Revolutionizing the imaginary: Visions for a degrowth future

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Abstract

My research tries to answer the question: Can imagining a degrowth future contribute to unlearning capitalist realism? Degrowth is based on the understanding that the earth's resources are finite, and that sustaining economic growth, even if under the guise of 'green growth' or 'eco-capitalism,' will continue to lead to catastrophic consequences. Beyond advocating for the equitable reduction of production and consumption, degrowth challenges the narrative that growth equals progress, or that it is essential for 'development' or wellbeing. Nevertheless, one of the biggest challenges the degrowth movement faces, is overcoming capitalist realism, or the pervasive belief that capitalism is the only viable economic and political system. I argue that speculative fiction presents a powerful tool for this purpose. Authors have long used speculative fiction to explore possible futures—whether utopian, dystopian, or somewhere in between. By integrating the degrowth goals and visions with non-Western perspectives on relational collectivity, pluriversity, and inter-species reciprocity, my research uses speculative fiction as a thought experiment in imaging a degrowth alternative to capitalism.

Foreword

I have always loved food. It is what originally taught me that diversity makes us stronger, and in the case of food, tastier. Furthermore, I have always loved nature, and been concerned with environmental issues. As a result, much of my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies, International Development and Political Studies focused on food, by way of sustainable agriculture and food security, and environmental sustainability. During my studies, I became increasingly interested in the role of agriculture in the narrative of 'progress' and 'development.' Large scale industrial agriculture and the worldwide distribution of agricultural commodities, have had huge environmental and social consequences. Indeed, the food system is responsible for a third of the total anthropogenic GHG emissions, with the main sources of emissions originating from transportation, on-farm equipment, chemical inputs, livestock production, and waste (FAO, 2022). Meanwhile, inputs, such as insecticides and fungicides, have led to the loss of insect biodiversity, which not only impacts pollinators, but trickles up the food chain, compromising the food supply of every living thing on this planet - not to mention the health impact linked to these chemicals.

Soil health has also been severely compromised. Soil depletion caused by the loss of organic matter, erosion and desertification are already impacting the productivity of what was once prime agricultural land (Nunes et al, 2020). As a result, both subsistence farmers and large-scale industrial agri-businesses are being forced onto more marginal lands, leading to deforestation, the destruction of important wetlands, along with habitat and biodiversity loss. Industrial agriculture also requires a huge amount of water (irrigation accounts for 70% of water use worldwide), and is not only depleting rivers and lakes, but whole aquifers (FAO, 2017). Meanwhile, the pollution from agricultural run-off is causing eutrophication (the depletion of oxygen in water), leading to deadly algae blooms that poison lakes and oceans, creating dead zones and again, threatening habitat and biodiversity.

Moreover, despite claims of increased 'efficiency' and 'productivity', neoliberal economic policies have failed to eradicate hunger in both low-income countries in the Global South, and

high-income countries in the Global North. Chronic hunger, starvation and famine continue to be realities in low-income countries, while issues of food security persists alongside massive amounts of food waste in the 'developed' nations of the Global North. As such, it has never been an issue of production, but one of unequal distribution. Yet, through my studies, I found that many of the issues facing sustainable agriculture and food security could be addressed by simply scaling-down and re-localizing the food supply. As it turns out, small-scale farms, employing sustainable practices, and shortening supply chains, can have a direct and significant environmental and social impact.

From this realization, after graduating I decided to focus my efforts on local solutions to the global problems facing the food system. I started by volunteering at community gardens in my neighbourhood, attending food security-related talks/workshops/conferences, and participating in local networks, such as Toronto Urban Growers and Food Strategy Committee. After meeting some like-minded people, I founded an urban Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program, where we converted front and backyards (and even a few rooftops) into productive food growing gardens, trained farm interns, and sold shares of the harvest to people in the community. Even still, the economics of running the CSA proved to be unviable (the price we would need to charge in order to pay even one of our farmers a livable wage would have made our produce unaffordable to most), and our reliance on grants was unsustainable. Thus, after a few years of urban farming, I transitioned to community outreach and programming roles with more established non-profits, while still focusing on food security and poverty reduction. During this time I worked at a food bank and a number of Community Health Centers (CHCs), offering system navigation support and health promotion/prevention programming to low-income, immigrant, refugee, and non-status populations, as well as, other vulnerable/marginalized communities.

Despite this important, on-the-ground, community-based work, I started to become disillusioned with the non-profit industrial complex as a whole. First of all, the majority of non-profits are highly hierarchical and undemocratic. As a result, the programs and support they

provide are based on the funders' needs, rather than the expressed needs of the community. Moreover, most of the work I was doing felt like stop-gap measures, or band-aid solutions to larger, systemic issues that were not being addressed, let alone discussed, by the organizations I was working for. I slowly came to understand that, while non-profits may offer necessary short-term fixes to systemic issues, and perhaps by doing so, offer a passive critique of that system, rarely do they actively question/disrupt that system, or offer any long-term solutions.

What's more, the success and future viability of most non-profits is contingent on the system being broken. This means that, not only are most non-profits unable/unwilling to critique the system in which they depend, they are wholly unsuited to push for radical, lasting, systemic change. Spurred by this realization, I started questioning the work that I was doing and the system in which I was doing it. If non-profits, good intentions aside, are unable to effect meaningful change, how does systemic change happen? Who are the agents of change? What are the economic and social forces that have caused these systemic issues in the first place? Are these systemic issues a product of neoliberal capitalism specifically? And if so, are there alternative systems we should be moving towards? These questions eventually led me to pursue my Master's of Environmental Studies at York, with a focus on heterodox theories of economics.

At its most basic, Ecological Economics acknowledges that the biocapacity of the planet to provide resources and metabolize waste has limits. Furthermore, the planet is being pushed to the point of ecological crisis and irreversible climate change by an economic system that externalizes ecosystem services, and values growth above planetary health. There are many overlapping and complementary theories/methods/tools/models emerging from Ecological Economics. From steady-state economies and degrowth, to doughnut economics and common governance, a large number of heterodox theories argue for the need to move away from endless production and consumption. The more I studies Ecological Economics, the more I became interested in the concept of 'degrowth', and the more I devoted my studies to exploring its goals, proposed policies, and implications. Even so, the conclusion I arrived at

through my graduate studies is that: it's one thing to read about heterodox theories such as degrowth, but quite another to be able to imagine what these alternative futures could look like. Through this portfolio, I hope to use speculative fiction as a tool to help me envision what a degrowth future could look like, and from this, consider how this approach could be utilized and shared.

To my mom, dad and e

A huge thank you to my supervisor, Lina Brand-Correa, for believing in my 'vision,' and to my Degrowth & Therapy supports, Anna and Kelly.

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Introduction: Why stories matter

"Stories matter, they're not just entertainment – they matter because humans are narrative creatures. It's not simply that we like to tell stories, and to listen to them, it's that narrative is hard wired into us. It's a function of our biology and the way our brains have evolved over time. We make sense of the world and fashion our identities through the sharing and passing on of stories. And so the stories we tell ourselves about the world and our place in it, shape not just our own lives, but the world around us. The cultural narrative is the culture." (Blackie, 2017)

"*All that you touch You Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change*" Lauren Oya Olamina in *Parable of the Sower* (Butler, 1993).

First and foremost, degrowth is a critique of capitalism and the destructiveness of endless and unequal growth. Degrowth challenges neoliberal capitalist ideologies that exploit marginalized communities and the more-than-human world, and jeopardizes future generations (Romano, 2015). Instead, degrowth advocates for an ecologically and socially just transition, stressing the importance of decreasing energy and resource use, particularly by over-consumers in high-income countries (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2018; Asara, 2022). Be that as it may, the effectiveness of a transition towards degrowth hinges not only on the success of its economic policies, but on a profound cultural transformation (Alexander, 2015, [pp 135]; Meissner, 2021). For this reason, it is imperative that degrowth scholars, advocates and activists not only critique the dominant ideology of growth-centric capitalism, but provide a concrete alternative and strategies for how to get there (Muraca, 2013; Asara, 2022). This necessitates the exploration of diverse ideas, concepts, and narratives that inspire and guide us towards a degrowth future (Mackenthun, 2021). Thus, while I strongly believe that degrowth offers a viable alternative to capitalism, I argue that currently it fails to capture the imagination of the public at large.

Consequently, many argue that one of neoliberal capitalism's greatest achievements is the subjugation of our collective cultural imagination (Graeber, 2011). By promoting the idea that individualism and capital accumulation are inherent to human nature, alternatives to capitalism are perceived as either unrealistic or unfeasible, despite increasing alienation, exploitation, and the threat of planetary collapse (Fisher, 2012). In fact, the original inspiration for my research

comes from a quote attributed to philosophers Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. It states that it is easier for most people to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, and I've seen it quoted directly, or the sentiment reproduced, by both capitalists and anti-capitalists alike (Mackenthun, 2021). Capitalist realism, as this phenomenon is known, is the belief that capitalism is the only feasible economic system, to the point where it is exceedingly challenging to conceive of an alternative (Fisher, 2012).

Yet, history reveals that capitalist realism has been fashioned by hundreds of years of social conditioning and normalization (Burkhart et al., 2022; Fisher, 2012). Indeed, scholars in cultural anthropology have discovered that cultural narratives, or shared beliefs about human nature, have fundamentally shaped society since our earliest ancestors (Short, 2024). Given the importance of narratives in the production of social norms, it goes without saying that shifting the narrative is vital in achieving any sort of social, political or economic change (Varvarousis, 2019; Short, 2024). But change, while inevitable and constant, is also extremely challenging, especially when it comes to individual choices and actions. People may crave change, but they also fear it, and unknowns only magnify that fear. What's more, changing mindsets, worldviews and highly ingrained thought patterns takes work, and there are many barriers in doing so, including capitalist realism itself.

Regardless, we cannot transition to a degrowth society without major change. I strongly believe that, in order for people to accept change, they need to be able to imagine that change. They need to have some idea what their day-to-day life would look like, and to understand how things would be different, but hopefully better. As Wanda Vrasti points out "It is one thing to tell people that another world is possible and another entirely to let them experience this, for however shortly" (Vrasti, 2012). Through the immersive experience of reading, speculative fiction has the potential to help people better understand what degrowth is and could be, envision pathways to achieving degrowth transformations, and ultimately break the grip that capitalist realism has on our imaginations. As science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin famously

pointed out: “Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art—the art of words” (Le Guin, 2014).

In this portfolio, I use speculative fiction and speculative design to bring to life what a degrowth future could look like in Toronto’s Little Italy neighbourhood. My research question is: Can tools such as speculative fiction and speculative design help me imagine and explore what a degrowth future might look like in my community? Follow-up questions include: Could speculative fiction and speculative design help readers understand heterodox theories such as degrowth? Can these tools start to dissolve the hold capitalist realism has on our imaginations? And finally: Do these tools have the potential to lead to personal, or even a larger-scale, transformations? However, rather than place the emphasis on the final output, this exercise focuses on the *process* of imagining degrowth as an alternative to capitalism. The goal is to investigate whether speculative thinking can contribute to “Decolonizing the Imaginary” (Latouche, 2010, 2015) by enabling individuals, to envision an alternative degrowth future. If this portfolio contributes to transforming the larger cultural milieu, then that would be a welcomed, additional benefit.

Positionality

But before I delve into my research, I would like to acknowledge my privilege as a white, middle-class, educated settler residing on the stolen lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. The aim of this portfolio is to create visions for a degrowth future that eliminates the destructive and exploitative forces that neoliberal capitalist ideologies inflict. In an attempt to counter my privilege, I will use a decolonized understanding of degrowth as my lens, which advocates for equality and justice (Kallis & March, 2015; Feola, 2019; Sachs Olsen, 2021; Mailhot & Perkins, 2022). By doing so, I hope to limit the reproduction of colonial, racist, sexist, capitalist ideologies, and will try to identify and remove any neoliberal narratives that seep into my work.

Working in solidarity with marginalized communities, requires actively opposing exploitative relationships, supporting anti-capitalist struggles, and addressing ignorance and complacency (Davis, 2010; Mailhot & Perkins, 2022). Degrowth activists and scholars, such as myself, must comprehend the historical and current injustices facing marginalized communities, address their complicity in these systems, and recognize the sacrifices necessary to dismantle the systems that enable them (Mailhot & Perkins, 2022; Burkhart et al., 2022). As such, it is important to note that, when speaking of decolonization, I am not only referring to currently colonized populations, such as Indigenous Peoples located in the Global North, but all marginalized populations who continue to experience the legacy of colonization, pernicious imperialist practices, the institutionalization of systemic racism, and all other forms of social exclusion.

Finally, though the majority of us suffer under capitalism, we do so at drastically varying degrees. As such, I cannot speak to other people's experiences, nor can I ever truly understand the exploitation and discrimination that the majority of the world have, and continue to experience. I recognize the limitations of my perspective, and understand that it is not my place to prescribe solutions or impose my point-of-view onto others. Instead, I will do my best to counter my assumptions, and encourage others to call me in and/or add to the conversation.

Methodology

This portfolio is a research-grounded thought experiment, assessing the efficacy of using speculative fiction and speculative art, as tools for unlearning capitalist ideology. After all, if degrowth seeks to pursue the transformations necessary to free itself from capitalist growth ideology, it must be willing to transcend existing institutional and theoretical boundaries, and embrace alternative forms of communication (Escobar, 2017).

In this portfolio, I draw from a mix of qualitative methods, including place-based/lived experience, self-reflection and narrative/storytelling, and non-Western and arts-based methodologies, to explore the potential for degrowth to provide an alternative to neoliberal

capitalism (Brown & Strega, 2015; Frechette et al., 2020; Kovach, 2015; Lewis & Hildebrandt, 2019; Spiers & Smith, 2019; Vanni & Crosby, 2023). My sources include both peer-reviewed articles, as well as grey-literature, including works of speculative fiction and quotes from fictional characters, speeches, reports and opinion pieces, and more informal sources such as discussion boards and social media posts. Finally, in order to make my work more accessible, I have tried to use plain language, avoided the use of acronyms, defined and explained terms and concepts, and given examples whenever possible.

Synthesis Paper

In this section, I give a brief overview of the origins of neoliberal capitalist ideology, the stated goals versus the reality, and the hold capitalist realism has on our imaginations. From there, I dive into the principles and objectives of degrowth, why it must be anti-capitalist and decolonial, and why it presents a viable alternative to capitalism. I also highlight the challenges degrowth faces, especially in regards to overcoming capitalist realism. Next l explore how 'Decolonizing the Imagination,' non-Western perspectives and unconventional communication methods, such as speculative fiction, can help degrowth liberate us from the ideology of growth. And finally I investigate the harmful reproduction of neoliberal capitalist narratives in speculative fiction, and highlight more constructive literary strategies that could better support degrowth objectives.

Speculative Fiction

For my speculative fiction piece, I started by compiling degrowth principles, objectives and policy proposals to give me the underlying framework for imagining a degrowth future. References to these can be found in Chapter 3 and 4, the Discussion Section, as well as the Glossary of Terms. I also read a wide array of speculative fiction, including authors from marginalized communities (Black, Indigenous, people of colour, people with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+) in order to gain an understanding of how to: a) write in an engaging and compelling way; b) glean ideas of how different speculative worlds are portrayed and find links to degrowth theories and visions for the future that may be useful in my own portrayal; and c)

counter my privilege and avoid replicating harmful narratives. Finally, I synthesized my research and grounded it in a place-based/lived-experience methodological understanding of what a degrowth future could look like in my community.

Though both place-based and lived-experience methods overlap in many regards, they differ in their epistemological origins. Thus, while place-based research evolved from ethnography (via anthropology), and looks at the scales, contexts, histories, and identities that affect the politics of a specific place, a lived-experience approach (or interpretative phenomenological analysis) stems from philosophy, and offers insights into how an individual's specific context influences how they make sense of the world or a given situation (Spiers & Smith, 2019; Vanni & Crosby, 2023). In other words, as Escobar states, "Individuals are the practitioners of their own knowledge - it is therefore crucial to examine how people themselves perceive themselves, and comprehend their own reality" (Escobar, 2017). The resulting short story is set in the Little Italy neighbourhood, in Tkaronto (or Toronto as it is now known). All the characters in my short story are fictional, and while their life experiences differ from mine, they are reflective of my general demographic/cultural upbringing.

Speculative Illustrations

As a visual learner, I created a handful of graphic designs to accompany my work of speculative fiction. My aim was to create a visual representation of the degrowth future I describe in my short story, to help further conceptualize what that future might look like. To do this, I used degrowth literature, as well as works of speculative art (image search 'solarpunk' - you won't regret it), to give me a framework of ideas from which to base my illustrations. From there, I used a mix of photography, collage and graphic design tools, to create a representation of what a degrowth future might look like in my surrounding community.

Discussion and Conclusions

To conclude my portfolio, I provide a critical reflection of the entire process, including my rationale for including and omitting certain things in my short story. I end by carefully considering the potential of this exercise as a strategy for a wider degrowth transformation.

Synthesis Paper

Chapter 1: The Capitalist Handbook

1.1 The Capitalist Handbook

But first, before we explore why degrowth offers a viable alternative to capitalism, and why speculative fiction is a potential tool with which to explore that degrowth future, it is important to understand what capitalism is, how it became the dominant ideology, and the consequences of its cultural hegemony.

Capitalism is an economic system characterized by private property, wage labour and profit accumulation (Kallis et al., 2015). The enclosure of the commons into private property means that the landless majority are no longer able to feed or house themselves, and are forced to sell their labour in exchange for currency with which to purchase necessities. In theory, the price of these necessities, or commodities as they are now considered, is determined by the market, through the mechanism of supply and demand. That said, supply and demand does not account for the presence of monopolies (often in the form of transnational corporations), or the externalization of ecosystem services and pollution, along with other, more nuanced market forces. Moreover, in this scenario, not only does labour becomes a commodity in itself and like all other commodities freely traded on the market (subjecting it to the same unfair price mechanisms), but it also becomes both the means of production and the driver of consumption (Andreucci & McDonough, 2015; Watts, 2009; Kreinin & Latif, 2022). This makes the existence of one dependant on the growth of the other.

