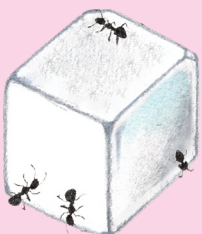
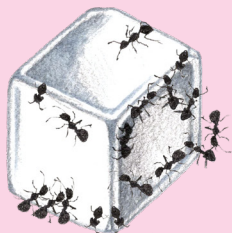
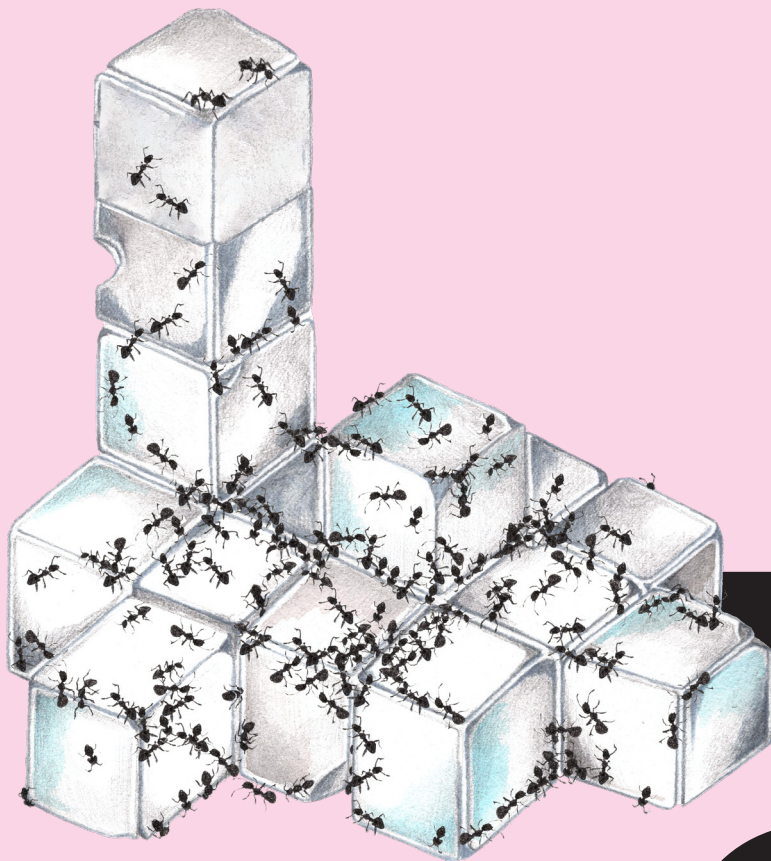


# THE DESIRE FOR A DONUT (ECONOMY)

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# THE LIMITS TO GROWTH Chapter 1: THE DESIRE FOR A DONUT(ECONOMY)

AN EXHIBITION ON DEGROWTH, THE DONUT-ECONOMY, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF WELL-BEING WITHIN PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

bambi van balen & BRANCO VAN GELDER | TOOLS FOR ACTION  
ELINE BENJAMINSEN & DAYNA CASEY  
CIAN DAYRIT  
DISNOVATION.ORG  
ROSIE HEINRICH  
TORIL JOHANNESSEN  
CARLIJN KINGMA  
JONAS STAAL  
MARJET ZWAANS & DAVID HABETS

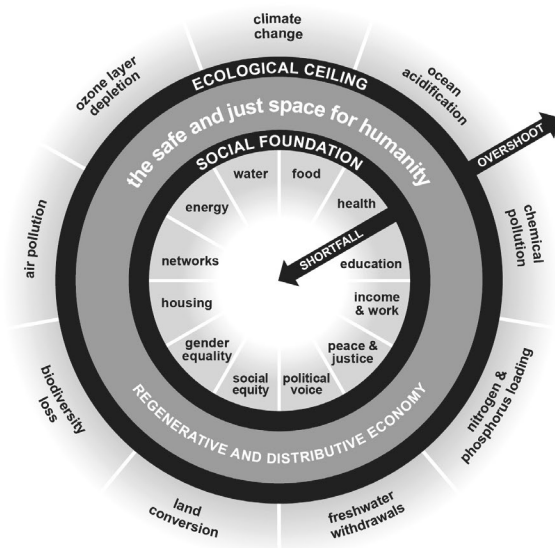
The exhibition THE DESIRE FOR A DONUT(ECONOMY) functions as a conversation starter for the year program THE LIMITS TO GROWTH, which intends to rethink the relationship between economy and ecology. With the work of twelve artists, the exhibition explores the possibilities of grounding a system in which economic and ecological well-being are considered integrally. What would such a more-than-human and climate-inclusive economy, that promotes a broader definition of welfare, look like?

