

our times is not repression but depression. Destructive pressure comes not from the Other but from within. (Byung-Chul 2018:1)

For Byung-Chul the violence of the Same is invisible because of its positivity; the proliferation of the Same presents itself as growth...

Today, perception itself takes the form of 'binge-watching'. This refers to the consumption of videos and films without any temporal restrictions...The proliferation of the Same resembles not a carcinoma but a coma, and does not meet with any immunological defences. Once goggles oneself into unconsciousness. (Han 2018: 2)

Han concludes with a call to an ethics of listening, for conversation to the Other via eros, for only eros is capable of freeing the I from depression, from narcissistic entanglement in itself and a temporal opening to the Other. He calls for a temporal revolution that ushers in a completely new time for 'Today's temporal crisis is not acceleration, but rather the totalization of the *time of the self*.' The time of the other, he posits, eludes the logic of increase based on performance and efficiency, which creates a pressure to accelerate. The neoliberal politics of time does away with the time of the Other, which it considers an unproductive time. The totalization of the time of the self goes hand in hand with the totalization of production. (Han 2018:78)

No Limits: Limits as Virtuosity

Scranton reminds us that philosophical humanism in its most radical practice is the disciplined interruption of somatic and social flows, the detachment of consciousness from impulse, and the condensation of conceptual truths out of the granular data of experience. It is the study of dying and a reconciliation with the dominion of death and the transience of individual existences, a reconciliation that is also a source of liberation into an embodied affirmation of the web of being (or 'interbeing' in the words of the Zen Master, Thich Nhat

Hanh) that connects past to future, and *the Others* to us. Scranton writes of 'practice' and 'cultivation':

Learning to die is hard. It takes practice. There is no royal road, no first-class lane. Learning to die demands daily cultivation of detachment and daily reminders of mortality. It requires long communion with the dead. And since we can't ever really know how to do something until we do it, learning to die also means accepting the impossibility of achieving that knowledge as long as we live...Yet [sic] the practice is the wisdom. (Scranton 2015:92)

Scranton cites the Japanese Zen master and scholar, Eihei Dogen (1200-1253): 'To practice the way single-heartedly is, in itself, Enlightenment.' He adds: 'As we struggle, awash in social vibrations of fear and aggression, to face the catastrophic self-destruction of global civilization, the only way to keep alive our long tradition of humanistic inquiry is to learn to die. We must practice suspending stress-semantic chains of social excitation through critical thought, contemplation, philosophical debate, and posing impertinent questions.' (Scranton 2015:108) He concludes that if we were to see past and future laid out in a single mathematical design it would appear infinite, determined and perfect. Nothing went wrong. No mistakes were made:

Yet we can practice and cultivate understanding the intimate, necessary connection of all things to each other. (Scranton 2015:117)

For the contemporary Zen teacher and writer, Daido Looi (2007), the 21st century mind is called to recover the mind of ancient buddhas, a mind marked by insight into the nature of the universe as a whole. Daido Looi (2007:27) notes that the Buddha mind is the mind of all sentient beings (the human and the more-than-human). This is a mind that is readily accessible but which has been buried under lifetimes of conditioning by parents, teachers, culture, nations, and education. He adds:

When we realize the interdependent universe, there's now way to avoid responsibility for it; it becomes unavoidably clear that what we do and what happens to us are the same thing. When you realize that deeply, it's no longer possible to postpone, blame, or be a victim. We create our universe – that's what is realized. That is the empowerment that comes from realization. (Daido Looi 2007:28)

Similarly, Michael Stone....yoga ...intimacy...

In her *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (2017), Puig de la Bellacasa builds on Tronto (1987) to unpack the political and ethical significance of *care* (“everything we do to”). Tronto wrote of those elements of an integrated act of care, namely ‘the affective and ethical dispositions involved in concern, worry, and taking responsibility for others’ well-being.’ Tronto (1993:103; with de la Bellacasa’s emphasis) defined care as including ‘everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair “our world”...which we seek to *interweave in a complex, life sustaining web.*’ De la Bellacasa observes that a politics of care engages more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence. Moreover, she adds:

Another critical dimension of this generic conception is the accent on care as vital in interweaving a web of life, expressing a key theme in feminist ethics, an emphasis on interconnection and interdependency in spite of the aversion to “dependency” in modern industrialized societies that still give prime value to individual agency.