Capitalism also creates artificial scarcity, by framing scarcity as a problem of production, and capitalism as the most suitable method for expanding production (Harvey, 1974; Kallis & March, 2015). Yet, the endless production and consumption of commodities requires an unlimited supply of raw materials and energy. This inevitably leads to depletion, necessitating the expansion and extraction of resources from territories abroad, or what are referred to as “commodity frontiers” (Conde & Walter, 2015; Gomez-Baggethun, 2022). Finally, competition

among capitalists for market share (of labour, raw materials and profits), drives capital accumulation (of profits), and underscores capitalism's need for endless growth (Andreucci & McDonough, 2015; Harvey, 2003; Luxemburg, 2016)

1.2 The Neoliberal Myth

Although the terms 'capitalism' and 'neoliberalism' are often used interchangeably, their meanings differ. As discussed above, capitalism is an *economic theory* that revolves around privatization, production-driven consumption, competitive markets and capital accumulation, and includes a number of variations, ranging from early merchant capitalism, to more contemporary welfare-state and free-market capitalism (Mehta et al., 2021). While all versions of capitalism entail growth, the main difference between them is the level of state involvement in regulating markets. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is a *political ideology* associated with a specific brand of free-market capitalism. Whereas previous versions of capitalism often included some measure of social welfare policies (such as universal healthcare, state-pensions, or unemployment benefits) and market interventions (including taxes, subsidies and regulations), neoliberalism advocates for policies of economic liberalization, such as free trade, austerity, deregulation, and the privatization of public sectors. These policies aim to reduce the role of the state in the functioning of the markets and of society as a whole.

Perhaps even more concerning though, is the extension of neoliberalism's ideology into the social/cultural domains, where it has succeeded in applying capitalist principles of individualism, competition and commodification, to every aspect of society - from education, reproduction and ecosystem services, to individuals and the relationships between them (Mehta et al., 2021). This dominance has been achieved in two ways: by depoliticizing the economy, so that neoliberal ideology becomes imbedded into the operationalization of our political system, and by economizing politics, so that market principles become entrenched into cultural fabric of society (Swyngedouw, 2015). Even public institutions, which historically were not profit oriented, now see competition and growth as essential to their success (Meissner, 2021). For example, instead of improving the quality of education, public universities now strive

to increase student enrollment, secure external funding, boost publication output, and improve ratings (Meissner, 2021). In these ways, the neoliberal project has stifled the imagination, so that, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, “there is no alternative” (Graeber, 2011).

1.3 The Backstory

History clearly reflects the pattern of dispossession, exploitation and expansionism that accompanies the evolution of capitalism, and the rise of neoliberalism. Most historians point to the enclosure of the commons throughout 16th-17th century England as the origins of capitalist thinking (Andreucci & McDonough, 2015). The depletion of local resources, saturation of markets, and the quest for increased profits, eventually led to expansionism abroad. The 18th-19th centuries saw the rise of colonization, whereby raw materials and labour were drained from the low-income countries in the ‘Global South’, in order to fuel industrialization in the high-income countries in the ‘Global North’ - a dynamic that continues to this day (Sultana, 2023). This unequal exchange eventually led to a rapid period of growth and development in the early to mid-20th century, referred to as the Industrial Revolution, and its subsequent scientific advancements and technological innovations (Escobar, 2017).

However, formally colonized countries, devastated by a century or more of extraction and exploitation, failed to prosper. In response, the rise of neoliberalism in the late 20th century saw industrialized countries in the Global North embrace the narrative of ‘growth’ as the route to ‘progress’ or ‘development’ (Mason, 2015). This led to imposition of ‘modernization’ or ‘structural adjustment’ programs on low-income countries in the Global South, ushering in a new era of imperialism/neo-colonialism (Escobar, 2017). Finally, the neoliberal project of globalization, and the ongoing unequal exchange of resources under the new imperial world order, has cemented neoliberal capitalism as the dominant socio-economic paradigm to this day.

Chapter 2: Dystopia Now

2.1 Environmental Crisis

In spite of its ideological victory, neoliberal capitalism has also led to an environmental crisis that now threatens all life on earth (Graeber, 2011). In fact, while the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report warned that, in order to limit global warming to around 1.5°C, global greenhouse gas emissions would need to peak "before 2025 at the latest, and be reduced by 43% by 2030," researchers from the World Meteorological Organization recently released a report announcing that there's now a 80% chance we will pass the 1.5°C threshold in the next 4 years (IPCC, 2023; WMO, 2024). Warming past 1.5°C will lead to a number of catastrophic cascading effects, including sea level rise, ocean acidification, and deoxygenation, more intense and frequent extreme temperatures (heatwaves, droughts, aridity and wildfires) and weather events (heavy and sustained precipitation, flooding and intensified tropical and extratropical storms), mass extinctions, and significant human suffering and mortality - with the most vulnerable people being disproportionately impacted (IPCC, 2023).

In response to this urgency, capitalist 'green growth' has proposed corporate-led, technological innovation, which aims to substitute polluting energy sources with renewable ones, enhance efficiency, and develop new methods for sequestering and storing carbon (Schmelzer & Büttner, 2024). Nonetheless, carbon capture technologies remain theoretical at scale, while renewables have a lower energy return on investment (EROI) compared to fossil fuels, meaning that the amount of usable energy produced by renewables is low compared to the energy required to obtain it (Kallis et al., 2015; Parrique, 2024; Sommersguter, 2022). Meanwhile, gains in efficiency have been plagued by the Jevons Paradox (or the 'rebound effect'), whereby increased efficiency leads to an increase in overall energy consumption (Alcott, 2015; Parrique, 2024). These limitations, along with the cost of electrifying fossil-fuel reliant industries, stand at odds with meeting the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's targets.

Even more concerning, is that the production of low energy systems, such as batteries, solar panels and wind turbines, rely heavily on raw materials such as lithium, cobalt, neodymium,

uranium and nickel, the majority of which originate in low-income countries (Muñoz, 2022; Murphy, 2024). As a consequence, while the extraction of biomass, including forest products and fossil fuels has more than doubled over the past 50 years, the mining of non-metallic minerals has nearly quintupled (UNEP & IRP, 2019). Obtaining these materials not only requires significant energy and causes devastating pollution, but it calls into question "supply chain justice," where greening the economies of high-income countries leaves inadequate resources for the same transition to take place in low-income countries (Horvitz, 2024; Silva, 2022). It is clear then, that 'green growth' policies not only exacerbate the unequal exchange of resources, but, instead of transitioning away from resource-intensive practices, they actually exacerbate them (Schmelzer & Büttner, 2024). As a result, not only does 'green growth' fail to address the climate crisis, but extraction at current and projected rates will only deepen our ecological overshoot and worsen the impacts of climate change.

2.2 An Unequal Exchange

Meanwhile, although the ecological and social impacts of capitalism are disproportionately felt by marginalized communities in low-income countries (and Indigenous communities in high-income countries), it is the wealthiest segment of the population in both that bear primary responsibility for exceeding ecological limits (Hickel et al., 2021; Sultana, 2023). As a matter of fact, a small group of high-income countries, representing only one-sixth of the world's population, act as net appropriators of resources and labour (embedded in trade) from the rest of the world, consuming approximately 52% more raw materials than they produce domestically, 28% more labour, 19% more land, and 10% more energy (Dorninger et al., 2021; Silva, 2022). What's more, the wealthiest 10% of individuals globally, totaling 780 million people, are responsible for more than half of global emissions, while the poorest, comprising 3.9 billion people, account for only 12% of emissions (IPCC, 2023; Parrique, 2024). However, while these statistics demonstrate the unequal distribution of resources, what they don't convey is that this inequality is actually a requirement of capitalism.

Instead, the paradox stands: it is ecologically impossible for everyone on the planet to live the high-energy lifestyles of those in high-income countries, while at the same time, the energy and resource consumption in high-income countries far exceeds what is necessary to eradicate poverty and ensure access to universal public services (O'Neill et al., 2018; Hickel, 2018; Hickel, 2021; Millward-Hopkins et al., 2020). Therefore, despite centuries of 'growth' and 'development', capitalism has been unable to meet the basic needs of the world's poor (Sultana, 2023). Moreover, development programs forcibly imposed on low-income countries, which promised to improve social conditions and material wealth through economic growth, have only served to exacerbate displacement, dispossession, and disparity, and resulted in political and social unrest (Amin, 2011; Arboleda, 2020; Ye et al., 2020; Muñoz, 2022; Sultana, 2023). As such, it is clear that growth-based economies actually *require* economic, political, and cultural instability in low-income countries *in order* to maintain the unequal exchange of resources and labour, and that, this unequal exchange of resources is fundamental to the environmental crises (Brand, 2019, 2022; Paulson, 2022; Sultana, 2023).

2.3 Crisis of Imagination

Finally, neoliberal capitalism has altered our perception of human nature and human-nature relationships by reducing all relationships into commodified market transactions (Gómez-Baggethun, 2015). As a result, more relational values of collective welfare, wellbeing, interconnectedness, reciprocity, have systematically been replaced with narratives of personal success, productivity, material possessions and ownership (Escobar, 2017). Similarly, neoliberal capitalist narratives have been used to fuel visions of development by way of perpetual growth and free markets, while actively suppressing movements that expose its inherent unsustainability, and undermining alternative visions that challenge the status quo (Cortiel et al., 2020; Graeber, 2011).

Nevertheless, despite pushing the narrative of markets free from state control, neoliberalism, through the actions of multinational corporations and global elites, actively removes labour from production, disrupts price mechanisms, and exacerbates the unequal exchange of resources (Mason, 2015; Sultana, 2023). While these interventions result in immense profits for

those at the top, they also make neoliberal economies extremely unstable, as evidenced by constant boom and bust cycles, including the 2007–2008 global financial crash (Escobar, 2017). In actuality, the economy goes into crisis every time cheap labour is depleted, new markets saturated, or a financial bubble bursts (Mason, 2015). Nevertheless, the core imagery of growth as the route to progress, unlimited production and consumption, and the myths of scarcity and individual choice, manages to persist (Escobar, 2017). The refusal of capitalists to reassess their economic assumptions, not only risks the collapse of capitalism, but the collapse of everything else as well (Graeber, 2011). Therefore, though it is widely acknowledged that capitalism is vitally flawed, envisioning alternatives continues to remain the biggest challenge in overcoming it.

Chapter 3: Degrowth: An escape from capitalism?

Though critiques of growth have been discussed in philosophical debates since the rise of capitalism, the term 'décroissance' (French for de-growth) didn't appear until the early 1970s, when it was introduced by French intellectual André Gorz in response to the Meadows report: 'The Limits to Growth' (Gorz, 1975; Kallis et al., 2015 ; Kaika et al., 2023). While the notion of de-growth gained some momentum in the following years, it was quickly overshadowed by the popularization of the term 'sustainability' in the 1980's. Nevertheless, after a few decades of relative obscurity, the term resurfaced in the early 2000's among French activists, who found that, unlike 'sustainability,' the subversive 'de' in de-growth withstood co-optation, while still encapsulating their diverse goals (Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis & March, 2015; Demaria et al., 2019). Since then, degrowth has dropped the hyphen, and expanded to become a highly heterogeneous framework of principles, policies and goals. Likewise, though it remains largely Euro-centric, degrowth has gained significant traction internationally over the last decade, as evidenced by a growing number of academic articles and mainstream media citing degrowth, the formation of countless degrowth groups or collectives, and the annual conferences dedicated to degrowth (Demaria et al., 2019; Kaika et al., 2023).

So, what exactly is degrowth? Early degrowth advocate, Serge Latouche, outlined a number of interdependent degrowth objectives, including the need to: redefine societal values and reconceptualize wealth and scarcity, restructure production and relocalize the economy, and use fewer resources and redistribute resources both locally and globally (Latouche, 2010; Demaria et al., 2013). Subsequently, the link between degrowth and decolonization has been made more explicit. Core degrowth values include: autonomy and sufficiency, sharing and reciprocity, voluntary simplicity and frugal abundance, conviviality and care, collectivity and the commons, and embracing the pluriverse of experiences and lived-realities (Kallis et al., 2015; Escobar, 2017). Some specific degrowth policies include: increased taxes on consumption, income and inheritance; bans on advertising, luxury goods, private property and harmful industries; and labour reforms such as income ratios, reduced working hours and universal basic income - to name but a few (Demaria et al., 2013; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Degrowth also embraces and aligns itself with many compatible theories and movements, such as: the environmental justice movement (Martinez-Alier, 2012; Barlow et al., 2022; Akbulut et al, 2019; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019); Indigenous struggles (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Escobar, 2017); the Zapatista uprising (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Demaria & Kothari, 2017); Modern Monetary Theory (Hickel, 2020), Nowtopias (Demaria et al., 2019); Permaculture/Agroecology (Alexander & McLeod, 2014; Bozsogi, 2023; Rocha, 2022); Transition Towns (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023b; Brouard-Sala, 2022); Donut Economics (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023b; Savini, 2023); Commoning (Barbagallo et al., 2019; Helfrich & Bollier, 2015; Perkins, 2015; Federici, 2018); Circular Economies (Ddiba et al., 2022; Nesterova & Buch-Hansen, 2023; Savini, 2023; Schröder et al., 2019); Eco-Feminism/Anarchism/Socialism (Barca et al., 2023; Dunlap & Becker, 2024; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Gorz, 1994; Işıkara & Narin, 2023). For this reason, degrowth is often described as a "movement of movements" (Meissner, 2021). For a more complete list of degrowth principles, policies and goals, please refer to the **Glossary of Terms**.

3.1 Limits to Growth

Although degrowth has moved beyond simply a critique of growth, the fact remains that the narrative of growth as 'good' and 'necessary' remains dominant. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the fundamental principles of capitalism are based-on continuous production and consumption that depend on an infinite supply of resources - a concept fundamentally incompatible with the finite nature of our planet's resources (Bonaiuti, 2015). This creates a dilemma: halting growth, leading to economic and social collapse, or continuing growth and endangering the ecosystems vital for our long-term survival (Jackson, 2015). Degrowth presents a third option. Unlike capitalism, degrowth recognizes that many of Earth's resources are finite, and those that are renewable are being consumed at a rate that far exceeds the planet's regenerative capacity. As a matter of fact, even if growth were halted tomorrow, resources would continue to be extracted at unsustainable rates (Demaria et al., 2015). As such, degrowth proposes a *planned* economic contraction whereby growth, especially in over-developed nations, is reversed. For degrowth advocates, the question is no longer whether to stop economic growth, but how much degrowth is needed and where (Farley, 2015).

3.2 Redistribution

As described in Chapter 2, industrialized countries in the Global North have profited significantly from the exploitation of natural resources and human labour in low-income countries, and, as a result, bear an ecological debt to these regions (Schulken et al., 2022). Degrowth recognizes the injustices stemming from colonialism and imperialism, both past and present, and maintains that the high-income countries must rectify the social and environmental burdens it has imposed on the low-income countries (Ojo, 2022). As such, degrowth must support resistance struggles for autonomy over land and resources, ensure the right to self-determination, and provide remediation and reparations for past harms (Mailhot & Perkins, 2022; Sultana, 2023).

Similarly, as Barker states, "Decolonization, at any scale, cannot be motivated by an effort to maintain as much comfort or privilege as possible," and that, "given the nature of hierarchical

oppression, confronting oppression requires significant sacrifices" (Barker, 2010 [pp 322]; Mailhot & Perkins, 2022). In other words, a good life beyond growth cannot be at the expense of another's wellbeing (Kothari et al., 2019; Schulken et al., 2022). The term "Imperial Mode of Living," coined by Brand and Wissen in 2013, describes the energy and resource intensive living standards of the wealthiest segment of the population, which are sustained by impoverished social and ecological conditions elsewhere (Nelson, 2024). As such, sustaining the 'Imperial Mode of Living' in high-income countries, by perpetuating global inequalities and unequal ecological exchange, only serves to worsen the ecological crisis (Schmelzer & Büttner, 2024). Hence, degrowth can't simply be about lowering consumption in line with ecological limits, but needs to be a critique of the unequal exchange of resources within and between countries (Kallis & March, 2015; Paulson, 2017; Demaria et al., 2019; Sachs Olsen, 2021). As Shevek, the protagonist in the *Dispossessed,* declares: "It is not that the Anarresti are not poor because nobody goes hungry. They are not poor because nobody goes hungry while another eats" (Le Guin, 1974 [pp 229]; Kallis & March, 2015).

3.3 Reimaging wellbeing

Finally, growth-dependent economies perpetuate the exploitation of marginalized communities and the unequal exchange of resources, by aligning societal interests with those of capital interests, over those of societal well-being (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). To counter this, degrowth seeks to reject capitalist norms and institutions, such as markets, competition and commodified labour, and reimagine the economy in terms of conviviality, collective ownership, and stewardship of the commons (Mailhot & Perkins, 2022; Meissner, 2021; Sekulova, 2015; Wright, 2010 [pp 277, 279]; Kreinin & Latif, 2022).

One way degrowth proposes to decouple wellbeing from material wealth, is through 'voluntary simplicity' (Gorz, 1975). Voluntary simplicity is when individuals choose to minimize wasteful consumption by prioritizing non-materialistic sources of fulfillment, such as community involvement, family, artistic pursuits, and immersion in nature (Alexander, 2015). While this concept may seem naive or unattainable given current values and norms, studies have shown

that, in actuality, excess material wealth does not lead to greater happiness or life satisfaction (Easterlin, 2003; Graham, 2005). In fact, the Easterlin paradox confirms that happiness is more influenced by factors like health, social connections, relationships, and marital status, than by material wealth or income (Easterlin, 2003; Sekulova, 2015). This perspective not only supports a degrowth understanding of wellbeing, but enables us to reconsider the amount of material goods or wealth necessary to maintain that wellbeing (Perkins, 2015).

Degrowth also challenges the idea that economic growth leads to 'progress' or 'development' (Romano, 2015). Thus, while degrowth advocates for the intentional contraction of over-developed economies in high-income countries, it encourages low-income countries to define their own concepts of prosperity (D'Alisa et al., 2015). In this sense, "degrowth is not to be misunderstood as a proposal from the Global North imposed on the Global South, but a Northern supplement to Southern concepts, movements and lines of thought" (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019 [pp 247]; Paulson, 2022).

In actuality, social movements in the Global South represent a profound and radical cultural shift away from capitalist ideologies (Asara & Muraca, 2015). For instance, resistance movements in South America have challenged prevailing values such as materialism, productivism, commodification and individualism, choosing instead to embrace Indigenous concepts such as 'Buen Vivir' and 'Sumak Kawsay' and 'Suma Qamaña' (roughly translated to living-well or well-being), and an improved relationship with nature (Conde & Walter, 2015; Escobar, 2017). Similarly, there has been a resurgence of interest in 'Ubuntu' in Africa and 'Eco-Swaraj' in India, both of which are socio-cultural frameworks built on values like solidarity, consensus, and autonomy (Conde & Walter, 2015; Kaul et al., 2022; Kothari et al., 2015, 2019). Thus, while a transition in high-income countries should be characterized as post-growth, post-materialist, post-economic, post-capitalist, and post-humanist (by reimaging what it is to be human), a transition in low-income countries should include post-development, non-liberal, post-capitalist/non-capitalist, post-extractivist, and alignment with nature, as their goals (Escobar, 2017).