The current capitalist system based on the promise of increasing economic growth, progress and prosperity generates a permanent state of crises. The accumulation of the various crises we are experiencing today—from climate and health crises, to economic, social and political crises—are the result of an all-encompassing exploitation of the environment, human and non-human alike. The exhibition THE DESIRE FOR A DONUT(ECONOMY) presents the work of a group of artists providing insight into the systemic crises we are facing. In response to this systemic crisis, their work focuses on the democratisation of current economic systems and features proposals for more hopeful, egalitarian and reciprocal economic systems, informed by alternative models such as the donut economy, eco-socialism and the degrowth movement. The participating artists share the realisation that such a complex, multi-layered and dynamic system requires more than one all-encompassing solution, and are united by a seemingly simple thought: infinite growth on a finite planet is simply not possible. To that end, the exhibition invites you to think about what really matters: decolonising growth as a profit motif, countering inequality, liberating creativity, and strengthening solidarity.

# DONUT-ECONOMY

As early as 1972, *The Limits to Growth*, the first report by the Club of Rome, concluded that it was impossible to ensure the exponential growth of both the economy and the world population on the basis of the limited and finite availability of natural resources. Through a number of future scenarios, the report showed that attempts at unbridled growth would sooner or later—but rather sooner—end with the collapse of socio-economic and ecological systems. Fifty years later, limits and borders are back on the political agenda, borders to “protect” the known level of prosperity of the Global North from incoming migrants. Yet, now it is not only national borders that are “threatened”, but also planetary borders which are threatened by climate change.

How do we get to the point where we can meet everyone’s needs without sacrificing the planet? This question is at the heart of economist Kate Raworth’s 2017 book *Donut Economics*. Raworth argues that we need to start looking at the economy in a fundamentally different way and let go of our fixation on growth. The addition of a small influential elite to economic growth has led to extreme inequality and unprecedented (ecological) degradation of the Earth. With her donut economics, Raworth argues for a broader view that includes both human and planetary well-being. She does this through an economic system in which basic human needs are met within a society that allows for development, while at the same time not overstepping planetary boundaries.

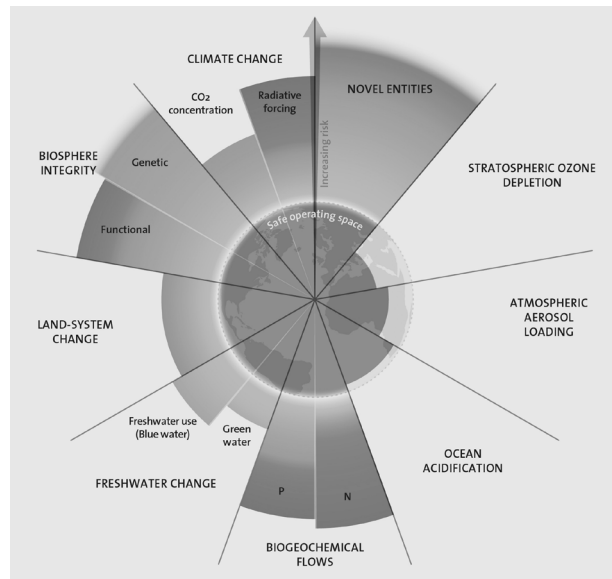


At the core of the inner circle of the donut—the social foundation—human misery, calamity and disaster, including hunger, illiteracy and social inequality are situated. On the outside of the outer ring—the ecological ceiling—we find the degradation of the planet, as caused, among other key factors, by climate change and biodiversity loss. Between these two circles is the donut: the space in which, within the limits of the Earth, we can meet the needs of humans and non-humans alike.

To promote human and ecosystem well-being, finding the right balance is thus essential. The donut, Raworth concludes, represents “a social foundation of well-being below which no one should sink, and an ecological ceiling (...) that should not be surpassed”.<sup>1</sup>

1 Citation from Rob Hagendijk and Paul Kalma, 'Donutpolitiek gaat van au', Groene Amsterdammer, June 2018.

Unfortunately, the so-called safe and just operating space within which humanity can operate, as described in Raworth's donut economics, has already been overstepped in most places.



Six of the nine planetary limits—global warming, precipitation and drinking water (water scarcity), ozone depletion, air pollution, ocean acidification, nitrogen and phosphorus (disruption of biochemical cycles), chemical environmental pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity—have been exceeded in 2023.<sup>2</sup> The economy still does not seem to be able to effectively decouple itself from the excessive consumption of non-renewable resources and the pollution and emissions that come with it. The opposite often turns out to be true: the market-based money system strongly favours economic growth, pushing for additional loans, lowering environmental and climate standards (note the effective lobbying by the fossil industry at United Nations Climate Conferences), and implementing longer working hours, higher retirement ages and cuts in social security in order to maintain the known level of growth, normalized as part of the fossil economy.