In a chapter on ‘Thinking with Care’, de la Bellacasa (2017) turns her attention to the writings of Donna Haraway on the situatedness of knowledge (1991, 1997). De La Bellacasa, engaging in a speculative ethics, reads Haraway’s take on the situatedness of knowledge as a way of thinking with care, positing that if knowledge is situated this means that knowing and thinking are unconceivable without the multitude of relations that make possible the worlds we think in:

'relations of thinking and knowing require care and affect how we care.' (de la Bellacasa 2017:69) In common with Zen writers but distinctive in her practice of speculative ethics, de la Bellacasa's work is premised on ontology rather than moral or epistemology: for 'not only relations involve care, care is relational per se.' (2017:69) In other words, this vision of caring presupposes 'heterogeneity as the ontological ground on which everything humans relate with exists: myriad doings – everything we do – and of ontological entities that compose a world – selves, bodies, environment. It speaks of care as a manifold range of *doings* needed to create, hold together, and sustain life and continues its diverseness.' (2017:69-70) De la Bellacasa reminds us that the affective tensions of care are present in its very etymology, which includes notions of both 'anxiety, sorry and grief' and 'serious mental attention.' She concludes that a politics of care goes against the bifurcation of consciousness that would keep our knowledge untouched by anxiety and inaccuracy: 'Involved knowledge is about *being touched* rather than observing from a distance.' (2017:93)

Towards a Mindful Commons

A feature of this contemporary commoning movement is the shift from a view of the commons as a 'thing' or even as a set of arrangements to a phenomenological emphasis on the active promotion of 'commoning' as a way of *being, doing and seeing* the world (Bollier 2014). Commoning has been described (Weber 2013:44) as an attempt to redefine our very understanding of 'the economy,' to challenge a dominant understanding that valorises rationality over subjectivity, material wealth over human fulfilment, and the system's abstract necessities (growth, capital accumulation) over human needs. Commoning can shatter these dualisms and reconfigures the role of participants so that we are not simply reduced to the roles of 'producers' or 'consumers' but regarded as participants in a physical and meaningful exchange of care with multiple material, social and sense-making needs.

Commoners realise that their household needs and livelihoods are entangled with the specific place and habitat where they live, and with the earth as a living

entity. The recovery of the commons is a collective act of restorative memory and remembering (Bollier 2014) and practice, and a rendering visible new possibilities for economic forms in the face of a failed attempt by champions of capitalist power to impose a false arrest on the historical evolution of economic ideas: to revive and re-embed slow practices in an ethos that is local or situated, entangled in relationships of attention (as attending to) that are human and non-human, and that command an ethics of care, reciprocity and inter-being (Weber 2013). Rowe (2001) describes the commons as the 'hidden economy, everywhere present but rarely noticed. It provides the basic support systems of life – both ecological and social.' Bresnihan (2015) sums up one perspective of the commons, one that refuses to fix the idea to that of a 'resource', for the commons is not merely land or knowledge but *the way* these, and more, are combined, used and cared for by and through a collective that is not only human but also non-human (more-than-human). Commoning, then, denotes the continuous making and remaking of the commons through shared practice. Bresnihan (2015) adds that at the heart of this relational, situated interdependence of humans and non-humans is not an impoverished world of 'niggardly nature,' nor an infinitely malleable world of 'techno-culture', but a *more-than-human* commons that navigates between limits and possibilities as they arise.