To recap: Degrowth is fundamentally anti-capitalist, in that it opposes growth, along with the social inequality and environmental degradation the growth-imperative entails; It is decolonial, in that it advocates for the redistribution of resources, reparations for past harms, autonomy and the right to self-determination; And finally, it challenges neoliberal ideology by reframing our understanding of wellbeing and progress. Nevertheless, despite increasing public interest, degrowth remains a theoretical collection of ideas, than a concrete strategy for a socio-economic transition (Kallis et al., 2020; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). In the next chapter, I explore the challenges degrowth faces, specifically in capturing the social imaginary and achieving the societal transformation necessary to overcome capitalist's hegemony.

Chapter 4: An Ambiguous Utopia

4.1 The Pluriverse

The first challenge degrowth faces in overcoming neoliberal narratives, is the pervasive Western-scientific belief that there is only one world and one reality - both of which are independent and detached from human experience (Escobar, 2017). This notion not only assumes that the West has the authority to define the way in which the world works, but dismisses the possibility that reality is shaped by human experience, and is therefore specific to geographical location and cultural context (Escobar, 2017). In contrast to universalist Western thinking, degrowth embraces the pluriverse - the idea that there are multiple ways of understanding and organizing the world, and each of which contains diverse values and practices (Demaria & Kothari, 2017; Kothari et al., 2019). This means that, rather than advocate for a new system, degrowth calls for the end to all hegemonic systems (Escobar, 2017; Demaria et al., 2019).

Consequently, the shift towards a pluriversal understanding of the world, requires moving away from centralized, hierarchical systems, towards decentralizing and diversifying everyday life

(Kossoff, 2015; Escobar, 2017). As such, degrowth remains intentionally ambiguous about its practical implementation, preferring to function as an interpretative framework that links various ideas, practices and movements (Demaria et al., 2013; Asara, 2022). However, this also means that there is no single vision of a 'degrowth world' (Mackenthun, 2021; Kallis & March, 2015). Thus, while many believe this flexibility is one of the degrowth movements greatest strengths, it also represents one of its biggest challenges, as the lack of a concrete vision or policy platform may hinder those sympathetic to degrowth but who struggle to grasp its practical implementation (Smucker, 2017; Schulken et al., 2022; Engler et al., 2024).

4.2 Transition Strategies

Another challenge facing degrowth is in mobilizing the transition from the current hegemonic system, to a pluriversal, degrowth one. As Paul Mason warns, "Postcapitalism is a given. Only question is whether we let it happen spontaneously, or employ a planned transition" (Mason, 2015). Still, theories on social-ecological transformations indicate that any attempts to initiate a planned transition will face significant resistance from powerful interests that benefit from maintaining the status quo (Brand, 2022). The book *Degrowth and Strategy* (2022), outlines Erik Olin Wright's three strategies for achieving societal change: ruptural, which aims to disrupt and dismantle the dominant system; symbiotic, which aims to reform the system from within; and interstitial, which aims to enact prefigurative practices within the margins of capitalist society (Wright, 2010, 2019 [pp 4]; Chertkovskaya, 2022). Each strategy has its strengths and limitations, including: portraying transitions as purely confrontational; risking co-optation; and remaining marginalized or purely theoretical (Schulken et al., 2022; Chertkovskaya, 2022; Kaika et al., 2023).

Given this, many degrowth proponents caution against any singular transition strategy, preferring to advocate for a decentralized and interconnected blend of approaches (Herbert et al, 2018; Brand, 2022; Schulken et al., 2022). They believe the strength of degrowth lies in its adaptability and its embrace of the pluriverse, both of which allow for an interconnected mix of approaches suited to local contexts (Barlow, 2022). As Demeria, Kallis and Bakker (2019) state,

degrowth “is a process of conflict with the prevalent model of growth-based development – not a blueprint to be discovered but rather a process that emerges as a model of growth encounters its limits.” For this reason, degrowth must continue to integrate diverse knowledge and practices, involve various actors and movements, and employ a multifaceted strategy across different levels of governance and knowledge mobilization platforms (Meissner, 2021).

Still, while plurality of vision and a blend of transition strategies may be crucial strategies for degrowth, they may not be strategic in themselves, and will require coordinated efforts among various actors to be effective (Schulken et al., 2022). In response, a number of degrowth scholars have more recently suggested that proponents of degrowth must compromise, especially since establishing a new socio-economic system will take time and faces considerable obstacles (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). They argue that degrowth must articulate concrete policy proposals, economic mechanisms and tangible examples, and employ clear communication across movements, platforms and geographic locations (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

One thing degrowth proponents do agree on, is that strategies for expanding the degrowth movement must align with degrowth principles, otherwise they risk undermining their own objectives (Schmid, 2020; Barlow, 2022). From a degrowth perspective, this means that strategies for communication and transition must be decolonial, decentralized, non-hierarchical, interconnected, context-driven, and aligned with other anti-capitalist movements and struggles. That said, remaining decolonial, decentralized, non-hierarchical, interconnected, context-driven, and aligned with other movements, while also communicating clearly and strategically organizing across movements, presents a major challenge. Furthermore, even within the degrowth discourse, there is debate on what is meant by decolonization, especially in regards to unlearning neoliberal ideology.

4.3 'Decolonizing the Imagination'

Finally, and I would argue the biggest challenge the degrowth movement faces is overcoming capitalist realism, or the pervasive belief that there is no alternative to the current economic system. Within degrowth, "Decolonizing the Imagination" refers to the grip capitalist realism has on our social and cultural ideology, which inhibits Western societies from imagining anything different (Latouche, 2010, 2015). It is therefore important for degrowth to challenge the dominant paradigm that sustains modern capitalist societies, while also presenting a compelling vision for something new (Feola, 2019; Latouche, 2015; Burkhart et al., 2022). Even so, for the global majority, "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) for ideological emancipation, but a real-world practice (Varvarousis, 2019). Marginalized communities have faced persistent oppression and exploitation for centuries, while neo-colonial imperialism continues to strip these communities of their land and their cultures (Mackenthun, 2021). In this sense, decolonization requires the affirmation of identity, political autonomy, sovereignty over land, the right to self-determination, and reparations for past harms (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Escobar, 2017).

Yet, despite its commitment to decolonization efforts, and although it aligns itself with resistance struggles, meaningful dialogue between degrowth proponents and these communities has been limited (Paulson, 2022; Sultana, 2023; Kaika et al., 2023; Steelman, 2024). For example, in so-called Canada, decolonization would require returning the land back to its original caretakers, the Indigenous Peoples, the implications of which have yet to be fully explored within degrowth discourse (McFarlane & Schabus, 2017; Gingrich et al, 2024, Forthcoming). Thus, while integrating diverse perspectives is crucial to nurturing the revolutionary potential of post-growth futures, transitioning away from growth requires genuine involvement with Indigenous Peoples, as well as other marginalized communities (Andreucci & McDonough, 2015; Sultana, 2023; Steelman, 2024).

Nevertheless, both understandings of decolonization refer to the same system of oppression, power dynamics and dominance. Neoliberal capitalism sustains the status quo and strengthens

its grip, by homogenizing culture, suppressing dissenting voices, dismissing other forms of material and cultural knowledge, and by stifling alternative visions of the future (Swyngedouw, 2015; Varvarousis, 2019). Indeed, Indigenous and traditional cultural practices, which center sufficiency, care, commoning, sustainability, reciprocity, and multi-species justice, are persistently undermined, devalued, and disregarded under capitalism (Sultana, 2023). In this sense, the growth imperative underlying today's 'Imperial Mode of Living' is not a metaphor, but a concrete extension of the neoliberal project, meaning that freeing the imagination is crucial for decolonization, as it's the starting point for all other decolonization efforts (Brand & Wissen, 2013; Quijano, 2000; Varvarousis, 2019; brown & Imarisha, 2015). In other words, 'Decolonizing the Imaginary' is both the goal and the method for decolonization (Varvarousis, 2019).

Chapter 5: Rewriting the Script

5.1 Changing the Narrative

If the decolonization process starts by changing cultural norms, then degrowth must start by creating "a new language and a new common sense about fundamental human nature and what it is reasonable for them to expect from the world, and from each other" (Graeber, 2011; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006; Feola, 2019). As previously touched on, political imagination theorists suggest that politics is deeply connected to societal images, narratives, and myths, which shape perceptions of reality (Czobor-Lupp, 2017; Cole, 2021). Accordingly, degrowth proponents must recognize that the ongoing crisis is not just a political, economic and environmental one, but a cultural one (Asara & Muraca, 2015). It is therefore imperative that the cultural politics of degrowth challenge conventional understandings of cultural practices, values, narratives, and identities, with the added bonus of enacting change from the bottom-up (Meissner, 2021).

One way in which degrowth can do this, is to redefine what it is to be a human independent of economic constructs, and recenter values outside profit accumulation, commodification and individualism (Demaria et al., 2013). For example, conventional economics often portrays humans as self-interested, competitive and rational, by employing restrictive metaphors, such as viewing language as merely a tool for transmitting information, or likening brains to computers (Escobar, 2017; Meissner, 2021). Yet, these comparisons diminish our other, more social and relational traits. Alternatively, research indicates that humans are fundamentally social, and have a psychological need for belonging, for which degrowth proposals such as commons and cooperatives could be emphasized (Perkins, 2015). Thus, by portraying humans as cooperative, reciprocal, and motivated by the greater good, degrowth could start to redefine what is possible, acceptable or desirable within society, and start to change the collective imagination (Varvarousis, 2019).

5.2 Embracing Alternative 'Ways of Being'

Another way degrowth can challenge conventional understandings of human nature and envision degrowth futures through a decolonial lens, is to embrace the very perspectives or alternative 'ways-of-being' that neoliberal capitalism has tried to undermine and erase (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Mailhot & Perkins, 2022). For instance, unlike Western scientific thought where humans are considered the pinnacle of evolution, in many Indigenous worldviews humans are described as "the younger brothers of Creation," suggesting that humans are the least experienced and should look to Mother Earth for guidance (Kimmerer, 2020). Likewise, in many traditional societies, the political, economic, and cultural spheres were (or are) unified, with power residing in the collective rather than the wealthy few (Escobar, 2017).

Here on Turtle Island (what is now referred to as Canada, United States and Mexico), many Indigenous communities practice laws of reciprocity, which center on taking only what is necessary and giving back - reminding us that protecting nature is protecting ourselves (McFarlane & Schabus, 2017; Maynard & Simpson, 2022). Many also live by 'Mino Pimatisiwin', a concept akin to South American principles of 'buen vivir,' ''sumak kawsay,' and 'suma

qamaña' (Landry et al., 2019). These principles emphasize living well, community and deep connections with the natural world (Gudynas, 2015 [pp 204]; Mailhot & Perkins, 2022). As a consequence, alternative perspectives and 'ways-of-being' remind us that other realities already exist, have existed for centuries, and are possible (Smith, 2020).

5.3 Pop culture

Lastly, if degrowth wants to inspire societal transformation and the development of a new common sense, it must expand beyond traditional degrowth circles and appeal to a wider audience. One way degrowth scholars and activists can do this is by exploring unconventional communication methods, such as popular culture (Meissner, 2021; Burkhart et al., 2022). Popular culture, or pop culture for short, is a collection of practices, beliefs, and artistic outputs, such as visual arts, literature, theatre, movies and television, which reflect the collective consciousness of a society at a given point in time (Sociology Group, 2019). By politicizing popular culture and portraying degrowth goals and objectives, degrowth can reverse co-opt it away from the current neoliberal narratives (Meissner, 2021).

Literature, especially fiction, is particularly well-suited in challenging the symbols, narratives, and concepts that shape how we represent and comprehend the current system (Cole, 2021; Burkhart et al., 2022). In fact, although the impact of literature on public attitudes is neither direct nor easily quantifiable, research suggests that fiction can lead readers to reconsider social and ecological issues, and even help them envision alternative futures (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018 [pp 495]). After all, writers have the capacity to challenge capitalist discourse through their work, and "a great deal is missed when we focus only on nation-states, transnational corporations, research scientists, and politicians as agents and explainers of change" (Streeby, 2018).

One way fiction can help translate hypothetical scenarios into emotionally relatable narratives is by distancing the reader from the present and transporting them to a *speculative* point in the future (Mehnert, 2016; Cortiel et al., 2020). By reconstructing the world in the future, or

transporting readers to a completely new world, speculative fictions can give readers the emotional space with which to critically reflect upon, and engage with present-day issues (Cortiel et al., 2020). Speculative fictions can also help readers comprehend the long-term and far-reaching implications of complex issues, such as climate change, as well as explore effective responses (Mackenthun, 2021; Cole, 2021). Hence, what makes speculative fiction a valuable tool for exploring the complexities of climate change, also makes it a valuable tool for navigating complex socio-political theories such as degrowth (Goodbody & Johns-Putra, 2019a [pp 4]; Mackenthun, 2021).

Given the potential of speculative fictions to be used as a tool to portray degrowth futures, and apply degrowth to specific geographical locations and cultural contexts, experiment with potential transition strategies, and act as a testing-ground for different degrowth policies and practices, it might be useful to better understand what speculative fiction is, what the difference between speculative fiction and science fiction is, and what are the opportunities and challenges speculative fiction faces in helping degrowth overcome neoliberal ideologies.

Chapter 6: Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction and science fiction are both umbrella terms used to describe fictional stories that explore imaginative and futuristic concepts, such as science and technology, space exploration, time travel, parallel universes, and extraterrestrial life (Taylor, 2023). Both genres overlap with each other and other genres, such as fantasy and horror, and share a diverse array of subgenres, making the difference between the two terms contentious. That said, Margaret Atwood, a self-described speculative fiction author, contrasted the two by stating that science fiction contains things that are not possible today, whereas speculative fiction contains things that are happening today, or could easily happen tomorrow - which aligns well with my own understanding (Atwood, 2011).

Though speculative fiction is by no means a new genre, granted it may be considered so compared to the more classical ones, its cultural significance has grown significantly over the last decade or two, especially in regards to dystopian fictions that portray apocalyptical futures and climate change related catastrophes (Jones & Paris, 2018; Death, 2021). This is especially evident in the rise of public (and academic) discourse surrounding speculative fiction, and the emergence of a number of newer speculative sub-genres. For instance, 'climate fiction' (or 'cli-fi' for short), focuses on the challenges and the outcomes of climate change, while 'cyberpunk' portrays the use of old and new technologies, in often gritty urban landscapes (Cole, 2021; Goodbody & Johns-Putra, 2019b). More recently, 'solarpunk', which acts as the antithesis to more conventional cyberpunk narratives, envisions sustainable communities living in harmony with nature - although these still tend to be technophilic (Rivero-Vadillo, 2022). Meanwhile, brown & Imarisha introduced the term "Visionary Fiction," or what I refer to as 'critical utopias,' to describe storylines that aim to uplift and empower readers, while challenging dominant systems and unequal power dynamics (brown & Imarisha, 2015; Cavalcanti, 2022).

6.1 'Structural Appropriation'

Unfortunately, however, most speculative fiction continues to uphold dominant ideologies and colonial imaginaries by emphasizing Western faith in science and technology (as cyberpunk does), while overlooking issues of overconsumption and systemic inequality (Xausa, 2020; Bettini, 2019). These storylines often limit the exploration of new approaches to addressing the global climate crisis and the inevitable cultural, material or ideological losses that climate change will entail (Bettini, 2019). In effect, they prioritize the comfort and security of the privileged, while often characterizing poorer and more racialized communities as a threat (Bettini, 2019; Cole, 2021; Doctorow, 2017; Mackenthun, 2021). For example, many dystopian narratives portray climate refugees as 'human tides', or promote ecological gentrification as 'sustainable development' (Bettini, 2013; Harper, 2019; Cole, 2021). This trend, termed "Structural Appropriation" (Hsu & Yazell, 2019), shows Western characters experiencing the structural violence typically faced by colonized and marginalized populations (Xausa, 2020). Yet for many of the world's poorest, dystopia is not a fictional future, but a lived reality, and "for a

large share of humanity, the end of the world has already occurred" (Mackenthun, 2021; Mbembe, 2019 [pp 29]; Death, 2021).

6.2 'Nature-Washing'

In addition to employing racist narratives, dystopian narratives also tend to frame the environment itself as the problem, creating what Mike Davis calls "Ecologies of Fear" (Davis, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2010). Thus, while society may (or may not) be blamed for causing environmental destruction, it is the power of these altered systems that becomes the existential threat to life on earth (Smith, 2008 [pp 245]; Swyngedouw, 2010). Neil Smith refers to this process as "Nature-Washing" (Smith, 2008 [pp 245]), where the implications of human activities on nature are acknowledged, but the systemic issues that caused them go unchallenged (Swyngedouw, 2010). These objectified understandings of the environment stem from a commodified view of natural resources and ecosystem services, which portray humans are separate from nature, and nature is something to be conquered or controlled (Bettini, 2019).

6.3 'Defuturing' the Future

Moreover, the struggle for speculative fiction to envision anything beyond dystopian futures, where climate change exacerbates exploitation and inequality, only serves to further disempower and disengage readers (Yuen, 2012 [pp 19]; Cole, 2021). Tony Fry (2020) describes this phenomenon as "defuturing," where the unsustainability of the capitalist system deepens feelings of hopelessness and apathy (Escobar, 2017). As a matter of fact, negative discourses around climate change, such as depicting it as unstoppable, have been shown to contribute to various mental health challenges (such as climate anxiety), fuel conspiracy theories (the tendency for individuals deny the issue out of fear or dismiss efforts to combat it as manipulative), and/or lead to extreme political ideologies (Stevenson & Peterson, 2016 [pp 2]; Cole, 2021; Buell, 2003; Mackenthun, 2021). Likewise, one survey of American climate fiction readers confirmed that disaster narratives often left them feeling helpless and depressed, while

another found that dystopian fiction increased the participant's tolerance for violence and undemocratic actions (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018 [pp 489–490]; Jones & Paris, 2018). It should not come as a surprise then that the proliferation of apocalyptic discourses in popular culture has coincided with business-as-usual responses to the climate crisis (Anshelm & Hultman, 2016; Cole, 2021).