## DEGROWTH

Whereas the donut economy model provides a useful alternative to the seemingly all-encompassing workings of advanced capitalism, and as an overarching system provides adequate space to think about the relationships between economy and ecology, between people and planet, it is equally important to look at more local and situated forms of non-exploitative economies. In other words, we need to believe that there are alternatives at hand if we are to counter and resist a system of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

Such a non-exploitative relationship is evident in the degrowth movement. The concept of degrowth first manifested itself in the 1970s and came to maturity in the early 2000s in France. It is important to stress that the concept of degrowth does not imply recession or negative growth, and should not be interpreted literally in that respect. Degrowth involves phasing out certain forms of non- or less necessary forms of production in order to reconnect and balance economy and ecology. Degrowth of specific forms of production takes place in a planned and democratic manner and affects only the richest, wealthiest group of humans and the products they consume and use. These include luxury goods such as SUVs, meat and private jets. Thus, degrowth is completely different from the sudden and disruptive recessions we know. Recessions almost always come at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society. They lose their jobs or are forced to spend more on their daily shopping. Degrowth, on the contrary, suggests that the poorest groups in society are allowed to thrive whilst the richest give up proportionally. Cutting back on the production of luxury goods leaves additional means, labour and natural resources to produce essential goods and services needed by the poorest and most vulnerable, such as proper education and healthcare.

<sup>2</sup> Stockholm Resilience Center, *Planetary Boundaries*, [www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries](http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries).

Similar to donut economics, degrowth addresses social and ecological indicators in their context, by seeking alliances and connecting existing practices and methods. These include universal basic income, cooperatives, resistance, protest and civil disobedience, as well as the commons. Degrowth is a process of political, ecological and social transformation that reduces a society's output and improves its quality of life, focusing on existing concerns and needs, by cutting down on consumption and setting up shorter production chains.

At the same time, degrowth is an invitation to retrospectively reflect on history: how did Western "civilisation" create such a destructive and production-oriented system, which simultaneously deteriorates the living environment and exploits people? Within this system, genocide and ecocide are two sides of the same medal, manifested in the ongoing struggle for land sovereignty by oppressed groups against governments and corporations seeking to capitalise on land conversion, for oil extraction or logging, for example. This reflection requires us to learn from these oppressed populations from the past (and present) and the Global South, where degrowth is about overcoming Western colonialism, for the sake of respecting, caring for and recreating universal rights and diversity in a globalised world.

If, through resistance, we manage to free ourselves from such totalising economic (and equally patriarchic) conceptions, we can begin to build new worlds on equal and reciprocal principles, including ecofeminism, self-determination and organisation, the commons, openness and freedom of movement. In other words, how can we live well without transferring costs and attributing debts to others, the planet and future generations, as the basic principle for climate justice? Within this, what are our basic needs and how can we fulfill these in a sustainable manner? Is there such a thing as frugal abundance? Cultural changes opposing a totalising capitalist system, moving towards principles of degrowth and the donut economy are not impossible. All across the world we see (local) initiatives inventing and implementing ways of living, based on reciprocity, care and sustainability. Initiatives that create new horizons beyond profit maximisation as the ultimate objective, incorporating a broader definition of well-being and well-fare.

*"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words." — Ursula K. Le Guin*

# ARTWORKS

1

## DISNOVATION.ORG

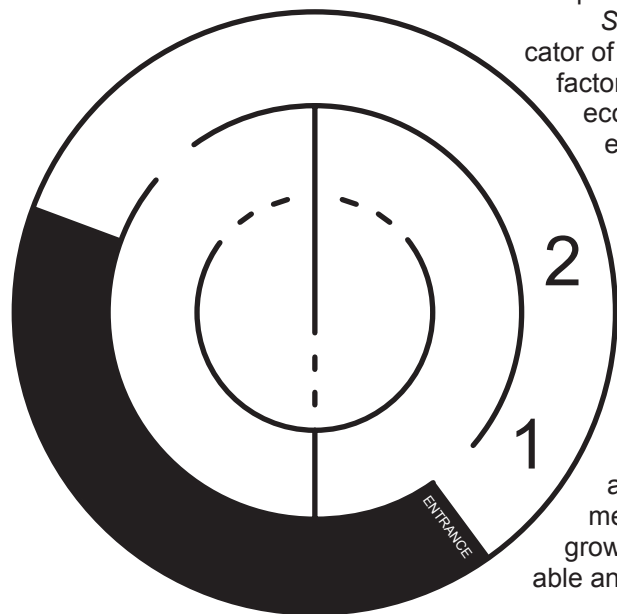
*Shadow Growth*

Duration of the video essay: 4 minutes 33 seconds

DISNOVATION.ORG is a research collective set up in Paris by Maria Roszkowska, Nicolas Maigret, Baruch Gottlieb, and Jerome Saint-Clair. Across artworks, publications, and curatorial projects, they empower post growth imaginaries and practices while challenging dominant techno-solutionist ideologies.

*Shadow Growth* seeks to expose the deceiving use of GDP as an indicator of a country's economic health. There are many planetary processes and factors that are obscured or ignored in the shadow of a growth-obsessed economy, such as fossil fuel combustion and the social costs of CO2 emissions. *Shadow Growth* presents the calculation of the latter and projects them into the GDP model, counterbalancing economic growth by the shadow of the harm it inflicts on people and the environment.