The cultivation of a mindful commons will demand a network of new conversations and practices, some of them embodied in the technologies of contemplative meditation and related mind-body practices or askesis. Attention is that to which we attend. William James (1958) observed that what we attend to is reality. Wallace (2006) believes that our very perception of reality is tied closely to where we focus our attention. Increasingly, our individual and collective ability 'to see' has been mediated by a highly reductionist mind-set of market-based economics and culture; Bollier (2014:150) notes that 'to see the commons – *to really see the commons*' we need to escape this reductionist mindset. This is true of the urban garden waiting to emerge through an act of attending and imagination, a pause that allows us to see through what has become hidden in plain view behind the ab-jective appearance of an abandoned

piece of urban 'waste' land. This is also true of the quality of our attendance to our own bodies and dispositions if 'care for the self' is to be cultivated and inform our relations with the world. De la Bellacasa (2012), wants us to remember that 'relations of thinking and knowing require care' (2012:198) and care is relational. Only what we pay attention to seems real to us (Wallace 2006). While what we ignore seems to fade into insignificance until, perhaps, we are, blindsided and events suddenly call out for attention. Wallace adds: 'Each of us chooses, by our ways of attending to things, the universe we inhabit and the people we encounter. But for most of us, this 'choice' is unconscious, so it's not really a choice at all.' Which raises interesting questions about freedom. While we hold to our beliefs about free will we are equally conscious of our struggles to direct our attention. He (2006:14) observes, 'We may believe in free will, but we can hardly be called 'free' if we can't direct our own attention. No philosopher or cognitive scientist needs to inform us that our behaviour isn't always guided by free will – it becomes obvious as soon as we try to hold our attention on a chosen object.'

The contemporary mindfulness movement (with its roots in Zen practice) and associated spiritual traditions, are associated with forms of training to enhance the capacity for attention in attempts to interrupt patterns of conditioned behaviour and cultivate a genuine quality of freedom and spaciousness around our capacity to see, to care, and our capacity for awareness. There is an emerging homology – rendered all the more urgent by the nature of the 'attention economy' – between the practices and dispositions of commoning and the mindfulness movement, especially for those who wish to inform their activism and powers of resistance.

Conclusions

The Anthropocene summons a potentially *liberating* encounter with limits – a defining 'sign of our times' – limits that are at once ecological and limits that suggest an imperative to embrace new forms of liberated awareness: a mutual cultivation of critical awareness and deep mind/body practice. The relation-to-

the body/mind is the first gateway to wilderness and wilding. It is also where we can first cultivate resistance by engaging with affective power, knowledge and the wisdom of our individual and collective dispositions-to-the-world as more-than-commons.

McGilchrist (2009:28) is correct to point out that *attention* is not just another function alongside other cognitive functions. Indeed, he claims, its ontological status is of something prior to functions and even to things, because the kind of attention we bring to the world *changes the nature of the world we attend to*, the very nature of the world in which those functions are carried out, and in which those 'things' come to exist. He continues:

Attention changes what kind of a thing comes into being for us: in that way it changes the world. (2009:28)

Moreover, the quality of attention is also bound up with who 'we' are and wish to become. Its quality defines who is doing the attending:

Through the direction and nature of our attention, we prove to ourselves to be partners in creation, both of the world and of ourselves. In keeping with this, attention is inescapably bound up with value – unlike what we conceive as 'cognitive functions', which are neutral in this respect...It brings into being a world, with it, depending on its nature, a set of values (McGilchrist 2009:28).

One of the most intriguing questions the modern citizen faces in this new age of limits – an age in which it appears that the anticipated exhaustion of resources and pollution sinks is matched by the psychic exhaustion of what was once a globalising political imaginary with universalising ambition, culminating in an age of sovereign consumers demanding the West of all possible worlds – is the ageless question of freedom. On the meaning of freedom signalled by the rise of the ecological movement, Eckersley (1992) once suggested that the new project entails much more than a simple reassertion of the modern emancipatory ideal of human autonomy or self-determination. It also calls for a re-evaluation of the

foundations of, and the conditions for, human autonomy or self-determination in Western political thought (Eckersley 1992:18).