Chapter 7: Critical Utopias

7.1 Decolonial Worldbuilding

Be that as it may, defeatist attitudes are *not* inherent to human nature, but cultivated by social conditions (Graeber, 2011). It is therefore crucial that degrowth storylines depict 'critical utopias' - utopian visions for the future that simultaneously offer vibrant, dignified futures inspired by inclusivity, interdependence and resilience, while also being decolonial and used as an instrument for dissent and social justice (Trojanow, 2018; Mackenthun, 2021; Xausa, 2020; Mehta et al., 2021). One way speculative fiction can encourage more critical utopian storylines within the genre is by including diverse voices and divergent narratives. In fact, cultural sociology emphasizes the importance of readers engaging with diverse human experiences through fiction (Olave 2018; Iossifidis, 2020). In this way, speculative fiction could confront readers with characters and settings outside their own experiences and comfort zones, potentially fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges these characters face, and enhancing their ability to empathize with them (Nussbaum, 1995; Mackenthun, 2021).

Nevertheless, just as Indigenous and traditional cultural practices have been eroded, devalued, and discarded under capitalist ideologies, until recently, marginalized authors have been excluded from the genre of speculative fiction (Sultana, 2023; Streeby, 2018). It is therefore crucial that speculative fiction include diverse authors and characters, the futurisms of historically marginalized communities, and a pluriversal understandings of the world (Cortiel et al., 2020; Streeby, 2018; Mehta et al., 2021). Additionally, speculative storylines should employ

anti-racist world-building and engage in political discourses that explore complex self-identities, including decolonial themes such as justice and equity, and support marginalized struggles (Mehta et al., 2021).

Speculative fiction must also challenge the underlying ideology that has led to environmental disaster and encourage readers to explore alternative approaches (Garrard, 2023). For example, rather than reducing complex issues into solvable problems by way of technological and scientific innovation, it is important that speculative fiction authors recognize and portray the interconnectedness and mutual dependence among all beings, and integrate human and more-than-human interactions into their storylines (Mehnert, 2016; Mackenthun, 2021; Short, 2024). As Escobar notes, "It is imperative to contribute to creating worlds where it is impossible to speak of nature and culture as separate" and to "emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings by reestablishing connections with both each other and the nature/nonhuman world" (Escobar, 2017).

7.2 Experimental Alternatives

Critical utopias also give degrowth advocates (and authors) a safe space to explore under-developed ideas, investigate unseen risks, and experiment with different policies, practices and theories (Mackenthun, 2021; Sachs Olsen, 2021). As brown affirms, speculative fiction is "a way to practice the future together," and that "If we want to bring new worlds into existence [we need to], grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (brown, 2017). Perhaps, by promoting degrowth values centered on collective wellbeing, speculative fiction can serve as a powerful tool to challenge conventional narratives (Meissner, 2021). By weaving themes of voluntary simplicity and conviviality into compelling, emotionally engaging stories, degrowth authors can enable readers to imagine these concepts in practice (Mehnert, 2016). Similarly, degrowth storylines could inspire readers to adopt alternative ways-of-being, by having characters model desirable behaviors (Mackenthun, 2021). Thus, while speculative fiction might appear distant from economics, policy-making and social movements, critical

utopias can serve as a portal into the 'degrowth imaginary,' and disseminate the degrowth movements objectives in a pluriversal and more relatable way (Milkoreit, 2017, Cole, 2021).

7.3 'Imaginactivsim'

Finally, if being able to visualize an alternative to capitalism is crucial in (re)politicizing the present, the portrayal of near-futures as catastrophic or apocalyptic often impedes the ability to imagine non-disastrous transitions (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014; Doctorow, 2017; Mackenthun, 2021). Nonetheless, near-future transition stories are crucial for inspiring collective action and fostering the belief that positive change is both necessary and possible (Mackenthun, 2021). As such, critical utopias must help readers grapple with long-term perspectives, agency, and responsibility, while humanizing change and exploring alternative pathways to achieving that change (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018; Garrard, 2023; Mehnert, 2016; Milkoreit, 2016).

One way critical utopias in speculative fiction can influence degrowth activism is through a concept known as "Imaginactivism" (Haran, 2017; Iossifidis, 2020). As Le Guin remarked in a 2014 speech, "Imagination is the precondition of action," and "Literature often serves as the starting point for resistance and change." Despite this, dystopian fictions rarely portray peaceful acts of resistance, preferring to focus on themes of violence and rebellion (Jones & Paris, 2018). It is therefore essential that critical utopias highlight a broad array of political actions, including alternative paths towards societal transformations (Yuen, 2012 [pp 21]; Cole, 2021). In actuality, showing characters adapting to or fighting climate change through mutual aid and collaborative action, could help readers feel less isolated and powerless, and could even encourage them to take action (Cole, 2021). In this manner, emphasizing agency over fear could actually help motivate political action, or at the very least, instill confidence in our capacity to embrace alternatives (Cole, 2021; Mackenthun, 2021).

What's more, critical utopias have the potential to unite diverse movements and activists from around the world, by linking them through shared struggles, common goals and collective visions for the future (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018 [pp 495]; Streeby, 2018). In fact, visionary

politics, or the “politics of the possible” (Swyngedouw, 2018), has been shown to play a pivotal role in the success and effectiveness of social movements (Reed, 2019; Engler & Engler, 2016; Zhao, 2010; Escobar, 2017; Meissner, 2021). In spite of this, most social movements fail to integrate visionary politics (or the introduction of tangible alternatives) into their activism, focusing solely on critiquing the destructiveness of capitalism (Burkhart et al., 2022). Furthermore, without a collective vision, some anti-capitalist movements have ended-up replicating the same dynamics they are fighting against (Tickell, 2022). As a result, in order to motivate truly transformative change, it is imperative that movements have a clear and positive vision of the future (McPhearson et al., 2016; Vaidyanathan, 2018).

Summary

The portrayal of critical utopias in speculative fiction can provide anti-capitalist movements such as degrowth, with a unique tool with which to experiment with policies and practices, create shared-visions across movements, and model a widespread transition away from the capitalist systems and towards an alternative one. Hence, while no single work or collection of fiction has the capacity to overcome capitalism, the introduction of tangible critical utopias, along with other transition strategies, has the potential to start to change the narrative.

Speculative Fiction & Illustrations

Collapse is not a new phenomenon. Colonization had seen the systematic genocide of Indigenous Communities around the world, an ongoing apocalyptical collapse lasting centuries, while neo-colonization had kept the Global South in a perpetual cycle of economic, political and social instability - a never-ending cycle of collapses. Similarly, the increased frequency of extreme weather events and global pandemics, caused by human induced climate change, had seen the rise of collapses, no matter how temporary, across the globe, although the impacts of those were unevenly felt. Meanwhile, the insatiable consumption of resources, fueled by capitalism, had led to a number of ecological collapses, which were having a cascading effect.

Yet, until recently, many in the West had been more or less insulated from the worst of it. The ravages of capitalism had only affected them superficially. Despite this, the endless cycle of growth with which the global economy was dependent, as it turns out, was not endless after all. Everything has limits, and the capitalist system had finally reached its own. In fact, it had actually hit its peak decades ago and been in decline ever since, though those with power and privilege had chosen to turn a blind eye and continue with business-as-usual. 'Late stage capitalism' they had called it. But that's the nature of…well nature. Things are born, things die, and rebirth isn't always gentle.

The land on which this neighbourhood was built had been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples for millennia. The Peoples had lived in balance with their surroundings over all that time, without destroying the place they called home. The first wave of colonizers from France were quickly followed by the British, who took on the task of violently removing and relocating the original caretakers. The land, deemed empty, was declared 'up-for-grabs', and land grab they did. Soon after, immigrants from all over Europe started settling on this land, making it their own. And so it was that Italians, fleeing economic hardship after the First World War, landed in this small pocket of the quickly expanding City of Toronto. Little Italy, as the neighbourhood became known, has since seen people from all over the world settle within its borders. Even the urbanization, gentrification and resulting rising cost-of-living throughout the last half of the 20th century and early 21st century, didn't stop people from establishing lives here, however temporary. And the trend continues.

Still, when the collapse first started, the population of the city had actually declined slightly. Some of this was caused by people trying to get back to their families elsewhere, while the rest was caused by an exodus from urban areas, to the surrounding suburban or rural ones. Similar to the white flight of the 1950s and 1960s, those with power and privilege tried to escape the collapse by fleeing to the countryside and the imagined protection it offered. They thought the way forward was backwards, and envisioned a return to the colonialist good 'ol days. Think back-to-the-landers but co-opted by neoliberal ideology. History has a disappointing way of repeating itself. Although that individualistic instinct wasn't exactly wrong, at least not in the beginning. As global supply-chains failed, and the electric grid and other municipal services became unreliable or non-existent, panic and desperation spurred chaos in many cities around

the world. So, when people could no longer access food, clean water, energy, and sanitation, those that could afford to tried to find resources and stability elsewhere, and around here, the countryside offered that. For a little while anyways. So it was, for the first time in Toronto's history, there were more people leaving the city than arriving.

But not everyone could afford to escape, nor were there places for most people to escape to. Little Italy, if not their place of origin, was where they had built a life. The small neighbourhood in Toronto's west end was their home. Thankfully, residents weren't caught completely off-guard. The threat of climate change had loomed for over a century, and some mitigation tactics had emerged under what was termed 'green capitalism' or 'eco-capitalism', although those were purely technological. These included solar panels and heat pumps, passive heating/cooling systems, geothermal, and more energy efficient buildings (both new and retrofits). While they may have lessened the blow of the collapse (for some), they had done nothing to prevent it.

Meanwhile, the environmental and social justice movements, which emerged and had evolved since the 1960's, along with the rise of the degrowth and other post-growth movements in the 2020's, had had a much larger influence than anyone, least of all the capitalists, could have imagined. As a result, many of the ideas and values touted by these movements already made-up a small part of the collective consciousness, and in some cases, alternative ideas were already being practiced. Though these movements had also failed to prevent collapse, they had at least helped to avert a complete break-down in social order, and given communities a framework with which to fashion a new one. Therefore, between the green technologies of eco-capitalism, the prefigurative practices born from these anti-capitalist movements, and the knowledge that there was another way, communities had been able to quickly adapt. People still suffered though, especially in the beginning. The transition, as could have been predicted from a system based on exploitation and denial, was not entirely smooth.

Back before the collapse, there had been around 7320 residents living in Little Italy. Back then, the boundaries of the neighbourhood had spanned from Harbord Street to the North, Ossington Avenue to the West, Dundas Street West to the South and Bathurst Street to the East. College Street, which cuts through the center of the neighbourhood, was also its cultural heart, famous for its vibrant nightlife, along with the annual 'Taste of Little Italy' street festival. The residential side streets running north and south from College, mainly consisted of detached and semi-detached Victorian-style houses built in the early 1900's. Though many remained single family homes until the post-collapse, a large portion of them had been converted into apartments in the 1980s and 90s. There were also few mid-rise buildings scattered around, but the intense condo-fication common to the rest of the city had endured, had not yet fully materialized. The area boasted one medium-sized park, four parkettes, and six schools with various sized playgrounds, with four much larger parks within a short walking distance. While there was only one large corporately-owned grocery store located in the community, many of the smaller, independent produce stores, butchers and bakeries had managed to stay in business over the years. The neighbourhood had a somewhat diverse make-up, both in terms of

ethnicity and income level, though it remained predominantly of European descent and middle-class.

Since the collapse, the population of Little Italy has steadily increased. The single-family homes are now shared living spaces, or what would have been called rooming houses back when paying rent was a thing. No one owns property anymore. Ownership of land, and the buildings on it, collapsed along with the financial system and the rest of the city's infrastructure. Everything in the community, and the city, is now collectively owned.

It was also consensually decided to consider shelter a human right, a logical outcome when no one owns the houses and buildings, with placement determined by need, availability and deliberative forum. Similarly, the restaurants and bars that were once the source of Little Italy's vibrant nightlife, have been replaced with shared community spaces, adding a different kind of vibrancy to the community. These premises now serve as giveaway shops, repair cafes, tool libraries and a whole host of do-it-yourself and artisan/craft/toolmaker spaces. Meanwhile, the annual street festival has been replaced with numerous, sometimes spontaneous, smaller community celebrations. Any excuse to come together and express gratitude to the community they helped build and the people that helped build it.

At the beginning of the collapse though, when access to resources had become limited and precarious, the population had initially declined. For a little while, there had still been access to heavily rationed power from the central grid. However, as this source became increasingly unreliable and prohibitively expensive (before ceasing altogether), the only access to power came from the solar panels and small wind turbines that had been installed on the properties of those who could afford them. Luckily, a decade or two before the collapse, solar panels, along with other 'green' technologies, were made more accessible, so there was actually quite a good stock of them. Even still, it became clear that energy needed to be restricted and prioritized, and fast. In response, solar panels were disconnected from the grid, rewired, and often relocated to where power was needed most.

The supply of fossil fuels, such as natural gas, on the other hand, had been cut-off right from the get go. For a short time there had been a reserve of tanks (like the ones used for BBQs), which postponed the inevitable, but those hadn't lasted long. For most, gas appliances such as stoves and furnaces, became redundant overnight. Thankfully, much of the reliance on these appliances had been phased out in the 'green' capitalist years, so the impact hadn't been as devastating as it might have been 50 years earlier. That said, there were still quite a few older buildings with gas heating and cooling systems, which had had to be retrofitted with electric furnaces or solar heat pumps - if they were available. More often than not though, buildings that had relied on natural gas had had to be repurposed for other uses. These buildings, along with the high-rise condos that had just started to infiltrate the community, became cold storage spaces during the winter and vertical farms in the summer. No building was ever completely abandoned, and no space was left unused, unless it posed a serious risk of collapse. Even then, buildings were carefully disassembled, materials relocated and reused elsewhere, and the site revamped to serve some other purpose.

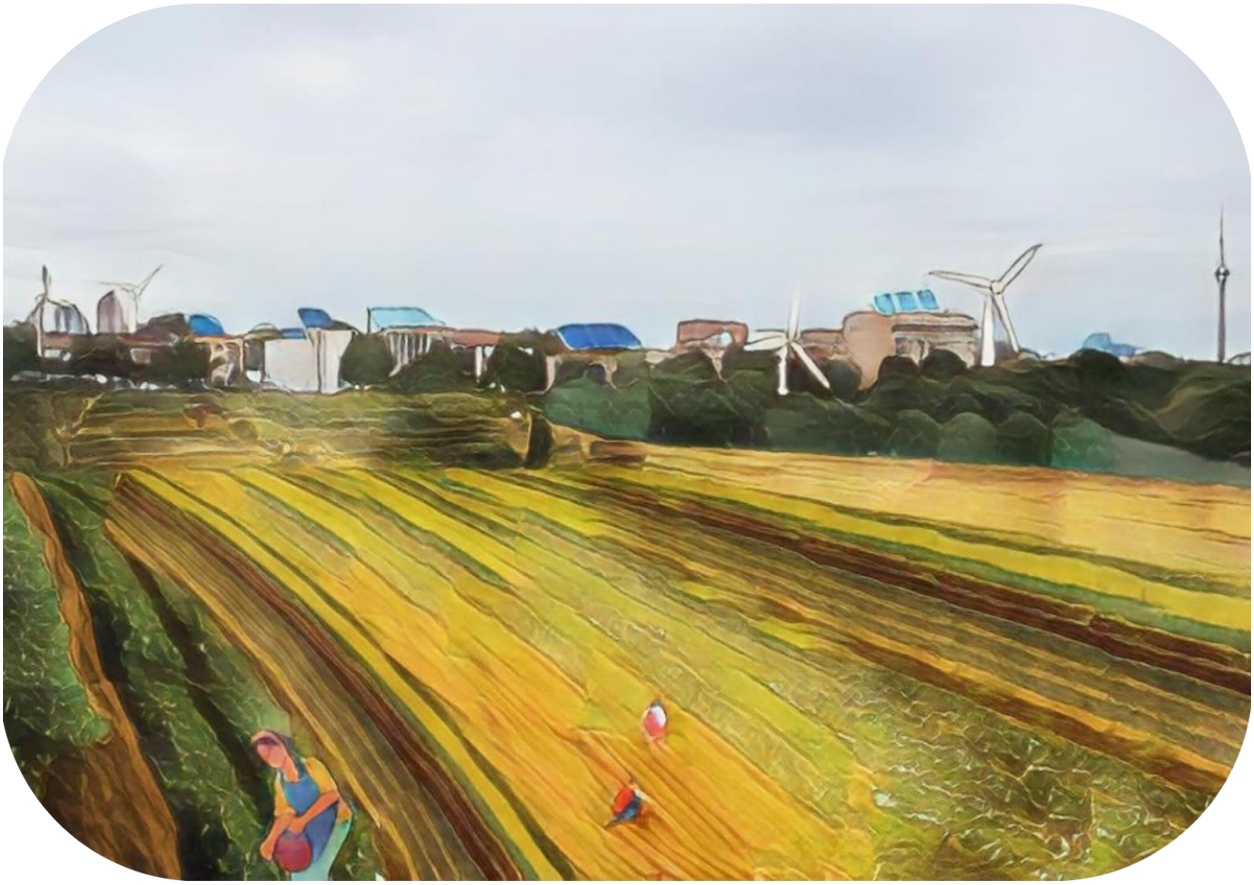
Water, on the other hand, became something they had urgently needed to worry about. Living on the shore of one of the Great Lakes, fresh water was not something most residents of Toronto had ever worried about. Nevertheless, once the taps stopped flowing and the toilets stopped flushing, water and sanitation (along with food) became primary concerns. Anything that could capture rainwater, was used to do so. Rooves, streets and parking lots became catchments, while ducts and gutters became siphons to direct water into whatever holding tanks could be repurposed for that use. A lot of time, space and energy became dedicated to the collection, storage and cleaning of water, and as a result, its use became heavily restricted. Hot water, supplied by solar hot water heaters, were relocated to where they were most needed, and likewise rationed. Similarly, no drop of water was wasted. Grey water from sinks and showers was recovered and used for irrigation, while waste unsuitable for irrigation was processed into fertilizer. And so on, and so forth.