Introduced as an instrument to monitor and plan the wartime economy in the 1940s, GDP has been widely used as a measure of economic progress and development around the world. Although there is general consensus among economists that GDP is an insufficient indicator that falls short of providing a suitable measure of well-being, it has become a popular and ubiquitous term in the media and in daily conversation. As a result, productivity and growth, two of its key elements, have become positively apprehended with little awareness of their ecological and social ramifications, such as environmental damage, waste, and poverty. *Shadow Growth* reveals the GDP growth's problematic use and the extent to how it perpetuates unsustainable and unjust understanding of economy.



2

## ELINE BENJAMINSEN & DAYNA CASEY

*Collapsed Mythologies: A Geofinancial Atlas*

*The Flora — 'Hedging'*

Hedging is the financial practice of limiting risk in the price of assets—stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, etc.—through different strategies. Just like hedges mark boundaries between public and private property in populated areas, financial hedging protects from risk of devaluation and seeks to maximise benefit. Hedging became increasingly prevalent in England during the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the vast privatisation of common land—mostly arable and herding land shared by peasants—unfolded throughout Europe, simultaneous to the establishment of colonies around the world and the perfection of cartography and estate surveying. The newly privatised land was often enclosed by hedges as a measure of protection, hence the origin of the term. Threatening people's livelihood, the hedge came to stand in for the injustices of social division, and was literally dug up during anti-enclosure uprisings. As Nicholas Blomley argues, "the hedge reminds us that property is never just about signs and stories: it can also, as noted here, concern bodies, thorns and social force."<sup>3</sup>

Eline Benjaminsen and Dayna Casey have been collaborating in the upcoming publication of *Collapsed Mythologies: A Geofinancial Atlas* (Spector Books, 2024), a book that investigates the vocabulary of finance and its impact on ecology, wealth distribution, and social relations. The 'hedging' chapter is one part of a larger speculative universe: one that reveals a fictional, yet naturalised world of creatures and landscapes, both real and supernatural. In unravelling hedging, the artists activate 'the flora' of the world of finance.

The chapter is adapted into an installation where a collection of hedge specimens are conjoined. They are made of different plants taken from specific locations surrounding the wealthiest street of The Netherlands: Konijnenlaan, in Wassenaar. Meticulously shaped and maintained, this area is full of hedges that safeguard properties hosting shell companies, often known to benefit from tax evasion. Accompanying the sculptural hedges, the artists present a video essay showing the collection of hedge species overlaid with their etymological and historical research on hedging, which is intertwined with their own associations to contemporary practices of wealth, risk management, and its

3 Nicholas Blomley, 'Making Private Property: Enclosure, Common Right and the Work of Hedges', in *Rural History*, no. 18, April 2017, 16-17.

intersections with ecology. Furthermore, visual research of other terms, such as the vampire squid (the anatomy), the hectocorn (the creatures), the black swan (the spells) and the witching hour (the enchantments)—all part of their upcoming publication—is presented in a selection of prints.

This project is expanding on Sami Hammana's *Geofinancial Lexicon* (Abstract Supply, 2020) and is supported by Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (LU), Creative Industries Fund NL (NL), Art Council Norway (NO), Stroom Den Haag (NL) and Jan van Eyck Academie (NL).

3

### **CIAN DAYRIT**

*Tree of Life in the State of Decay and Rebirth* and *Et Hoc Quod Nos Nescimus*

The work of Cian Dayrit interrogates the ways in which land, landscapes, and territories are represented and narrated under oppressive regimes of extraction of natural resources. As part of his artistic practice, he develops 'counter-cartographies', works that examine how economic systems based on unsustainable extraction define geographies and how local communities resist their exploitation. Dayrit often collaborates with Indigenous and peasant communities in the Philippines, his native country. For the realisation of the two embroidered textiles pieces in this exhibition, he collaborated with Henry Caceres.

Dayrit seeks to subvert the functions of the map, a navigational tool that was perfected and biased by the advancement of cartography vis-à-vis the discovery and colonisation of territories by European colonisers. He does so by turning them into a political vehicle for activism against exploitation. As he develops an artistic language and participates in the struggles he tackles in his work, the maps evolve from representing space to representing existing material and social conditions as defined by the perspectives of marginalised peoples. Having a first-hand experience in the over-exploitation, corruption, militarism, and the dispossession of common land that afflict the Philippines, his work strives to offer alternative imaginaries for ecological and social justice, working grassroots and denouncing industrial development of the ancestral lands of Indigenous populations.