Leiss (1978) made a related point when he observed that everything depends not so much upon the establishment that limits to economic growth do exist but upon whether humans regard such limits as a bitter disappointment or as a welcome opportunity to turn from quantitative to qualitative improvement in the course of creating a conserver society.

As Luke (1999) observed in his *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ecology*, the consumerist social model calls for a 'political economy of social ecology and voluntary simplicity' (1999:198). Citing the work of E.F Schumacher, Hazel Henderson, Ivan Illich and Duane Elgin, Luke describes voluntary simplicity as an essential part of a *practice as an oppositional form of struggle* against the regimes tied to transnational corporate capital, and designed to undercut the extravagant consumption, social passivity and personal impotence engendered in the everyday life of the consumer. For his part, Elgin, also underlines the overlapping concerns of ecology, resistance and mindfulness as a technique for the 'care of the self' in the emphasis he places on intentionality and purposefulness for those who wish to pursue a simplified lifestyle, with due regard for both the outer world and the inner world:

To the extent that we do not notice both inner and outer aspects of our passage through life, then our capacity for voluntary, deliberate, and purposeful action is commensurately diminished (Elgin 2002: 245).

Just as the contradictions of ecological constraints have begun to make themselves felt in debates on macroeconomic concepts of 'growth' and the meaning of 'prosperity', so we can expect reflective individuals and communities to increasingly transform their experience of 'freedom' – *spuriously reduced to calculable market choice* - into a more far-reaching set of choices and refusals in response to a proliferation of forms of discontent with the by-products of

affluence and a growing awareness that the realisation of important intrinsic values are not in the gift of the market. In response to more and more choice, a growing number of people are choosing to simplify, consume less and differently, and to bring their expenditure and their experience of self under a gentle form of control and regulation for a disposition of care, recognising that while choice is beneficial up to a point, limitations, restrictions and boundaries can also have a strangely liberating effect (Sigman 2004).⁵

None of these insights are new. The French philosopher Michel Foucault – who once spent time on retreat in a Japanese Zen temple and wrote about his admiration for meditative and monastic practices – was also interested in the Greek concept of *epimeleiam heautou*, which means ‘care of one’s self’, describing a type of work, activity and attention, knowledge or technique (1984:359-360). In ancient thought he found a different organization of ethical subjectivity and a different formulation of self-knowledge, an experience that is aesthetic and ethopoetic rather than hermeneutical. The imperative to self-knowledge was once but one element of a broader and more fundamental *task* of self-care. Indeed the pursuit of knowledge was once inseparable from the ancients’ pursuit of love.

For Foucault, ‘Care of the self’ (*epimēleia heautou*) is an attitude of mind that combines one’s comportment within the world, with others and with the self. Most importantly in this context is the dimension of *epimēleia*, which refers to activities, practices and techniques. Care in the ancient context does not simply refer to a state of being. It is an activity: watching over, cultivating, protecting, improving. Foucault catalogued a number of these practices:

- Techniques for concentrating the soul; and
- The *retreat* or withdrawal, which entails both physical and mental withdrawal.
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⁵ A. Sigman, *The Explosion of Choice: Tyranny or Freedom?* (2004) cited in the report *I will if you will: Towards sustainable consumption* (Sustainable Development Commission and the National Consumer Council, London, 2006). <www.aricsigman.com/research.html> (accessed 6 October 2008)

The relationship between the subject and truth in 'care of the self' is not dealt with as a question of how the subject is able to know the truth, including the truth about itself. Foucault, rather, sought to show that the relationship takes place within an experience he described as a form of 'spirituality' or 'a transformation necessary in order to have access to the truth' (CdF82: 16-17). Spirituality refers here to a particular form of care of the self that transforms one in the necessary way to gain access to the truth. The truth is available to the subject at a price that puts into play the very being of the subject itself. Other dimensions of spirituality are the resulting self-modification of the subject; and an uncovering of truth as a fulfilment or saving experience (McGushin 2007:39). Looking back from the time of modernity, Foucault acknowledged that it is difficult now for us to appreciate the experience of truth as a spiritual practice.