Equally devastating, had been the complete failure of global supply chains, or really the transportation of any goods near or far, most crucially of which was access to food. Of course this wasn't a new phenomenon. They had all lived through the various pandemics and natural disasters that had started to hit more frequently in the early to mid 21st century. These interruptions had begun to last for longer periods of time, and with less recovery time in between. As a result, they'd gotten used to stockpiling non-perishables and (what they thought were) necessities (like toilet paper), just in case. What they hadn't realized, is that these mini-collapses had also started to build the resilience they would later rely upon. They had unwittingly been building social infrastructure that entire time. This time though, globalization as they had known it, and the resulting global trade they had all become dependent on, didn't bounce back. The most immediate and concerning outcome of which was the loss of the food supply. Being both a northern country with long winters, and an urban area with limited green space, food production would turn out to be the biggest challenge facing them.

As an urban neighbourhood, 100% of their food had come from outside of the city, with most of it imported from abroad. It was clear that they need to start producing their own food, and fast. Fortunately (in a way), because they had become so experienced at weathering these disruptions, and because the collapse of the food system didn't happen overnight, they'd had time to prepare. Instead of encountering the looting and hoarding predicted by some (though, to be fair this did take place to a certain extent), early on the community strategically decided to localize and collectivize the food system. This meant that most of the food available in local stores was appropriated for community use, and relocated to what would become the sites of community kitchens. After they were emptied, retail spaces with south-facing windows were converted into greenhouses, and used for growing food indoors all year round - especially vital given the increasingly unpredictable and volatile seasons.

Meanwhile, all outdoor green spaces, from lawns to school grounds to parks, were given over to growing food. Even roads and parking lots, in the absence of cars, were fitted-out with raised beds, while pots and containers squeezed into all other suitable indoor and outdoor spaces. Nowhere was left uncultivated. Fortunately, many of the residents that made-up the

community brought with them the knowledge of growing and preserving food, while some rebellious neighbours had been keeping (illegal) backyard chickens. And so, they eventually had a somewhat steady supply of vegetables, eggs, and along with the pet bunnies and older chickens...well, even some meat. Thus, while they endured the heavy rationing, and most of them experienced the pangs of hunger, no one in Little Italy had starved.



Christie Pits Farm

As for cities, the thing that most threatened their survival, was actually the key to it. It may appear counterintuitive: a large concentration of people in a small area, who are completely reliant on outside resources for survival - hardly a recipe for success when those outside resources cease. However, after an initial period of turmoil, there was an understanding between and within urban communities that they needed to cooperate in order to survive. Panic and hoarding only breed chaos and violence, a lose-lose situation where there are no winners. As people detoxed away from capitalist ideologies, such as individualism and privatization, the shared-use of resources became easier to manage, to the point where eventually, they hardly needed to be managed at all.

Likewise, the old leaders, way out of their depths, no longer knew how to serve their communities when their communities had next to nothing, and needed pretty much everything. So there was a power vacuum. And from that vacuum came an opportunity - an opening for a different kind of power to take hold - a collective one. And no, it isn't always easy. Things got

heated and personalities clashed. But in the end, most people agreed that things weren't going to, and couldn't, go back to the way they were. Instead, they needed to leave their own, selfish interests behind, and serve the greater good. The guiding principles, inspired by the degrowth movement, became wellbeing, autonomy, sharing, simplicity, conviviality, care and commoning. When tough decisions needed to be made, or divisions couldn't be bridged, residents started to examine the problem using those principles as a lens, and for the most part, the path forward would become clear.

More often than not, communities were able to make decisions, but when they weren't, decisions were shelved until tempers cooled down. Usually these strong reactions were emotional, so a cooling off period almost always worked. Most importantly though, once collective decision-making becomes the norm, there is no going back to the weak and broken democratic system they had thought was so participatory before. As soon as people became accustomed to having their voices heard, and having a direct say on the things that impacted their lives, autonomy was not something that could easily be forsaken. Every decision, whether related to housing, education, food and energy production, or healthcare, has been completely democratized, and in this way, democracy has been transformed.

Hannah woke up with a start before remembering where she was, and more importantly, when it was. From the faint light illuminating the dark outside her window, she judged that dawn was still a few hours away. She must have been dreaming about her old life as a 9 to 5 commuter - she was so glad those days were over. Knowing that she still had some time before she needed to get up, she snuggled back into her pillow and mulled over the day ahead. She had a morning shift in the vegetable beds that were now her street, then she needed to bring a few meals to Joan and Phoi, the mostly homebound elderly ladies who lived in the first floor apartment in their converted triplex. She had a bit of free time to do whatever she wanted in the late afternoon - time to do laundry perhaps? Then there was the important community-wide deliberative forum in the early evening to discuss the formation of a new local currency - one of many strategies being put forward to help reconnect and re-establish trade between communities. Wait, was that what she had been dreaming of? She had a vague recollection of hot tempers…

She loved and looked forward to tending to the vegetables. She hadn't grown-up gardening at all, or even knowing where her food came from (news flash: not from the grocery store!), but she had grown to love the meditative, repetitive garden tasks, and the satisfaction of helping to feed the community with food she had nurtured from seed. The forum on the other hand, was something she was still getting used to. She had never been very political, or even very informed for that matter, and collective decision-making was something she still found overwhelming and intimidating. Even so, she enjoyed the realization that she did have thoughts and opinions on things, and even felt a sense of empowerment helping to make decisions that would affect her and her community's future - something she had never really felt or done

before. If someone would have told her a couple of years ago, that this is what her day would look like, she would have told them they had mistaken her for someone else.

Hannah had grown-up in a standard subdivision in one of Toronto's many suburbs. You could find blueprint neighbourhoods just like hers outside any town or city in North America. She still thought it was a pretty good place to grow-up. Nonetheless, even though many of her friends had grown-up in the same subdivision as her, and her family had been friendly with a few of her direct neighbours, it had never felt like a cohesive community. Not that she had given it much thought at the time. Sure, most of her neighbours would greet each other on the street, comment on the weather, or relay whatever gossip was making the rounds, but usually this was done in passing. Other than a few invites to holiday or celebratory parties from the handful of families with kids her or her brother's age, her family hadn't mingled much with the other people living in their area.

In truth, they had been busy with school stuff, extra-curriculars, day and overnight camps and all the other activities that marked a happy middle-class, suburban childhood. In fact, she wouldn't have been able to call most of her neighbours by their names (although her and her friends had sometimes made-up funny descriptive names for them), and there were quite a few houses in her subdivision that she had never even seen the occupants. Still, this experience didn't seem to be that unique. Most people that she knew, who were from the city or the burbs, especially North American cities and suburbs, had grown-up not really knowing their neighbours, or at least not relying on them for anything other than a quick hello, or nagging complaint.

Like most of her friends, Hannah had moved out from her parent's house as soon as she could. At 17 she couldn't wait to leave home, and once she had, she had never moved back. Even her parents had moved out from her grandparents' houses around the same age, so while it may have felt like a big deal at the time, culturally it was just what people did. Likewise, she had a few aunts and uncles, a handful of cousins, and one set of grandparents within an hours drive. But despite their proximity, she hadn't seen them all that often. Now that she really thought about it, she had spent way more time with her schoolmates, friends, and co-workers over the years, than she had with anyone in her extended family. Despite that, if she'd been asked at the time, she would have said that she and her relations were super close. And they had been - just in a supportive but busy living their own lives, kind of way.

Looking back at her childhood now, the two weeks every summer they all spent together at her grandparent's cottage up north, and the comings-together to celebrate different milestones a dozen or so times a year, was nothing compared to the closeness she now felt with people who had been complete strangers not so long ago, but whom she now spent so much of her time with. For example, she checked-in on and hung out with Joan and Phoi way more than she had with any of her own grandparents. Likewise, she felt a closeness with neighbours on her street, who she hadn't even seen, let alone known, a few years ago, who now felt akin to family.

Once up and out of the house, she grabbed a quick breakfast, before getting to work carefully pulling weeds, and harvesting any fruit and vegetables that were ripe, or close enough. After about an hour's work, one of her neighbours and strict garden overseer, a vovó (Portuguese for grandma) called Maria, brought her a cup of cold mint tea, and told her to ‘pausa, pausa’, waving around at their surroundings as if to say, ‘slow down and enjoy the fruits of your labour’. Hannah smiled and thanked her, accepting the refreshment, then made her way over to a nearby bench and sank into it. Looking around, she would not have recognized this Little Italy with the one she had relocated to not so long ago.

Montrose Ave

When she had first moved to Toronto to start her communications internship at a large advertising firm, she had loved Little Italy’s vibrant nightlife and proximity to Trinity-Bellwood’s Park, where people her age flocked like they were at a summer long music festival. She would hang-out at the park or public pool, go shopping on West Queen West, and/or grab dinner and drinks on College or the Ossington strip. During the weekdays, she would take public transit to her unpaid internship, where she would perform menial tasks for the higher-ups for 8 hours a day. Then, in order to afford her downtown lifestyle and pay off her loans, she worked a few shifts a week at a nearby upscale French restaurant. Yet, despite good tips and some cash infusions from her parents and grandparents, she had still had to take out a line-of-credit in

order to cover her monthly expenses and student loan repayments. At this point in her life though, what was a little more debt? She was young, the internship would invariably lead to a higher-paid job, and life would go on. It was more or less what everyone her age did. In fact, it kind of seemed like the more successful you were, the more debt you had.

Things had been hectic in those days. She worked hard and played hard. Nevertheless, despite her busy schedule, she had been aware that things weren't great in the world. But that wasn't that unusual. Things had seemed to be on a downward spiral her entire life. The full impacts of climate change had already started wreaking havoc, and there were constant power outages and supply shortages. Like everyone else, she had weathered many 'supply-chain failures,' 'service interruptions' and 'social unrests' over the years, and gotten used to stockpiling staples, making things last, and hunkering down. Even then, she'd never really questioned why things were the way they were.

From what she could tell, people no longer believed in the government, and in turn, the government provided fewer and fewer services to the people. Or maybe it was the other way around? And she understood where the people were coming from. Most social safety nets, like employment insurance and disability, and social services, like public transit and healthcare, had either been completely hollowed-out and/or privatized, and were therefore now unaffordable to most. The proliferation of vast 'tent cities' or 'slums' in and around Toronto, reflected the number of people who were no longer able to keep their heads above water. Even services such as electricity, fresh water and garbage pick-ups had become so unreliable, that people who could afford to, had started installing their own power and/or water supplies, and employing private waste disposal services to maintain the standard of living they were used to.

To be fair, Hannah hadn't really had the time to process all the changes that had been happening, though to be completely honest, she had never really been very aware of current events. She tended not to read the news, since there seemed to be very little in it that made her feel like she had any control over anything, so really, what was the point? And she felt the same way about politics. In fact, she had only voted once since coming of age, and that was only because the polling station had been located outside one of her lectures at uni, and she had felt pressured by her peers to participate in her 'democratic duty'. Just the same, it seemed to her that the government did not help her in any tangible way, so why would she waste her time and energy thinking about or participating in it? As long as she kept working hard, she would be able to make enough money to afford the things she needed and build the life she wanted. So, at the beginning of the transition, she hadn't really noticed, or been bothered, not understanding that it would be both the end of what was, and the beginning of something new.

So it was that Hannah hadn't realized that the transition had already been well on its way, and what was happening at that moment, was just the tipping point. She'd been too busy at her internship to really get to know any of her peers, beyond the superficial comradery of unpaid labourers. And so, while there'd been rumblings for quite some time, things had seemed to go on like business-as-usual - at least for the first little while. Yet, once the higher-ups stopped

being paid (the junior staff hadn't been paid for longer, but what else could they do but continue to show-up and hope), they stopped coming to work completely - ironic since Hannah had been working for nothing all along. And with no one to unlock the doors in the morning, or bark orders, everyone was forced to stay home. At the same time, the streetcars she relied on to get to work had been getting more and more unreliable, and eventually stopped showing-up all together. At first she had started walking to work, which is when she discovered that walking took the same amount of time to get there as the streetcar during rush hour - who knew?

Similarly, internet and cell service had become spotty, progressively worsening until it was basically useless, and since there was no one left at the office for her to contact anyways, she decided to wait, whatever was going on, out at home. She had assumed it was just another temporary shut-down. Yet another short-term crisis to be weathered, and she would be contacted about returning to her internship once things went back to 'normal'. Luckily, the French Restaurant that she worked at would still be up and running, or so she figured. Being unaffordable to most, it was only the rich who ate there, and the rich were more insulated than the rest of them from these disruptions. You know, they still had money to spend and lifestyles to uphold. But, this time had been different. The wealthy had been the first to know that this wasn't just another short-term financial crisis or climate-related disaster to be profited-off, and, as a result, had been the first to flee the city to their barricaded country retreats. And so she discovered that the restaurant had all but been abandoned.

Not really knowing what else to do, Hannah had bided her time and tried to survive by herself. Her and her roommates had a three bedroom, split level apartment, with a large living room which was now being used as a storage area for non-perishables. One of her roommates, Neha, was a close friend from childhood. She had completed an accounting degree at a different university, but had also found an entry level job in the city at the same time Hannah had scored her internship. Their other roommate, Jaz, was a friend of Neha's cousin, a couple years older, and had just completed a practicum in social work. They had just so happened to be looking for two roommates at the same time Neha and Hannah had been trying to find somewhere in the downtown vicinity. It was a lucky break for us that Neha's cousin had connected them, and that Jaz's apartment was in the sought after Little Italy neighbourhood.

Jaz had grown up in one of Toronto's community housing buildings, and knew the city inside and out. They were also well connected throughout the city, and one of those people who couldn't go anywhere without bumping into at least a handful of acquaintances. They were also way more political than Hannah and Neha, and regularly attended protests and community meetings - usually something related to 'degrowth,' which they talked about endlessly. Growing up in a low-income family, Jaz was also much better at making food last and finding out where they could get more. They had, what Hannah's dad would have called, 'street smarts'.

During the other blips, each of them had stockpiled their own necessities. But once it became clear that this one was going to be a longer term situation, Jaz suggested that it made more sense for them to combine what they had left and share meals - that it was more efficient that way. When even their shared supplies started running low, they were forced outside to find out

what was going on and see if they could find more supplies. Jaz, who obviously had close ties with many of their neighbours, and had even been checking-up on some of the more vulnerable ones, went to see if anyone knew what was going on. After making some inquiries, it was clear that this time wasn't going to be like the other times, and we were all forced to weigh our options.

Asking for help was not something any of them, even Jaz, was used to. They had all been brought up to be independent and self-sufficient. Like most people who grew up like them, they were not used to relying on anyone, let alone strangers, and certainly not the government. In spite of that, impending hunger had forced everyone in their community to put aside these notions, and ask for help. But who could they ask for help from? The government had also stopped paying its workers, and so had effectively collapsed as well. And it was the same for the grocery stores, and every other business from what they could tell. So who could they ask for help from - but each other?

Surprisingly perhaps, many of those who'd grown up rurally, in North America anyways, were also not used to a lot of outside support, though they were definitely easier to convince that working together was the way forward. Rather, it was the ones who'd come from elsewhere, and who knew how to live interdependently, who showed us the way. They had experienced close-knit communities in the small towns and villages they had grown-up in, and they knew that there was no surviving 'the transition,' as we were now calling it, without pulling together and working as one for the greater good. There were also quite a few Indigenous Peoples living in the neighbourhood, a few of whom had grown-up on reserves, and many of whom had been taught the ways of their ancestors. They also understood the importance of community and practicing reciprocity.

Meanwhile, mostly unbeknownst to Hannah, there had been all sorts of community initiatives taking place in Little Italy and the rest of the city, especially in the tent cities, that had been preparing for this, although maybe not intentionally. Like Jaz, these groups, organizations, collectives, etc., all seemed to identify under the banner of degrowth - though Hannah was still unclear as to what exactly that meant. So it was that these three diverse groups were the ones to show the rest of us a different way of doing things…

Suddenly a deep voice interrupted Hannah's reverie, startling her back into her surroundings.

"What?" she squeaked, in an unintentionally high voice, looking up to find Max staring at her quizzically. Max lived up the street from her, in one of the nice, renovated houses that he and his husband José had once lived in alone, and which they now shared with a few newcomers to the community.

"I said, are you going to the forum tonight?" he said with a grin.

"Oh right. Yah, sorry" Hannah said, shaking her head free from the last of her recollections. "I mean, yes I am. Are you?"

“Wow Hannah, I really caught you having a moment” Max laughed. “Yah, I’ll definitely be there. I’m on the subcommittee for this one, remember?” he paused, “you know, because I used to work in finance?”

“Right. Right.” Hannah said, palming her face. “I forgot you are one of the experts on this”

“Not an expert,” he winked. “Just ... an ‘experienced advisor’,” he said, air quoting the ‘experienced advisor’ part.

“Oh right” Hannah smiled, swinging her head from side-to-side and rolling her eyes. Degrowth, or the ‘new way’ as they were calling it, meant that there were no longer ‘experts’ and everyone else, but many people with various experiences and understandings that they all brought to the table. They said it was a way to decenter the dominant Western idea that there were ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways of doing things, and to allow room for other voices, cultural perspectives, and ways of understanding the world. Oh yah, and it was also supposed to challenge hierarchies, which, after years of student life, working in the service industry, as well as her experience as an intern, Hannah really liked the idea of.

To be honest, she was still trying to wrap her head around many of the ideas and changes coming from the ‘degrowthers’ as they called themselves… and there were many. But she had to admit, once you got to see the ideas in action, like turning her street into a garden and communilizing meals, they really did seem to instinctively feel right. They actually made a kind of sense to her, in a way the old system never had.

“Right, of course, one of the ‘advisors’” she smiled, mimicking his air quotes. She paused, glancing at him. “Honestly, I’m still just trying to wrap my head around having no currency right now, let alone a whole new local one” she said in mock exasperation. “I have no idea how that would even work.”

“I hear you,” he agreed. “It’s just as new of a concept to me as it is to you, although I suppose I have the advantage of understanding how the financial system works - or used to work, I should say. But the degrowthers have given me a lot of literature and case studies on a handful of options, and I gotta say, some of them look quite interesting - I’m actually pretty excited! More than I ever was when I worked on Bay Street, I’ll say that” he paused, furrowing his brow, “Obviously there will be kinks to work out. Well quite a few kinks I would think. And I still have a lot of questions”. He looked up smiling, “But seriously, at this point any currency is better than no currency, right? May as well give it a go and address the problems as they come up. Well that’s my feeling about it anyways. I guess I’m a convert” he chuckled. “Anyways, I’m glad you’re coming. I’ll see you there then…..ummm, mind if I take a tomato for the road?” he asked.

“All yours” Hannah nodded, smiling. “See you later,” she said, as he plucked a juicy looking heirloom off a nearby plant, and strode away down the small pathway that now served as the only access to her street.