4

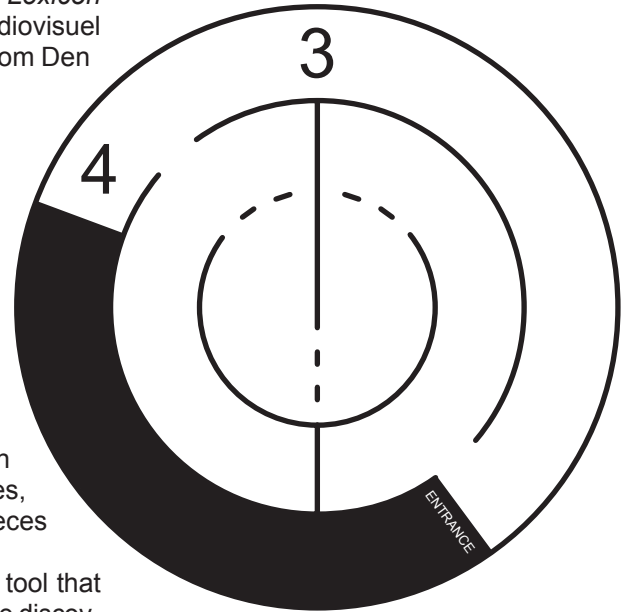
### **JONAS STAAL**

*94 Million Years of Collectivism, Video Study*

Duration: 13:14 minutes

This video essay by Jonas Staal departs from an interest in the Ediacaran, a geological period that spanned 94 million years wherein the first widespread appearance of complex multicellular life took place. In contrast with the subsequent Cambrian period, which is characterised by a bursting diversification of heterotrophic species governed by predation, the watery organisms of the Ediacaran developed an interdependent, non-predatory ecology.<sup>4</sup> They would likely share nutrients among one another through symbiotic interactions, establishing a long-lasting shared ecology.

Staal reasons that the characteristic predatory behaviour of the Cambrian period has been used to naturalise the plundering violence of Capitalism under a neo-Darwinian rhetoric of survival of the fittest. Nevertheless, with the discovery of the Ediacaran period, a fundamentally different history of the origins of life is arguable: one that is based on other-than-human collectivism and cooperation. In connecting the Ediacaran ecology with historical figures that sought to overturn Capitalism, Staal presents a case of what he calls *prolet-geology*: the study of other-than-human proletarian and collectivist life-forms throughout the geological memory of the Earth. As Capitalism has proven to be incompatible with an egalitarian and sustainable future, can the Ediacaran inspire us in conceiving life systems beyond the present ecological plight?



4 A heterotroph is an organism that cannot produce its own food, instead taking nutrition from other sources, mainly plant or animal matter.



Designed to challenge the economic growth orthodoxy, *Post Growth Toolkit* is a research project comprised of a card game and a series of interviews. Focusing on notions such as planetary boundaries, interspecies wealth transfer, and collapse informatics, the game is designed to offer prompts to challenge certain logics that reinforce a utilitarian vision of nature to ensure continuous economic growth.

Despite the financial addiction to growth, the forecasts of increasing GDPs are rather meagre, especially for the richest countries in the world. Reasons for it include shrinking and ageing populations, falling labour productivity, an overhang of debt that widens wealth inequality, rising commodity prices, and the costs of counteracting climate change.<sup>5</sup> Although infinite growth is completely unattainable with a liveable planet, (financial) institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, as well as every political party that advocates for a neoliberal economy, are reticent to let go of it. They are faced with the conundrum of either continuing in the headlong race towards collapse or completely change the economy—which inevitably requires a shift in power and lifestyle.

The interviews presented alongside the game offer a chance to gain deeper insight into some of the concepts in the game. Researchers, theoreticians, and activists provide knowledge and tools to become critical of continual GDP growth and envision different ways of living in relation with our environment.

6

**TORIL JOHANNESSEN**  
*Words and Years*

*Words and Years* is a series of framed prints depicting graphs that are based on data from different academic journals and news magazines. Digging into her digital archives, Toril Johannessen compiled the amount of times that certain words appeared in them, and showed their frequency over time in statistical diagrams. Johannessen draws parallels between language and quantitative science in the medium of the graph, the quintessential fetish for lovers of economic models and studies. The graphs suggest different interpretations, as the metaphorical meaning applied to the selected words changes across the fields of knowledge the source journals represent.

The vocabulary of economy has permeated our day-to-day speech, all the while shaping and establishing concepts and metaphors that often impede thinking of alternatives for Capitalism. Balance, progress, development, miracle, crisis: to what extent have these words been overwritten by an unjust and degenerative economic doctrine in place?

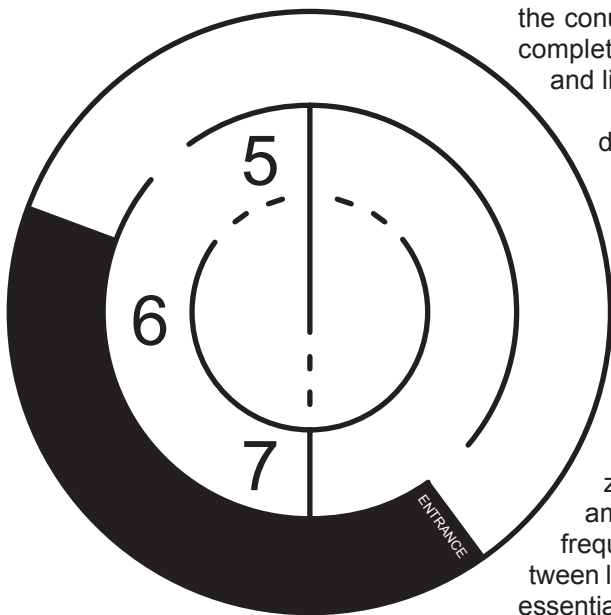
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**ROSIE HEINRICH**  
*we always need heroes*  
 Duration: 46 minutes

In 2008, Iceland experienced the biggest systemic banking collapse in economic history. The three main Icelandic banks had amassed assets worth eleven times the GDP of the country making the financial system of Iceland vastly bigger than its economy.<sup>6</sup> The banking collapse resulted in an external debt of seven times the Icelandic GDP, leading to a huge economic depression and social disarray.