When Foucault took up that invitation to sample the life of Zen monks in the Spring of 1978 he would have been struck by the emphasis on the material or practical aspects of the life. In the Soto Zen tradition, in particular, students are constantly called back to the basics of posture, the body, and "just sitting" (*shikantaza*). Fischer (2005) notes that far from offering a path to transcend the material world, the process of Zen practice *deepens and opens the material world, revealing its inner richness*. This is accomplished not by making the physical world symbolic or filling it up with explanations or complications but simply by entering the physical world wholeheartedly, on its own terms:

When you do that, you see that the material world is not just the material world, something flat and dumb, as we might have thought...As the Zen masters show us, the material world is not superficial or mundane. What is superficial and mundane is our habitual view of the material world, which we have so long insisted on reducing to a single dimension (Fischer 2005:218).

Zen training is the effort to learn to enter the material world at such a depth and to appreciate it. From the Zen perspective the underlying challenge is not that we are 'too materialistic' but that we 'are not materialistic enough' (Haller 2009). Too many people fail to treasure the simple things that are available, and do not

have an appreciation for their utility. There is a widespread (perhaps institutionalised) forgetfulness or failure to realise that the kitchen knife can last a lifetime, that we can not only own and wear those clothes but mend them too for reuse. Haller, formerly the Co-Abbott of the San Francisco Zen Centre, one of the earliest Zen institutions in the West, recalls that there is another way of relating to material objects that we already possess and this alternative must be part of our redefinition of prosperity. Haller notes:

It is about connectedness and the way in which we are involved with our material world and with our environment. As the intimacy of involvement grows, the satisfaction grows. I think that is a shift that all of us are invited to make. That is part of the wonderful thing about awareness....mindfulness...it initiates that kind of intimacy...it initiates an appreciation for what is happening. And as we do that [practice of mindfulness], quite naturally for us there is a shift in how we define prosperity for ourselves. And as that happens for us, the compelling urge to consume more will start to dissipate. (Haller 2009)

The Middle Way as taught by the Buddha is a way of balance, based on instructions to eschew the extremes of asceticism and the pursuit of pleasure. Given the responsibility assumed by the individual in Buddhist teachings, the technologies designed to address forms of suffering in all its guises are what Hershock describes as ‘social technologies rooted in the training of awareness, the perfecting of attention.’ (Hershock 1999:111)

He continues:

Instead of stressing increased control over our circumstances, Buddhist technology has aimed at opening up our capacity for improvising with and appreciatively contributing to those very circumstances. Rather than focusing on explicitly altering our situation, techniques like sitting meditation, the use of mantra, bowing, and guided visualization are part of a system for

reconfiguring the value complexes that implicitly condition the topography of our experience (Hershock 1999:112).

In contrast with an all too typical response to trouble – whether in private or public life – where we are likely to do more of what we’ve already done, to effect ever greater control (new laws, more tools, institutions), the ideal Buddhist practitioner aspires to cultivate unlimited capacity for ‘skill-in-means’ (*upāya*). Such a person is able to improvise with any situation to orient it (with a minimum expenditure of force or energy) away from blockage, stalemate, rigidity, and frustration and toward freedom, harmony, flexibility and joy. Rather than forcing the situation to change, the practitioner cultivates an ability to appreciate the unique qualities of a situation and draw them out in an appropriate direction. The Chan tradition has adopted the Taoist term *wu-wei* to connote this disposition: ‘conduct without precedent, referring to a capacity of spontaneous conduct or virtuosic improvisation that removes blockages to the natural course of things (*tao*). Hershock (1999:114) explains that in both Chan and in the Taoist traditions, *wu-wei* refers to something slightly more subtle than improvisation: it is associated with the free circulation of energy – that is, with a situation in which we need not control a thing because all things are able to take care of themselves. This demands recognition of a sense of order in situations that is anarchic, or centreless, and without overarching principles or precedents. Unlike Western notions of order – predicated on universal, eternal laws and regularity – the Chinese cosmos pivots on the irruption of the unexpected (Hershock 1991).