As she watched Max disappear down the path, Hannah was startled to realize that just a few years ago, she would have been sitting in the middle of her street! It was bizarre, she thought, how much space had been given over to the inanimate objects that they had called cars. If you really thought about it, it was actually shocking! Kilometers and kilometers of highways, roads and streets, all devoted to driving them, plus acres and acres paved over to make ground-level, multi-level and underground lots - just to store them! And they had actually been parked the majority of the time - it was completely absurd!

Take her street for example. It was approximately three cars wide - parked cars on one side, and then enough space on either side for a car to drive by comfortably. Plus sidewalks on either side of that. That’s like, what? Forty-odd feet of space, times however long her street was? Looking around her now, at all the food that was being grown, as well as the water catchment barrels, the irrigation channels, and the pedestrian pathway…it was hard to believe how much of a green, bountiful, multifunctional, ecosystem this space was now, compared to the empty, dead, and not to mention boring, expanse of pavement it used to be. Eating the food grown on her literal street was something she never could have imagined. Not before seeing it with her own eyes anyways. So much so that when the degrowthers had said they wanted to grow vegetables and plant trees in the middle of her street, she thought they were living in a different reality. But now she saw that they had been - a better one!

To her surprise, her thinking was also, slowly, starting to change. It was like being deprogrammed, or unplugged from the system. Like in that old cult movie, The Matrix, but in place of the lines of code, everything was bountiful and everyone was generous. Well, almost everyone…and there were still hardships and plenty of unknowns. But she was excited to find out what else was possible! If nothing else, she couldn’t imagine anyone wanting to go back to the grey concrete, uninspiring car culture, rush hour commute, and 9-5 jobs most of them had thought was ‘just the way things were’ before. So, even though she couldn’t fathom how a local currency might work, she was sure it would be something completely different and maybe even transformative.

With a contented sigh, she got back to work, and continued weeding and harvesting for another couple of hours, before loading her bounty, both edible and compostable, onto her cargo bike, and heading towards the ‘kitchen table’, as they facetiously called their community kitchen.

Just as her and her roommates had realized that they could ration food better when they combined supplies, so had the community. Not to mention the more efficient use of time and energy. Think about it. Before, everyone had to buy their own groceries, prepare and cook their own three meals a day, and then clean-up after each one. Not to mention the huge amount of food wasted in the process. Now, each block radius (or whatever geographical partitioning

made sense) had set-up their own ‘community kitchens,’ in spaces with commercial kitchens and food storage areas. These usually ended-up being abandoned restaurants, community centers, grocery stores, or actual school cafeterias. They each took turns helping out in the kitchen and washing dishes, though there were a few die-hards, usually people who had been chefs, or even home cooks, before the transition, who chose to cook full-time. Freed-up from meal prep, the rest of the community could get on with all the other things that needed doing. More importantly, because the community was so diverse, and the cooks experienced, the meals were better than anything Hannah could have made on her own. Her stomach growled just thinking about it.

First stop though, was the Hungry Hippo - the name they had all given to the small biodigester at the end of her street, which she now fed the inedible plant bits and weeds into. The digester produced methane gas, which was somehow captured and used to fuel the handful of gas powered tools and appliances still in operation. It was amazing! Not only did it quickly turn plant matter and waste (human and otherwise) into compost, adding nutrients back to the gardens, but they got power from it as well. There was a larger waste facility, once an outdoor skating rink, a couple blocks away, in her beloved Trinity-Bellwoods park, but they all tried to limit the amount of material they disposed of there. Plus, the digester needed constant feeding, so more often than not, there was no need to make the trip down.

Plans had been proposed for a higher capacity biogas digester, but it was highly contested, and it was proving hard to find a place to locate it. Turns out NIMBY was still a problem, even now. The opponents, however, argued that more, smaller digesters, spread around, would be better than burdening one area with the smelly off-gassing of a single, big one - think giant farts! Hannah surprised herself, by agreeing with them. Why lug all their waste somewhere farther afield, then have to lug it back to fertilize the gardens, when they had Hungry Hippo practically on their doorstep? It just didn’t make sense. Sometimes smaller is better. Oftentimes, as she was beginning to learn.

Anyways, it was just one of the many things that had been debated extensively in the deliberative forums that now constituted the decision-making process - resolution pending! It was true perhaps, that this way of making decisions, with full community involvement and consensus, was more time consuming. But hadn’t the old government systems been slow to make decisions as well? And not a fraction as democratic. Actually from what she could tell, it had always seemed like decisions that were good for society were always slow to be made, if made at all, while ones that benefited the wealthy were always quickly pushed through….

Community Kitchen located in College Square (College Street & Crawford Avenue)

She 'pushed' aside her thoughts, as she arrived at the 'kitchen table' and greeted Obasi, one of the die-hard cooks, coming out of the kitchen door.

"Heyyyyyy, Hannah" he said with his West African tilt. "Whatchu got for us today, eh?"

"Come check it out" Hannah said, as she waved him over to the bike. "Maybe you can even help me bring this lot inside?" she asked hopefully.

"But it's my break," he complained jokingly, as he helped Hannah carry her haul inside, where they handed it off to that day's kitchen crew for cleaning and storing.

"Thanks Obi, you're the best. So, what's on the menu today?" Hannah asked Obasi as they headed back outside.

Obasi responded, "we got the salad bar as per usual - peak harvest season and all. Plus, some cornbread and a killer chilli".

Hannah's stomach rumbled loudly, and she covered it with her hands self-consciously.

“You better get in there quick before your stomach starts yelling at ME” Obasi laughed.

Hannah narrowed her eyes and then laughed as she headed towards the front of the building, where lunch was being served. Right before turning the corner, she looked back and yelled “Hey, see you at the forum tonight?”

“You bet,” Obasi said, saluting her, before slipping back into the kitchen.

Hannah smiled to herself, nodding at a few people, as she walked past the rows of picnic benches outside, and got in line for food. She peered inside the dining room, but the tables and chairs were nearly empty, with most people choosing to sit outside while the weather was nice. She helped herself to a robust salad at the salad bar, heaping on lots of vinegar marinated beans for a little extra protein boost. She then took a slice of cornbread and helped herself to a bowl of veggie chili, giving the crew a nod of thanks, before looking around to find a place to sit. She recognized the majority of the people eating, but spotted Neha, Jaz and a few of her other friends, sitting in a shady spot on the far side of the patio. She made her way over to them, stopping to say hi and confirming to multiple people that she would see them at the forum, before reaching them and sitting down heavily with a sigh.

“Whoa, tough morning?” Jaz teased. “You were up and out early this morning, Han. I didn’t even hear you leave.”

Jaz was usually up long before Neha and Hannah, so they could make it to one of the other neighbourhoods and back to Little Italy before lunch, or dinner at the latest. On rare occasions, they ended-up having to stay the night, but that was only if the communities they visited were farther away, or deliberations took longer. Jaz, who used they/them pronouns, had been nominated by the rest of the neighbourhood to be one of our ‘community ambassadors’ - someone who visited and hosted the other ambassadors (representatives or whatever other designation their community had bestowed upon them), to exchange ideas, relay information on larger, city-wide projects, and update them on the general goings-on. In fact, these ambassadors had been essential in assuring that no community went without, and that resources, ideas and convivial technologies were dispersed equitably. As a Toronto-born, trained social worker, Jaz was the perfect fit for this role, and they seemed to enjoy it immensely.

“Yah, I woke-up early thinking I was late for my old, before-times, job, and then decided to get a head-start in the garden while it was still cool out” Hannah replied. “Any news from the outside world?” she asked Jaz.

“Actually, yes,” Jaz said, “I was just telling these folks all about it” they gestured to the group sitting around the table, some of whom nodded excitedly. “I’ll be filling everyone in on the details at the forum tonight, but basically, I met with the city-wide transportation sub-committee this morning, and it looks like most of the logistics behind re-operationalizing parts

of the transit system have been worked out, and they will be ready to present options at the next city-wide forum."

Since electrical power had become unreliable, and petroleum non-existent, most modes of motorized transportation had come to a jolting halt not long into the transition. On top of that, the public transportation system in Toronto had been notoriously underfunded and mismanaged, plagued by disruptions caused by poor upkeep and disputes over working conditions and pay. As a result, there had been no fully functioning mass transportation system for years. In fact, there were only a small number of 'appropriated' vehicles, running off whatever electricity could be found, which now served as both human transportation, and for moving of supplies within and between Toronto's many neighbourhoods, and beyond. In consequence, Hannah had only been able to visit her family a few times since the transition started.

Instead, bicycles had returned to the street en masse, with a wide variety of new and interesting contraptions used for moving people and goods around the city. These cargo wielding bikes had all manner of wagons and trailers hooked onto them, with a handful of pedal-powered carts even using the existing streetcar tracks to move heavier loads around the city.

College Street at Montrose Avenue

Similarly, while most roads and highways had been repurposed for other, more pressing matters, such as collecting water and growing food, the streetcar tracks, subway lines and train tracks had purposefully been left intact in the hopes that one day they could be used again. The potential return of those forms of public transportation was great news, not just so that people could start moving themselves and things around the city more easily, but because it meant that other services might also be reinstated as a result. This was because most of the people who knew how to run the city-wide or provincial infrastructure, such as the waste treatment facilities, or the hydro electric power plants, had not been able to get to them. Both problems went hand-in-hand, and solving one would help solve the other.

“Wow that really IS great news Jaz!!!” Hannah enthused, squeezing their arm affectionately, then frowning, “Although, I can’t even imagine leaving our little 4 block radius, let alone commuting again, arrggghhhh. I guess my dream-nightmare this morning wasn’t completely random after all.”

“If that happens, it won’t be long before other municipal services come back online too, right?” Hùng said excitedly, saying out loud what everyone else was thinking. “Can you imagine having on-demand access to electricity and water again? Remember how much we used to use, without even giving it a second thought?” he snickered.

“Whoa, whoa, hold your horses,” laughed Jaz. “The transit plans haven't even been presented yet, let alone approved. And you know how much longer decision-making takes at the city level. It’ll be a long time before the rest of it follows. Although…” Jaz intoned, seeing Hùng’s disappointment, “it would be nice to have a hot shower in my own bathroom” they joked.

Like their current eating arrangements, other amenities, such as showers and electricity had been communalized… and rationed. Water was now collected from pretty much every impermeable surface imaginable, and piped to a number of key spots, one of them being the ‘bath house’ - another facetious term for where they all took their showers now, as well as the ‘laundry room’, and of course the community kitchens.

Similarly, ‘hot spots’, usually located in libraries or theaters, were places where people could go to read at night, charge a device if extra power was on offer, or take in some entertainment. These hubs, along with the community kitchens, were powered by solar panels, which had been ‘appropriated’ from the houses that had been able to afford them, and distributed equitably around the city. No one minded though, or at least most didn’t mind. Since the crash of the financial system, and the currency along with it, all property had become communally owned and managed, and slowly, the notion of ownership, which had felt so vital before, was fading away.

After a lively discussion about unlimited hot water, electricity, and all the other small luxuries they missed, they finished up their meals to make room for the next wave of eaters. Hannah grabbed a few take-away meals, before running to catch-up with Neha and Jaz.

Halfway up their street, Hannah turned to Neha and Jaz and ventured, “I don’t know if I want all those things to come back…I mean, don’t get me wrong, there are some things I do really miss, my family for one thing, and flushing toilets of course, but I’ve grown to love this way of life. You know what I mean? I feel happier now. More sure of myself and content. Like I know my place. My days are fulfilling, and I am contributing something useful, something tangible to the world. Not like my previous life as an advertiser-in-training” she tsked, bitterly. “I’m just not sure I want things to go back to the way they were - is that weird? I know things aren’t as convenient as they were before, and I won’t miss walking to and from the showers in the middle of winter, and I know we have to sometimes have to worry about food, water, and everything else, but I never felt like I belonged anywhere as much as I do here and now”

Neha nodded in agreement. “I feel you. Sometimes I miss the convenience of buying new clothes, or going on trips - remember that resort we went to in Mexico?” she laughed. “But I think what we have now is so much… richer than all of that. I don’t know, it's hard to describe…”

“But also” Jaz chimed in “it would be a shame for us to have gone through all this, to have created this community and way of life, only to go back to how things were before. And I think as we get some of those ‘conveniences’ back, the struggle will be to not slip back into that way of thinking. I think that’s why this transition was so important. We needed to physically see, to experience this other way. To know that it is possible. To see that life without everything at our fingertips wasn’t the end of the world, but just the beginning of a better one,” they paused, before continuing. “We just need to make sure that when we make decisions, we always ask ourselves the big questions: Is this necessary? Is there a better way of doing this? Does doing this harm others, or the environment?” They paused again, thinking, “but also, I don’t think we can go back to how it was. All these disasters - climate change - everything” they said, waving their arms around, “it was the planet telling us that we had gone too far. Used too much. And I think if we want to survive as a species, we can’t go back, we can only go forward. The old way wasn’t working. It didn’t work, except for a few at the top. We have to remember that”

“Well said,” Hannah laughed, as Neha 'amened’ and snapped her fingers giggling.

Back at the house, Hannah knocked on the first floor apartment door, while Jaz and Neha continued up the stairs to their apartment. After some faint shuffling, Phoi opened the door and smiled wide at Hannah, “I was hoping it was you! Joan and I were just discussing what delicious meals you might bring us today.”

Hannah followed Phoi back into the apartment, updating them both on the day's menu, news and gossip. After hanging out with them for about an hour, she quickly tidied their apartment, gathered their dirty laundry into a pile (to do with her own when she had a chance), and replaced the used composting toilet with a new one - putting the old out on the porch to be collected. Like kitchen duties, she and the others on their street had rotating shifts checking in on, and bringing food to their homebound neighbours, doing their laundry, and emptying their composting toilets. Oh, yah, and bringing them to community meetings, if possible.

Laundry worked pretty similarly to how it had before, for those who hadn't had in-house laundry that is. Every street had a laundry facility, which was either an actual laundromat, or a space converted to be used as one. The composting toilets were something Hannah, and everyone else, were still getting used to, and the 'butt' of a lot of grumblings and jokes! But it really wasn't as bad as it sounded. The buckets were simply fed to the Hungry Hippo, and washed down with a hose. Most households took care of their own buckets, but a collection crew went down the street with a wagon every couple of days to collect and redistribute buckets as needed.

That said, her composting toilet days might be numbered with the return of public water and waste facilities, Hannah mused as she headed up to her apartment. It would be interesting to see how things evolved - what changes stayed and what went back to how they had been. Hannah couldn't help worrying, but her worry actually reassured her in a way. If she, the girl from the burbs, who had grown-up with every convenience and who hadn't ever questioned the system, could understand why they couldn't go back, surely everyone else understood it as well?

Sighing, she let herself into her apartment, and joined Jaz and Neha on their back patio, which, like the street, was packed full of vegetables growing out of all manner of pots and containers. There were even a few containers on the roof, with winter squash plants draping all over the roof and hanging down over the eves. Their own little oasis, she thought. As soon as she sat down, Jaz got up and said they had to head over to the hall where the forum would be held that evening, to help set-up and update the organizers on their news. "I'll see you both later" they said as they left.

Neha and Hannah hung out on the patio for a while after Jaz left, chatting about what things they missed and what things they could do without, when suddenly, without warning, it started pouring. The weather had become unpredictable at best, so it wasn't really a surprise, although it had been full sun all morning. Laughing they ran inside, then looked at each other dripping wet, rolled their eyes, and laughed again. They quickly stripped out of their clothes, grabbed their toiletries and towels, before stepping outside again. 'Why waste the luxury of a shower at home?' they joked, even if it was a cold one.

"Whelp, good thing I didn't bother watering the garden this morning," Hannah scoffed, as they climbed back inside.

"And good thing I slept in instead of going to take a shower like I had planned to," Neha giggled.

"Everything works out I guess - I hope," Hannah corrected herself.

The rest of the afternoon passed uneventfully, and Hannah was ready to go when Jaz and Neha popped by to ask if she wanted to grab an early dinner, and then head over to the meeting.

They ate quickly in anticipation and then walked, along with everyone else, to the local school, where the forum was being held.

The school gym was packed with people sitting and standing around, chatting with their neighbours, and exchanging pleasantries with those from farther afield - which now only meant a street or two away. After about half an hour of hobnobbing, the loud hum was quickly silenced by the “Attention, Attention everyone” of the organizers.

Like most other tasks, they all took turns organizing and moderating the deliberative forums, and sitting on the sub-committees - although the sub-committees were technically voluntary. It was more socially expected that everyone participated in at least one of the sub-committees, and contributed to the running of this new, experimental decision-making apparatus. For instance, because Hannah had fallen in love with gardening, she had joined the food & agriculture sub-committee, which researched different growing methods, planned how much and of what was grown (with community input of course!), scheduled garden shifts, liaised with the kitchens, and helped plan food distribution, preservation and storage, etc., etc. They would then update the deliberative forum when needed, and present options and advice when it came time to make the larger, community-wide decisions. And yes, this way of making decisions took way more effort, and much more time. But none of them had full-time jobs anymore anyways, so helping to make decisions was their job now. Or one of them, anyways.

“Alright, everyone. Thanks for being here this evening” Shonda, one of the organizers, said. “Surprise, surprise, we’ve got a long agenda, so we best get started now, if we want to make it to our beds at a reasonable hour tonight” she smiled, to a chorus of scoffs and chuckles. “First on the agenda, is an update from the Finance Committee on their exploration of local currencies - Finance?” she looked around.

Community Deliberative Forum located at Central Toronto Academy

At that, Max and the rest of the finance people got up, and started going over the different systems of local currencies, the benefits and downfalls of each, and how each might work, ending with their advice on which system they thought would work best for now, and how it might be adapted and aligned with other community currencies, and the national currency if the Canadian dollar was ever re-introduced.

Max ended by repeating a version of what he had said to Hannah early that day. “You know, I worked on Bay Street for 20 years, so I know finance. All I can say is, these are interesting options, and all we can do is start small and see where it takes us. Trial and error, you know? To start at the community level is small stakes. If it doesn’t work, we can always circle back, adjust or try something else” he said, reassuringly.

People immediately started discussing with the people sitting around them, and Shonda had to intervene loudly to get everyone to hush again. “Alright,” Shonda yelled, “Are we ready to vote on this tonight, or do people need time to digest? Let’s vote on it. All those in favour of voting tonight, raise your hand.”

After a quick tally, it was decided that most people were ready to vote tonight.