Rosie Heinrich's *we always need heroes* investigates the failure of an economic system that had been fueled by a mythical tale of the Icelandic national identity through different narrators who recount their emotional journey, from glory to downfall. The film presents the psychological aftermath of the crash as much as it exposes the smoke and mirrors of an economic system based on overabundance and infinite growth.

The subtitled accounts from the narrators are accompanied with a system of signs devised by the artist. These signs, akin to musical notation, give shape to the body movements, exhalations, silences, unfinished thoughts and small gestures, all of which add an emotional layer to the stories. On the other hand, some textual subtitles mismatch the recording, as if suggesting what the



<sup>5</sup> Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (London: Penguin Books, 2022), 255.

<sup>6</sup> The total market value of all goods and services within a country's borders, acronym for Gross Domestic Product.

narrators are really trying to convey. Interested in the politics of perception and myth-making, Heinrich explores the hinges between reality and delusion in a society grappling with the memory of their collapse.

In seeing how the current economic systems bind us to social and cultural constructs that estrange us from grounded attachments to each other and the environment, Heinrich's work underscores the importance of finding a vocabulary for the remembrance of disenchantment, so that nationalist fables are prevented and better futures can be conceived.

The music of the film has been composed by Katrin Hahner / KENICHI & THE SUN. *we always need heroes* also comprises a book (Fw:Books, 2018).

8

**MARJET ZWAANS & DAVID HABETS**

*Eco Echo, Echo Eco*

Inspired by the doughnut economy model by Kate Raworth, artists Marjet Zwaans and David Habets have transformed the core circle of RADIUS into a space of reflection and engagement in which to discuss the possibilities of ecologically conscious economies, in collective and context-responding ways, throughout the run of the exhibition.

Eighteen perforated paper rolls hung distributively in the space. They represent the precarious boundaries of the safe and just space for humanity, which is threatened by a deteriorating ecological ceiling. In Kate Raworth's model, it lies between the shortage of vital basic things that make up the social foundation of humanity—such as water, food, housing, social equity and energy—and the surplus of pressure on Earth's life-giving systems—through crises such as climate change, ocean acidification, or biodiversity loss.

The drawings encircle the tailor-made benches, altogether creating the setting of the main space for this exhibition's public programme events, including talks, presentations, reading sessions, workshops, and more. *Eco Echo, Echo Eco* is thus a support structure in which to discuss possibilities of regenerative forms of economy, art, and education. As we have already crossed into global ecological danger zones that are undermining the stability of life systems on Earth, how can we abandon and rethink notions of progress, value, exchange, and growth towards an embedded, distributive, and regenerative economy?

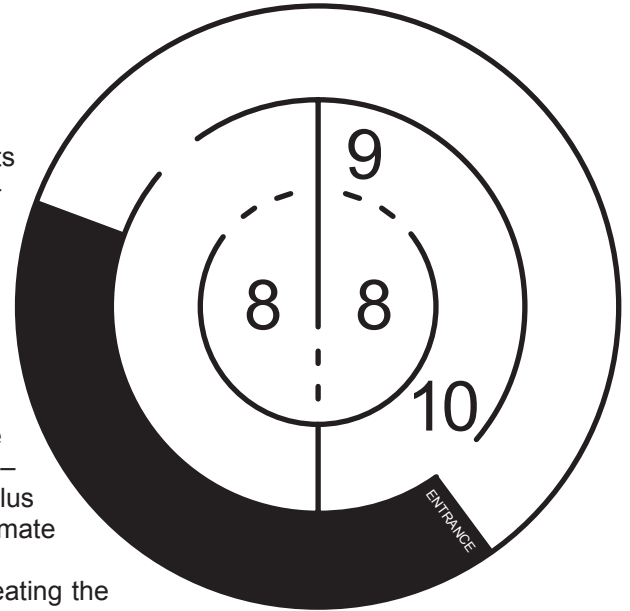
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**bambi van balen & BRANCO VAN GELDER | TOOLS FOR ACTION**

*Becoming Other*

bambi van balen is an artist and educator who, driven by their roots in climate activism, founded Tools for Action, a network of artists, activists, and other cultural workers that develop educational programs to engage future generations in political action. In collaboration with RADIUS, they have developed *Becoming Other*, a project for primary school kids consisting of Life Action Role Play carried out in a range of costumes. The costumes are divided in two types, representing species that can be found around the premises of RADIUS: isopods and lichen. Isopods are known as cleaners of nature as they eat decaying plants. For this reason they are associated with a circular economy. Lichen are endosymbiotic organisms consisting of fungi, algae or cyanobacteria and symbolize models for cooperation in a costume for up to four persons. As ancient life forms from the dinosaur era, both organisms let us imagine different timescales beyond a short term extractivist economy.