From the Buddhist perspective, exerting control and amassing power to effect change has severe limitations. Limits and resistance emanate from our own (uncultivated) dispositions. The more power we amass, the less freely energy circulates, the less things take care of themselves, the more we are obligated to act on them, and so on in an endless spiralling that effectively seals us off from simply ‘according with the situation, responding as needed.’ (Hershock 1999:115) With such strategies we will ultimately only succeed in crossing a series of thresholds of utility while losing sight of and crashing through immanent potentials for dynamic balance in our ecological and social systems.

Instead of concentrating on building a perfectly predictable or orderly world, Buddhist technology, according to Hershock (1999:115), emphasizes training ourselves to creatively appreciate – *literally impart value to* – whatever is present. It is concerned not with ‘things’ or ‘situations’, but with the direction in which our narration is moving. This means opening up an unprecedented path between any present trouble and the harmonious interpenetration of all things:

Instead of freedom being identified with an absence of restrictions on our ability to choose this or that, Buddhist freedom is understood in terms of virtuosity as such – virtuosity in the art of contributing (Hershock 1999:115-116).

For Hershock, relinquishing our obsession with objective control and practicing instead the art of seeing things as enlightening and worthy of limitless appreciation directly orients us away from a world of ‘things’ toward the originally ambiguous narration of which they are but conceptual, emotional, or perceptual abstractions. In Buddhism, things are what they *are* only because our attention has circumscribed them, established at least relatively fixed horizons for their definition. Shifting our attention by relinquishing these horizons is thus our most immediate way of releasing the energy bound up in form. Practicing emptiness – relinquishing our horizons for what is admitted as relevant – is liberating not because we get anything, but because we are removing blockages to the spontaneous and creative circulation of energy by freeing attention from its customs, habits, and obsessions.

Freeing all beings, Hershock (1999:131) adds, means releasing them from the boundary conditions imposed on them by our values. As a species, as Heidegger observed, we have been engaged on a wholesale pursuit of an economic paradigm predicated on the reduction of being to the ‘world-as-technology’.

Hershock explains:

In meditation we simply offer ourselves – all our attention-energy – to appreciating the moment in which we find ourselves. It is attending in the sense of vigilant caring – our most primordial mode of

contribution...Meditation can be seen, then, as an alternative technology – an alternative to our technological bias toward control. Meditation breaks down the cycle of our wanting (Hershock 1999:280).

Meditative technologies and the associated teachings can only form part of a collective and systemic transformation of carbon-based capitalism. They can, nevertheless, provide a first moment of insight and opposition. The *vita contemplativa* is an invitation to interrupt and re-connect our experience of ‘being-in-the-world’ through contact and care with the mind and body: the first point of resistance is this re-connection with the body, a site of wilderness and the imposition of carbon-fuelled neoliberal power.

Jackson (2016) notes the importance of Michel Foucault’s work on governmentality for helping us to understand the way in which Government institutions – driven by the growth imperative – inevitably design consumer society to favour a particularly materialistic individualism and to encourage the relentless pursuit of consumer novelty because this is exactly what is needed to keep the economy going:

The governmentality of the consumer society demands it. (Jackson 2016:197)

It is interesting to note that a systematic erosion of ‘commitment’ is part of that structural requirement for the reproduction of consumer capitalism, according to Jackson (2016:197). He notes that growth calls on us to be myopic, individualistic novelty seekers, because that is exactly what is needed to perpetuate the economic system. It propels us in this direction by undermining the commitment devices that support more altruistic and more conservative values. Governments play an active role in creating this paradoxical set of societal dynamics because it bears ultimate responsibility for the stability of a conventional macroeconomics based on endless growth, which in turn, demands the stimulation of consumerism. An individualistic pursuit of novelty is regarded as a key requirement for consumption growth and economic stability.