“Ohhwee, we’re speedy tonight” Shonda said, amused. “Okayyy, all in favour of trying out the LETS model the finance committee recommended, raise your hand”

Again, from what Hannah could tell, most of the room had their hands raised.

“Alrighty, looks like you’ve got the go ahead,” Shonda said to the Finance Team, “You can update us all on your progress at the next meeting. And remember folks, this is a trail. Bring any of your concerns to the finance committee and they’ll be happy to answer any of your questions,” she nodded sternly at the committee members who were dispersing back to their seats. “Okay, moving on. The next item on the agenda is…” she proceeded, expertly guiding them through the long list of items. Some people were natural facilitators, Hannah smiled to herself.

The rest of the meeting passed in a blur, and Hannah quickly maxed out on information. Nevertheless, the meeting ended on a high, with Jaz’s update on the public transit system proposal, which received a lot of murmurs and raised hands.

“Thanks for the update Jaz,” Shonda grinned, “looks like we’ll all be having sweet dreams tonight. And you’ll be more popular than usual,” she said, looking around. “If you have questions, please direct them to Jaz. Remember, this is not a go ahead. There will be time to ask questions and register concerns before anything is brought forward to the city-wide forum. And don’t shoot the messenger.” she winked at Jaz.

“As for our own little slice of heaven, our next forum will be held on…..” she informed them of the date of the next meeting, before finally adjourning the meeting.

After chatting with a few friends and neighbours, Hannah and Neha shuffled out of the hall, trying to regroup with Jaz, who was being surrounded on all sides by a large group of people, jostling for their attention. They waved them on, mouthing 'I'll meet you at home' smiling at a particularly persistent elderly man called 'old man Jo'. We nodded and left them to do what they do best.

"You know what we forgot to vote on," Neha broke their contented silence about halfway home.

"No, what?" Hannah replied, sleepily.

"What we're going to name the new currency!!" Neha exclaimed. "Like we used to have toonies and loonies, and we already have a Hungry Hippo, so what creature is next? Beavers? Hi, how many beavers does this cost?"

Hannah gasped and squealed "OMG!" before breaking into laughter

They both belly laughed all the way home, making more and more absurd suggestions. It felt good to laugh after a long day of nagging worry about the future.

Before they went into their separate rooms, Hannah hugged Neha and thanked her for being 'the bestest friend in the world'. Whatever happened, Hannah now had an amazing community of people around her, who cared about her and who she cared about in return. Whatever happened, as long as they put the needs and the wellbeing of others and the environment first, things would work out. What was it that Jaz had said earlier?

Jaz earlier: "We just need to make sure that when we make decisions, we always ask ourselves the big questions: Is this necessary? Is there a better way of doing this? Does doing this harm others, or the environment. But also, I don't think we can go back to how it was. All these disasters - climate change - everything, it was the planet telling us that we had gone too far. Used too much. And I think if we want to survive as a species, we can't go back, we can only go forward. The old way wasn't working. It didn't work, except for a few at the top. We have to remember that"

Words to live by.

Discussion

In this portfolio, I have used a multi-method/multi-tool approach to help me envision a degrowth future. First I synthesized the degrowth movements objectives, policies and visions for the future. Next I studied works of speculative fiction, to better understand the opportunities and constraints speculative fiction provides. I then asked myself a series of questions, which required me to try to think past neoliberal capitalist ideologies, unlearn harmful practices, and reflect on wellbeing and what it means to live well beyond material wealth. These questions included: What do I need to feel fulfilled? What gives me purpose? If nothing else mattered, what would my ideal life look like? What would a perfect world look like? If all my basic needs were universally met, and I didn't need to worry about money, shelter, food, care (health, child, senior), what would I do with my time? While these questions center on the self, I reflected on whether my responses caused harm, required the exploitation of others (human or more-than-human) and questioned whether, if everyone was given the opportunity to live as I describe, would we do so within planetary boundaries. Finally, I combined these two areas of research, in order to create my own speculative fiction work.

Below I discuss some of the key degrowth features and storylines of my fictional work.

Transition

First off, I decided to locate my speculative fictions in the not too distant future, although the exact year remains unclear. This was done purposefully, in order to avoid any predictive/prescriptive timelines, and to make the piece slightly more timeless. In my narrative, humans have not managed to avert climate change, and the impacts of it are now an everyday reality. Equally, it is clear that there has been some sort of economic/societal collapse, although the details of this collapse are ambiguous (for instance, questions like: what sparked it, was it global or specific to Canada, or was it violent, remain unanswered or vague).

In truth, I debated whether or not to include any narrative of 'collapse,' or whether to portray a slow, natural progression into degrowth such as the interstitial theory of change envisions, but

in the end decided that some sort of collapse is a) more realistic, and b) aligns better with the predictions of degrowth scholars. For instance, Demaria, Kallis, and Bakker (2019) state "if a transition akin to degrowth is to take place in capitalist societies, it will likely start with a crisis." Likewise, Varvaroussis (2019) asserts that "decolonizing the imaginary is not a gradual or smooth process achieved through moral appeals for a different future. Instead, it is driven by crises and the transitional stages they create." That said, I chose not to write about the violent overthrow of capitalism, opting for a more decentralized, almost accidental transition into a degrowth society, triggered by an unspecified socio-economic collapse, and guided by degrowth aligned prefigurative practices. This works well with what Escobar refers to as a slow 'emergence', where transformation occurs through a multitude of local actions that, through their mostly unplanned interactions, create a new system without the necessity for central planning or state-led interference (Escobar, 2017).

Context

I also wanted to explore the possibility of urban centers being the epicenters of a degrowth transition for a number of important reasons. First of all, though they occupy only 3% of the total landmass, cities are home to over half of the world's population, generate 80% of the global economic output, and are responsible for two thirds of the global energy demand and 75% of CO2 emissions (Seto et al. 2017; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). This makes cities not only a major threat to sustainability, but also the key to achieving deep emissions reductions and advancing climate resiliency (IPCC, 2023; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). In actuality, cities present significant opportunities for emissions reductions and other sustainability measures, such as lowering energy consumption through the creation of compact, walkable urban areas and the electrification of transportation using low-emission energy sources (IPCC, 2023). Thus, while the extreme density of cities presents a major challenge to degrowth, I also believe the convergence of diverse communities represents an opportunity for degrowth to experiment and collaborate.

Secondly, cities tend to be the physical manifestations of capitalist ideology. They are the outcome of scientific and technological innovation, the embodiment of economic growth, and the 'concrete' representation of man's conquering of nature (Glaeser et al., 1992; Henderson, 2010; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). For example, while most of the imagery surrounding 'sustainability' evokes pastoral scenes, or pristine, uninhabited nature, cities are often thought of as "growth machines" (Molotch, 1976) or "growth engines" (Jones et al., 2020). As such, the cultural narrative of cities poses a major challenge for degrowth in overcoming capitalist realism and presenting a viable alternative, with speculative fiction offering a great way to re-envision them.

Thirdly, there is a gap in degrowth scholarship around urban sustainability, urban planning, urban economics, and the role cities can play in social movements, organizing and prefigurative practices. For instance, in their 2023 article *Urbanizing degrowth: Five steps towards a Radical Spatial Degrowth Agenda for planning in the face of climate emergency*, Kaika et al., urge degrowth scholars to engage with "theories and debates around urban planning, socio-spatial policies, spatial activism, urban imaginaries, and urban political ecology," and that critical urban studies can "foster pathways for 'spatializing', 'operationalizing', 'scaling-up' and even 'institutionalizing' degrowth debates that currently remain focused mainly on macro-economic level policies or on documenting localised small-scale practices." Similarly, in their 2023 article *Urban Degrowth Economics: Making Cities Better Places for Living, Working, and Playing,* Khmara and Kronenberg state that, while cities appear in the degrowth literature as a places for experimentation, degrowth lacks comprehensive proposals for urban planning and urban economics (Alexander & Gleeson, 2018; Cattaneo & Gavaldà, 2010; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2020; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). As a result, I wanted to further explore how the degrowth movements objectives and policies might fit in an urban context.

And the final reason I chose to locate my short story in an urban location, is because I am using a mix of place-based and lived-experience methods to explore what a degrowth future might look like in my own geographical and cultural context. As a result, it was important for me to

use the city I grew-up in and still call home, as the backdrop to my speculative fiction. I am a Torontonian born and raised, having spent my formative years in the east-end, moving to and from 3 other neighbourhoods after returning from my undergrad and living abroad a few times, before settling in my current apartment in Little Italy about 8 years ago. While I love Little Italy for many reasons, like my story's protagonist prior to the collapse, I wouldn't say I have experienced any great sense of community living here, and certainly not in the way I've described in my story post-collapse. Meanwhile, from a degrowth lens, though Little Italy has some redeeming features (such as: walkability, bike lanes, and many public transit options; mixed-use and multi-family buildings; a fairly diverse and mixed-income demographic; a decent tree canopy and assortment of green areas; and a good number of independently owned local businesses) it also leaves a lot to be desired, especially in terms of community cohesion and environmental sustainability.

Food & Agriculture

In addition, given my background in urban agriculture/food security, I include a lot of details on food production, both because of the importance of food to human survival, but also because the liberation of food production plays an important role in disrupting capitalist narratives of scarcity. For example, in *Nowtopias* Chris Carlsson explores the potential of urban agriculture as an alternative to our reliance on industrial agribusiness, referring to community gardens as "non-commercial public spaces" and "liberated zones" (Carlsson, 2008 [pp 93]). Similarly, the Zapatista movement, although for the most part rural, resisted growth-driven projects and achieved self-sufficiency, not by expanding the amount of land under cultivation, but by converting ranches and plantations into subsistence farms, thereby maintaining their autonomy (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Demaria et al., 2019). Accordingly, urban agriculture provides a useful tool to demonstrate that, not only can cities be places for sustainability to flourish, but that, along with all other things under capitalism, it has never been a question of scarcity, but one of distribution.

Furthermore, I've always been curious about how much food can actually be grown within city limits. For instance, if the infrastructure used to support car-culture, such as highways and parking lots, and the space taken-up by private property, such as yards, vacant lots and rooftops, all became a commons and replaced with community-shared agriculture projects, how much food could cities produce? One historical example, are the several million Victory Gardens that were planted across North America during both the First and Second World Wars. These gardens were mainly planted in urban yards or vacant lots, and resulted in $520 million worth of fresh vegetables grown in 1918 alone (Carlsson, 2008).

Meanwhile, though there have been numerous studies attempting to estimate the amount of food different cities could produce, or try to calculate the amount of food already being produced within city limits, or from their surrounding foodsheds (think watersheds but for food production), these figures vary widely. For instance, in 2012, MacRae et al., estimated that Toronto could produce 10% of its own food within city limits, while in 2005, Howe et al., cited a study that showed that Shanghai and Beijing already grow enough vegetables to be self-sufficient. So, while the amount of food that a city is able produce remains unclear, I found the exploration of urban food production to be an interesting exercise in rethinking urban spaces and infrastructure outside of a capitalist, commodified understanding of them.

Housing

Another important aspect of thinking about urban areas from a degrowth perspective, is in regards to housing. Having grown-up in a city that is in a perpetual housing crisis, with a predicted 3.1 million people set to relocate to the GTA next 23 years, out of control urban sprawl sealing prime agricultural land, and sky-rocketing house prices (and interest rates to boot), the importance of affordable housing is something I have experienced first hand (Province of Ontario, 2024). And again, like all things under capitalism, it seems to come down to unequal distribution.

Unlike conventional economics, degrowth views housing as a public good not as a commodity, emphasizing the need for decent and affordable housing with minimal environmental impact (Barlow et al., 2022; Savini et al., 2022). Therefore, rather then look at housing and other built infrastructure as private property, I tried to think of all the built infrastructure in my neighbourhood as a commons held as a community land trust, and collectively owned and managed by the people, for the people. Consequently, existing built infrastructure could be distributed based on need.

One degrowth proposal I found especially interesting, which tries to reduce the unsustainable use of space, is the idea that each person could be issued a maximum quota of floor space per capita (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). A tax could then be imposed on those occupying spaces larger than their assigned quota, with revenues used to finance the refurbishment and renovation of the existing housing stock, subsidize affordable housing, and provide local governments with general tax revenues (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). Rather than build new stock, existing stock could be renovated to meet the changing needs of the community – perhaps by converting single-family homes into multi-family or co-housing arrangements, or by improving efficiency, and reducing energy/resource use over time. For instance, one study estimated that eco-refurbishments in Spain could reduce energy demand by up to 80% and hot water energy demand by 60% by 2050 (Burgos & Sweatman, 2011; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

Infrastructure

In a similar vein, I also focus a lot of attention on transportation infrastructure, and the move from car-dominated culture to a human-scaled one. From a degrowth perspective, cars are one of the most unsustainable aspects of urban life. Motorized vehicles not only consume vast amounts of energy and are the source of significant levels of emissions and other pollutants, but they require substantial energy, water, and raw materials to manufacture, a process which itself generates considerable waste (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). Green growth proposes switching from fossil fuel powered cars, to electric ones. But, while electric vehicles may

improve the efficiency and emissions (depending on the source of electricity used), their manufacturing process is similar, while the batteries used to power them require lithium and other minerals, the cost of which I touched on in Chapter 2 (Alexander & Gleeson, 2018). Plus, as Braess's paradox illustrates, adding more roads or lanes to highways often increases traffic and congestion, as it incentivizes more people to drive (Duranton & Turner, 2011; Small & Verhoef, 2007; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

Degrowth proposes to reduce dependency on cars for personal transportation in two ways. First, by increasing and improving public transportation, walking and cycling infrastructure, and encouraging car/bike sharing and other community-run and operated transportation options (Wells, 2018). And secondly, through better urban/job planning, such as polycentricity (a pluriversal approach to governance), mixed-use neighbourhoods, shared-work spaces, and moving towards remote work where possible (Alexander & Gleeson, 2018; Brossmann & Islar, 2020; Kuzmanic, 2017; Lehtinen, 2018; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). Policy incentives could include subsidies for public transport, bikes and shared-vehicles, while disincentives could include parking fees, fuel and pollution taxes, road tolls and congestion charges, along with more radical ideas, such as regulated energy consumption caps per capita, which could be traded similarly to carbon emissions caps and incrementally decreased (Barlow et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

In my short story, the main form of local transportation becomes bicycles, with a plethora of trailers and wagons used for transporting people and cargo within and between neighbourhoods. For longer journeys, shared electric vehicles, which have been commandeered, are used in the absence of personally owned vehicles or a functioning public transportation system. Later, there is talk of the public transit system being re-established, but under collective public ownership. The re-introduction of waste treatment, water purification, electricity and other urban infrastructure services, is also proposed, but again, under collective, public ownership. Unfortunately, I did not have the scope to delve deeper into different models

for collectively owned public utilities, but again, this is an aspect of degrowth strategies in practice that would be great to explore in a future fictional work.

Governance & Finance

One of the more challenging degrowth objectives I attempted to portray in my speculative fiction, is the (re)democratization of the political system, along with the democratization of the economic/financial system. I found both of these aspects daunting, in terms of envisioning what that would be like (having limited experience in other forms of citizen-led democratic processes, and having never experienced any sort of economic democracy, besides 'voting with my dollar'), and to write about both in a clear, concise and engaging way. That said, transitioning to a sustainable degrowth society requires moving away from hierarchical, monopolistic, centralized capitalist systems, towards self-organized, participatory, and horizontal ones, so it was important to address both, however briefly (Kossoff, 2015; Escobar, 2017).

One way degrowth proposes to reshape various levels of governance is by encouraging decentralized and participatory decision-making processes, through local self-governance, community-based resource management, and horizontal power structures that prioritize direct democracy (Demaria et al., 2019). Communities could establish citizen councils that work with a range of experts to help guide and inform the decision-making process (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2015; Gough, 2017; Wells et al., 2021). In these types of systems, issues would be resolved through compromise and consensus, both making politics accessible to everyone and minimizing the divisiveness often found in party politics (Swyngedouw, 2010). Degrowth also promotes the creation of networks among different localities to foster a global sense of connection and solidarity, thereby forming a cohesive movement capable of collaboratively addressing broader systemic challenges (Escobar, 2017; Demaria et al., 2019). The outcome of increasingly networked participatory decision-making, both politically and economically, is the creation of more resilient systems and a redefinition of work, interpersonal relationships, and well-being (Escobar, 2017).

In my speculative fiction, I took a complete bottom-up, informal approach to the decision-making process. Deliberative forums, or equivalents, are formed in each community, where everyone has a chance, even an obligation, to participate and help make decisions on things that affect the community. The organizers and moderators of the forum alternate between community members, and there are voluntary sub-committees in place to advise on strategy, administrate certain sectors (such as finance and food production), and explore certain issues in more detail. The governance structure is fluid, in that there are very few set rules, and the process of making decisions (and introducing financial democracy) is evolving. Indeed, there is a term in degrowth literature, "nomadic utopianism" (Asara, 2022), which is used to describe a system of non-hierarchical structures which embrace diversity, draw from a pluriverse understand of the world(s), and is constantly evolving and adapting. I would liken the deliberative forum portrayed in my fiction as having a similar structure/objective. Similarly, though I tried to be clear about the pitfalls of local self-governance, mainly that it takes a lot longer, I also emphasized the sense of empowerment and engagement that comes from being included in the decision-making process.

Meanwhile, although money is already technically a public good (in that the government creates and guarantees its value), in the current system, control over monetary flows is largely private (Aigner et al., 2022). In response, degrowth aims to democratize how money is created and how public money is spent (Aigner et al., 2022). This could include the use of community currencies, community banking (such as building societies and credit unions), more participatory forms of governance, cooperatives and social enterprises, and alternative work and employment practices (Barlow et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). While I touched on the use of local currencies, I didn't go much further into describing the democratization of finance, mostly because the complexity was outside of the scope of the story. That said, the role of money, financial democracy, and just economics are topics that I would like to (and think are important) to explore further.

Economy/Work

As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of my Synthesis Paper, neoliberal capitalism systems attempt to commodify everything, while degrowth hopes to decommodify everyday life by focusing the attention away from markets and growth. One way to do this is by democratizing decision-making, especially economic democratization, as described above. Another way to decommodify society is by 'commoning' goods and services. Rather then have profit-driven actors, such as corporations and centralized governments control resources, commoning puts the stewardship and management of those resources in the hands of those that use them (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). Thus, by turning resources, such as land, housing, and even the internet, into a commons, degrowth hopes to redistribute resources more equitably and democratically.