By wearing the costumes, the kids embody lichen or isopods as they move through space, while trying to answer questions around the premises of the exhibition.



**Carlijn Kingma***The Waterworks of Money/Het waterwerk van ons geld*

Carlijn Kingma is a researcher, artist, and cartographer who draws maps and *capricci* to visualise invisible social and political power structures.<sup>7</sup> In the series *The Waterworks of Money*, Kingma seeks to shine her light on the monetary, financial, and fiscal systems that are often obscured from view, and yet have a major impact on our daily lives. Unlike traditional cartography, Kingma conceives her maps as 'mindscapes' in which she analyses the political, societal, spiritual and economical mechanisms through which society is managed. Reassembled into fictional worlds, these mechanisms are laid out in fantastical architectures where the wonder of technology is met with tongue-in-cheek criticism. In the seemingly techno-utopia of contemporary finance depicted in *The Waterworks of Money*, Kingma reflects on the fallacious principles of Capitalism and the intentionally obscure technocratic language of economy, banking, and taxing.

By using water metaphors to depict the monetary system, Kingma seeks to make the ins and outs of economy more comprehensible: Where are its sources, from which money springs? How does it flow? Where is economic abundance found, and where does it provoke drought? In highly meticulous and imaginative architectures, Kingma exposes the intricate functioning of money with a critical and humorous undertone. All in all, this series attempts to increase knowledge on the functioning of the monetary, financial and fiscal systems, the inequalities they generate, and the current opportunities and alternatives to replace an economy managed in the ivory towers of technocrats for a regenerative, ecologically-sensitive economy.

<sup>7</sup> In painting and drawing, *capriccio* is an architectural fantasy, combining buildings, archaeological, architectural elements, and sometimes human figures in fictional and often fantastical combinations. The genre was introduced in the Renaissance and enjoyed popularity in the Baroque and Neoclassicism periods.

# YEAR PROGRAM THE LIMITS TO GROWTH

BETWEEN SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND CONSUMER ACTIVISM

[...] The adventure of these last three centuries can be summed up by the story of a double displacement: from economy to ecology. Two forms of familiar habitats, oikos: we know that the first is uninhabitable and the second is not yet ready for us. The whole world has been forced to move into “The Economy,” which we now know is only a utopia—or rather a dystopia, something like the opium of the people. We are now being asked to move suddenly with our baggage into the new dwelling place called “Ecology,” which was sold to us as being more habitable and more sustainable but which for the moment has no more form or substance than The Economy, which we are in such a hurry to leave behind. [...] We are travelers in transit, as displaced masses currently wandering between the dystopia of The Economy and the promise of ecology, in need of an urbanist who can design a shelter for us, show us drawings of a temporary living space on Earth.<sup>1</sup>

In 1972, the now-famous report *The Limits to Growth* was published by the Club of Rome. Founded by a group of intellectuals and major industrialists, the club commissioned a team of MIT scientists, led by Donella and Dennis Meadows, to investigate the relationship between the exponential growth of our material consumption and its impact on Earth’s climate and environment. The report, which was the first ever to use computer simulations, studied several scenarios set in the future, examining the future impact of resource and food consumption. The premise of the report: within a few decades, Earth’s resources will deplete. At the time, the Club of Rome’s report had a major impact in The Netherlands. To keep the Earth habitable, we need to control economic growth, proclaimed prominent politicians such as Joop den Uyl: “*The unbridled operation of the profit motive has led to a parasitic upward production. We thought we were getting rich, but we became poor, poor in available living environment, in welfare*”.<sup>2</sup> Currently, fifty years later, the implementation of the report’s core message has been relegated to the background. This is partly due to short-term thinking in politics concerning the government budget deficit and employment opportunities, the rise of the neoliberal doctrine proclaiming that everyone benefits from more growth through the trickle-down mechanism, and the lobbying of big companies who prioritize profit maximization.

Departing from the *The Limits to Growth* report, the 2024 year programme of RADIUS explores the relationships between economy and ecology. Through five exhibitions, a public and education programme, we aim to counterbalance the global and totalising effects of advanced capitalism as the prevailing economic system. By harnessing the propositional and imaginative capacities of artists and other stakeholders, this annual programme aims to re-evaluate notions such as value, desire, abundance and scarcity in the face of climate change and ecological degradation. Are there forms of resistance, organisation and (proposals for) systemic change that escape these totalising effects and prioritise well-being and welfare above profit? How can we resist the totalizing effect of capitalism and prioritize well-being over the profit motive?

1 Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 23.

2 Jaap Tielbeke, *We Waren Gewaarschuwd* (Amsterdam: Das Mag, 2022), 27.

# CONTEXT

The concept of progress is bankrupt. It is part of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, which proclaimed that capitalist development would bring prosperity to the world. Behind the idea of progress there was the assumption that social life, beginning with economic activities, would be organised according to rational, scientific principles. The child of the scientific revolution was industry, which opened up immense resources and was supposed to improve all the tasks necessary for our reproduction. This involved a complete devaluation of the past. Improvement was conceived as only occurring in the future; past knowledges, customs were totally devalued.<sup>3</sup>

Current socio-economic and political paradigms within advanced capitalism are all unabatedly based on the underlying assumption that economic growth is necessary to maintain a certain degree of welfare and wellbeing. In that respect, economic growth means an increase in real production—which has a negative impact on society as a whole, as well as the environment and climate—because it implies that gross domestic product (GDP) as an economic indicator must increase exponentially, as otherwise we will enter a period of economic recession. Up until this moment, governments and companies are doing all they can to justify and encourage an increase in material wealth. Economic growth as the sole indicator of progress, development and social welfare, measured through an increase in the GDP, has thus become the obsession of governments, politicians and policymakers, informed by the idea that increasing economic growth creates the conditions for a better life, eradicates poverty and reduces unemployment. The fact that the GDP does not distinguish between good and bad economic activities and that a higher GDP directly correlates with higher carbon emissions is mostly ignored. As scientist and Green Growth advocate Sam Fankhauser argues, “GDP is a worthless measure of human flourishing: it is a measure of production, not a measure of human happiness. A car accident is good for GDP growth.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, governments, politicians and policymakers still define “health” in an economy as a stable and high growth rate. According to these paradigms, limits and deficiencies of energy and natural resources which impede growth, as well as “symptoms” such as climate change, will be overcome once we manage to transform them through innovation and the deployment of new technology. This way of thinking is often called ‘technological optimism’ or ‘resilience politics’: stabilising an exclusively human-centered system for the sake of maintaining the known level of welfare and comfort. Though the question remains: with technological innovation, are we not just stretching the limits of a system that is already overburdened, especially when it perpetuates the over-indebtedness to the fossil-fuel economy?

Contrary to the general framework of economic growth, new economic models have been developed in recent decades, the best-known examples being the ‘circular economy’, ‘green growth’ and the ‘donut economy’. Put bluntly, advocates of the ‘circular economy’ would promote recycling without residues, where advocates of ‘green growth’ are convinced that there are always solutions to decouple economic growth from pollution and ecological destruction in some way.<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that these models do operate normatively, that is, within planetary boundaries, and effectuate a limit to growth and profit, whilst simultaneously encouraging sustainable forms of growth such as an increase in wages, it remains to be seen whether these models will enable us to meet the goals (within the limited time left) of the Paris Agreement.

The RADIUS 2024 year program aims to highlight the need for greater economic awareness of ecological impacts and dependencies and, vice versa, the need to make ecology more resilient to economic forces, incentives and constraints. Such an approach is vital in order to bring about a shift in consciousness on the apparent contradiction between caring for our environment and caring for ourselves. Within the social and political debate on the relationship between welfare, climate and economy, an apparent dichotomy is still present, between the need for systemic change on the one hand, and the importance of consumer activism on the other. With systemic change, priority is given to fixing socio-economic flaws within existing systems, overturning precisely those systems, and proposing alternatives to them: it is a range of proposals advocating for climate policies that do justice to ecological and social limits. In consumer activism, the responsibility for system change is instead attributed to consumers, in order to emancipate them and have them collectively combat the climate crisis and ecological degradation through individual impact (such as changes in

3 Interview with Silvia Federici by Sara Buraya Boned, *Degrowth and Progress*, L'Internationale, 2021, 42.

4 Quote from Sam Fankhauser from the panel discussion ‘How to Save the Planet: Degrowth versus Green Growth?’ 2022, with Jason Hickel and moderated by Kate Raworth.

5 Paraphrased from Lisa Doeland, ‘We waren ge-waarschuwd, maar we hebben niet geluisterd’, *Groene Amsterdammer*, February 2022.

their consumption patterns and lifestyle). In both attitudes, the person ultimately responsible differs: is the government or the consumer leading?

In 2024, RADIUS examines the field of tension surrounding systemic change and consumer activism and asks: How do you breach feelings of hopelessness and despair present among consumers and citizens? After all: How can one live sustainably in an unsustainable system, where the Dutch government, for example, already grants more than forty billion in fossil subsidies alone? On the other hand: How do you get affluent people to take to heart a political message—one of scarcity and (self-)imposed limit—that are deemed confronting and unwelcome, whilst the majority of the world's population can only dream of a larger carbon footprint? Is there an economy that can provide a society, in its broadest sense, with well-being, prosperity and abundance, albeit bound by ecological limits, or is such a system an illusion? How do we shift from (green) growth and profit maximisation to a more holistic economic system in which shareholders become stakeholders and consumers become citizens, thus mediating between ecological and economic interests in a reciprocal and altruistic manner?



THE LIMITS TO GROWTH, Chapter 1  
THE DESIRE FOR A DONUT(ECONOMY)  
24 February — 5 May 2024

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