Another benefit of commoning is that it tends to re-localize the economy, since more local control over production and consumption usually entails shorter supply chains (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). By commoning resources and employing circular strategies, such as eliminating waste, creating shared infrastructure, developing online marketplaces for second-hand items, providing repair services to extend product life cycles, collaborating with businesses to stop planned obsolescence (and reverse logistics), degrowth hopes to use resources more sparingly and efficiently (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a; Gardner, 2024). As a result, degrowth hopes to "transition from a market economy to an economy with markets" (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

Another way to decommodify everyday life is to reimagine work outside of wage labour. Degrowth outlines a number of strategies to support the transition away from commodified labour, including moving towards a shorter work week, universal basic income, job-sharing, and minimum and maximum wages (Meissner, 2021; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Orsagh, 2024). Please refer to the **Glossary of Terms** for a more complete list. Degrowth also proposes the use of alternative societal indicators, moving from Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which only measures a country's spending, to more inclusive and diverse indicators, such as wellbeing, happiness, and ecological footprint and biocapacity (Hickel, 2018; Kallis et al., 2015; Robinson,

2024). By placing the emphasis on societal and environmental health then that of economic output, degrowth hopes to recenter societal values, thereby changing the narrative.

In my short speculative story, I not only make goods and services, such as housing and food production, into common resources, but have actively tried to include the "pooling of common resources" (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). For instance, in my degrowth vision of Little Italy, the community's food supply is not only pooled in that the local community collectively manages the land in which food is grown, but the food harvested from the commons is also shared between community members via the community kitchens. I applied the same logic to housing and work, with residents sharing both the management and the output of these sectors. Likewise, in my story, the national currency has collapsed, and the introduction of a local currency is still being discussed at the community level. The lack of currency means that goods and services are instantly decommodified, especially when pooled. Furthermore, the lack of currency means that wage labour is not possible, so that people in the community are voluntarily working for the greater good, not financial reward - perhaps the simplest way to decommodify labour.

Challenges & Limitations

Through the writing of this portfolio, I hoped to inspire myself to break free of capitalist realist rhetoric and start to live by the change I want to see. After all, as the protagonist in *The Dispossessed* exclaims, "You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution." (Le Guin, 1974). Nevertheless, while on the whole, I found the writing of speculative fiction and the creation of speculative art to be great tools for imagining an alternative degrowth future, there were also a few challenges and limitations.

The first limitation I encountered was in the format itself. There were many aspects of a degrowth transition that I was not able to address in full (or sometimes any) detail, given the length of my written work. My goal was to write a *short* speculative story portraying a degrowth future, but what I didn't anticipate is the amount of time and space world-building,

character-building and dialogue takes-up in the telling of a story. As a result, I wasn't able to go very deeply into many aspects of degrowth, including the role of technology, healthcare (or any care), education, regional or international trade, or any higher levels of governance beyond the community, along with many other aspects of the general functioning of society. Nor was I able to provide a glimpse into what a degrowth or post-growth future might look like in the Global South. Yet, all of these things are crucial for day-to-day living and imagining a degrowth future, and are therefore vital aspects to explore and portray.

On a similar note, I wasn't able to properly illustrate what decolonization or post-colonization would look-like in Little Italy, or Tkaronto as the area with which Toronto now sits was once called. Partly, this was due to the format, which again, didn't give me the space to explore the intricacies of what decolonization in this specific community, or city, might look like. But also, as mentioned in Chapter 4 of my Synthesis Paper, there is a gap in the degrowth literature in regards to exploring how decolonization fits in settler-colonial countries in the Global North. This is a huge limitation, on both degrowth scholarship's part, and for validity of my own speculative work.

Likewise, in Chapter 7 of my Synthesis Paper, I discuss the importance of including diverse voices, not only in the narratives of speculative fiction, but in the writing of speculative fiction. Again, as a privileged white settler, it's not my place to speak on behalf of, or from the perspective of marginalized peoples. Instead, I tried to include a broad representation of characters from different communities and backgrounds, and portray historically marginalized populations as integral and empowered leaders of the community. Furthermore, I tried to highlight the need for those in the Global North to drastically reduce their material footprints, by minimizing international trade, especially commodities extracted from low-income countries to the Global North, and massively reducing the amount of energy consumed and waste produced. In contrast, I attempted to portray alternative degrowth objectives, such as wellbeing, sharing, voluntary simplicity, autonomy, conviviality, care, commoning, and the idea that 'small is beautiful.'

Another thing I personally found extremely challenging was the introduction of believable characters and the writing of convincing dialogue. I am not a writer by trade, let alone a fiction writer. In fact, I had never actually written fiction before, and was understandably intimidated by the process. Yet, despite my lack of experience, I found the world-building aspect of writing speculative fiction extremely immersive and cathartic. While I had an outline of aspects of a degrowth future I wanted to touch on, I found that describing the collapse, the community, and the changes that had and were happening, flowed easily and seamlessly from my subconscious. So much so that the first few attempts at writing my short story were purely exercises in world-building, with no characters or dialogue to speak of. Consequently, for the story that appears in this portfolio, I had to force the establishment of a protagonist, by starting the story with an introduction to that protagonist. From there, it took awhile, and a lot of intentional reading of dialogue in the speculative fiction novels I was reading, to get the hang of writing natural-sounding conversations between characters. Even still, I'm not sure I succeeded in creating a believable plot or storyline, but I hope that I still managed to capture a few important aspects of degrowth in action.

As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, I am not completely convinced that my lack of overthrow, or avoidance of violence and chaos through the societal collapse, and the resulting transition to a degrowth way of life, is very realistic. However, as mentioned in Chapter 6 and 7 of my Synthesis Paper, the portrayal of climate change as inevitable, and transitions as violent, often leads to immobilizing emotions and negative outcomes. For that reason, I tried to portray the transition as a gradual reshaping of society's narrative, through the slow emergence of new social practices. This doesn't mean that degrowth proponents should simply wait for a collapse to happen, and then come to the rescue once on the other side. Preferably, degrowth needs to actively implement the transition strategies outlined in Chapter 4 now, in order to establish a working framework of ideas and practices. This proactive approach aims to ensure that, rather than resulting in chaos and violence, when a crisis does happen (big or small), degrowth

practices are already in place to help minimize the consequences. This is what I tried to portray in my speculative fiction.

Finally, I struggled with feeling that the entire work was too idealistic or simplistic, given the complexity of these issues, and everyday life in this day and age. I had to keep reminding myself that, if utopias and dystopias are mental constructs that guide our thoughts and behaviors in the present, tangible depictions of utopia, even if flawed or improbable, have the ability to emotionally and physically engage us with the 'politics of the possible' (Kallis, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2018). Therefore, utopias should serve as a reminder to us that when we consider the future, we should focus not just on what is predictable, possible, or probable, but on what is desirable (Garforth, 2021).

It is also important to note that utopia is not a fixed point in the future, but an ongoing process and struggle (Le Guin, 1989; Kallis & March, 2015). Therefore, rather then present a fixed destination, degrowth utopias should be approached from a process-oriented perspective, which is exactly what I tried to do (Kallis & March, 2015). My short story presents one day in the life of a degrowth future. Not a fully formed and functioning degrowth future, but a midpoint in the evolution from a destructive, hegemonic system, to a decentralized, pluriversal one. As such, instead of portraying a pragmatic future, I intentionally focused on modeling socially and ecologically responsible behavior, practical creativity, and human capacity for frugality and reform (Mackenthun, 2021).

Conclusion: Reflections on the Journey

The portrayal of utopias has the power to liberate us from historical determinism by helping us imagine something better (Jameson, 1975; Kallis & March, 2015). Therefore, although degrowth supporters have crafted a nuanced critique of neoliberal capitalism, outlining why the current political-economic system is faltering, they must also present a compelling utopian vision of what that alternative society could look like (Barlow, 2022). This includes describing a pluriverse of degrowth futures, alternative strategies on how to get there, and ultimately new ways of existence that transcend current socio-ecological boundaries (Skrimshire, 2010; Yusoff & Gabrys, 2011; Milkoreit, 2017; Streeby, 2018; Bettini, 2019). Speculative fiction is one such communication tool, which has thus far, been under-utilized by degrowth scholars, advocates and activists. Through decolonial world-building, 'imaginactivism' and the introduction of experimental alternatives, speculative fiction can help translate degrowth objectives and proposals, into relatable geographical and context specific storylines.

In this research portfolio, I utilized a blend of methods to answer the question: Can tools such as speculative fiction and speculative design help me imagine and explore what a degrowth future might look like in my community? Follow-up questions included: Could speculative fiction and speculative design help readers understand heterodox theories such as degrowth? Can these tools start to dissolve the hold capitalist realism has on our imaginations? And finally, do these tools have the potential to lead to personal, or even a larger-scale, transformations? First I provided an overview of why neoliberal capitalism doesn't work, but why, despite not working, ideologically-speaking capitalism remains dominant. I then synthesized the degrowth movements objectives and challenges, explored alternative/non-Western perspectives, and weighed the opportunities and pitfalls of using speculative fiction as a wider communication tool. My synthesis paper also provides the rationale for my research-based portfolio, the frameworks (academic and otherwise) used to guide my research, as well as some more general contextual information.

Next, I used a narrative/storytelling approach, in this case the process of writing speculative fiction, as a thought experiment in unlearning capitalist ideologies, allowing me to reimagine market/state systems through a degrowth lens. After all, stories and narratives form the basis for many qualitative methodologies, including ethnography, narrative inquiry, self-study, auto-ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Lewis & Hildebrandt, 2019). Again, the purpose of this exercise was not necessarily the output itself, but the *process* of imagining what a degrowth future could look like. I see this portion of the portfolio as a thought-experiment that could potentially be reproduced by others as a tool for unlearning and reimagining - story as theory. My written work is also complimented by a handful of graphic design illustrations, which further bring my ideas to light.

Overall, I found this to be an immersive and rewarding experience. The process of writing speculative fiction really did allow me to imagine degrowth as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism, and it was exciting to explore what degrowth could look like in my own geographical/cultural context. Even though degrowth originates in Europe, which has a similar cultural backdrop as so-called Canada, it really did make a difference imagining my own neighbourhood transformed, and thinking through what day-to-day life could look like. As a result, though it's unclear what the long-term the effects of this exercise might be and what action it may inspire, I highly recommend the writing of speculative fiction, as both a place to experiment with and solidify degrowth policies in different contexts and a way to inspire alternative transition strategies, but also as communication tool with which to chip away at the larger dominant narrative and introduce the wider public to a degrowth understanding. Perhaps reframing my speculative fiction as an output - as a written work to be consumed by others - and/or encouraging others to write their own speculative fictions, adding to a larger critical utopian/degrowth sub-genre of speculative fiction, would have a greater and longer-term impact? This question is something I hope to, and encourage others to, explore further.

Glossary of Terms

Alternative Indicators:

As described in Chapter 3, individual wealth does not correlate with happiness. Likewise, it is now widely acknowledged that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) does not necessarily equate to human welfare or well-being and can even result in harmful practices (Fanning & O'Neill, 2019; Helliwell et al., 2022; Kaika et al., 2023). Instead of continuing to use Gross Domestic Product as the sole measure of a country's wealth, degrowth proponents advocate for alternative metrics that account for environmental sustainability, social equality, and overall well-being (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Fortunately, the debate around Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not new, and there are already numerous alternative metrics available, such as happiness (World Happiness Report), well-being (OECD Better Life Index), environmental impact (Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity), and human development (Human Development Index). Degrowth scholars also highlight the significance of cultural diversity for well-being and endorse policies that preserve and promote various cultural practices, languages, and traditions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

See also: Pluriverse, Finance, Care, Education, Earth Overshoot

Autonomy:

Autonomy is a key principle in degrowth. Within degrowth, autonomy means maximizing political rights, authority, and agency for decision-making and action based on localized decision-making and citizen-led decision-making, while respecting social and ecological values and limits (Nelson, 2024). This entails living as much as possible outside the influence of the state and capital, by developing and relying on non-liberal, non-state, and non-capitalist forms of existence, action, and knowledges (Escobar, 2017). This can include practices such as co-governing, horizontal and consensus decision-making techniques, and emphasizing collaborative power dynamics (Nelson, 2024). In this way, autonomy seeks to establish new ways of being.

See also: Decolonization, Sufficiency, Justice, Governance, Commons, Localization, Work, Transportation/Trade

Care:

Influenced by feminist scholarship, care is another central concept within degrowth. Inspired by Tronto's (1993) dimensions of care ('caring about,' 'care-giving,' 'care-receiving,' 'taking care of,' and 'caring with'), care in the degrowth context extends beyond 'care work' or the 'care sector,' to encompasses all activities and relationships within a holistic care economy (Tronto, 1993; Pungas, 2020; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019, Nelson, 2024). For example, care work could include self-provisioning through growing and harvesting, educating, and even crafting (Nelson, 2024).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Universal healthcare, including mental health services
- Massive reduction in medical waste
- End to pharmaceutical patents
- Free medications
- Nutritious food
- Free assisted living communities
- Free childcare services
- Free menstrual and birth control products

See also: Work, Reciprocity, Justice, Commodification, Technology/Science, Education, Commoning, Community,

Circular Economy:

In nature, there is no such thing as waste. One organism's waste, is another's food. Circular economies aim to replicate natural ecosystems by prioritizing recycling, reusing, and waste reduction. Goods produced in a circular economy should be designed to be durable, repairable, and long-lasting, in order to minimize waste and decrease overall consumption (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Although certain elements of circular economies have been adopted by capitalist green growth, a degrowth perspective on circular economies would promote alternative ownership models, convivial technology, no planned obsolescence, and other ideas that are in line with and support degrowth (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- High fees for garbage disposal
- Ban on single-use items
- Emphasis on reusable, recyclable or compostable items
- No planned obsolescence. All items should be repairable
- Mandatory reverse logistics or reverse supply-chain
- Community recycling and composting facilities (no individual collection)
- Composting toilets to replace flush toilets
- Grey water recycling systems
- Alternative ownership models such as product-service systems
- Emphasis on reusing and/or recycling what already exists. E.g. repair cafes, upcycling resources such as minerals, building supplies, etc, garbage dump mining

See also: Economy, Dematerialization, Voluntary Simplicity, Sufficiency, Energy, Finance,

Collectivity:

Collectives, and collectivity, encompass various activities that are inclusive in nature. They could include ecologically-oriented affordable housing models such as joint households, co-housing, self-managed housing cooperatives, or political squats, and localizing food production through organic community gardening and farming, community-supported agriculture, and food cooperatives (Nelson, 2024). Other examples include maker labs, bike-making, hiring, and repairing collectives, which could enhance practitioners' skills while bolstering localized economies (Nelson, 2024).

See also: Commoning, Cooperatives, Autonomy, Conviviality, Horizontalism, Governance,

Conviviality:

Conviviality is another key concept within degrowth scholarship. The term is derived from the Latin '*convivere*' (living together), which traditionally refers to amicable relationships and simple, leisurely and pleasurable activities of daily life, such as lengthy communal meals (Nelson, 2024). Within degrowth scholarship, conviviality not only refers to relation(ship)s and activities, but also to tools and technology. The concept of 'convivial tools' was developed by Ivan Illich in his book, *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), and 'convivial technology' by Andrea Vetter in 2018 (Illich, 1973; Nelson, 2024; Vetter, 2018). Industrial tools often create what Illich refers to as a "radical monopoly," where complex machines restrict an individual's autonomy by making them dependent on industrially produced commodities and services, limiting their ability to produce, exchange, or share goods independently (Deriu, 2015). This dependency leads to a phenomenon Illich describes as the "modernization of poverty" (Illich, 1973).

Unlike traditional tools controlled by experts or technocrats, convivial tools are developed by and for their users, making them both ecologically efficient and appropriate for their geographical and cultural contexts (Nelson, 2024). Convivial tools and technologies should be user-friendly, easy to create and repair, and shared by everyone (Deriu, 2022). Additionally, while industrial production is often standardized, convivial production encourages personal creativity and collaborative innovation, shifting from a productivity and scarcity based economy to a convivial, frugal abundant 'gift' or wellbeing economy (Deriu, 2022). Examples of convivial tools include: bicycle, sewing machines, telephones and radios (Illich, 1973; Deriu, 2022). Computers and the internet, on the other hand, could be considered both convivial and non-convivial based on their use (Deriu, 2022)

Specific actions include (taken from Nelson, 2024):

- Repairing, altering, reusing materials, swapping and donating clothes.
- Renovating old buildings or self-building in collective ways using salvaged materials and simple, human-powered tools.
- Self-provisioning food, and striving to eat nutritious, locally organically grown food.

See also: Technology/Science, Collectivity, Commoning, Cooperatives, Circular Economy, Work, Dematerialization, Frugal Abundance,

Commoning:

The commons, or 'commoning,' is another central concept within degrowth. The commons is generally understood in two main ways: as a governance and resource-management model, and as a collection of social practices across nearly all areas of human activity (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). In contrast to private ownership, markets and state governance, a commons system of governance emphasizes collective management, stewardship and utilization of land and other life-sustaining resources (Nelson, 2024). As a collection of social practices, the commons is better understood by using it as a verb: 'commoning' (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). This is because the commons are not just material or intangible collective resources, but processes of shared stewardship (Helfrich & Bollier, 2022). Commoning refers to things that a community, network or humanity as a whole, collectively manage, including natural gifts and collectively produced resources such as knowledge, cultural techniques, urban spaces and landscapes (Helfrich & Bollier, 2022). Commoning can also contribute to the dematerialization of production and consumption by re-localizing production, intensifying use through co-use and collaboration, and fostering 'prosumption,' where production and consumption are combined into a single process (Helfrich & Bollier, 2022).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

Locally:

- Giveaway shops; repair cafes; rent-for-free store; gift shop;
- community gardens and community supported agriculture (CSA);
- tool libraries ;
- open workshops;
- citizen self-help groups ;
- barter clubs ;
- farmers markets;
- Cooperatives;
- community land trusts;
- volunteer community working bees;
- bike kitchens

Regionally:

- Conservation corridors;
- Community land trusts;
- Regional CSA

Globally:

- Cloud-based organisational management systems (Sky Trust);
- Tech Commons
- Creative Commons

See also: Collectivity, Cooperatives, Community, Horizontalism, Governance, Work, Commodification, Dematerialization

Community/Communalism:

Individuals exist in their relationships to others (Escobar, 2017). As such, community is built through networks of individuals connected by shared identities, beliefs, backgrounds, values, etc (Asara, 2022). Degrowth aims to support community-based initiatives that emphasize collaboration, sharing, and self-sufficiency, thereby reducing the reliance on external consumption-driven systems (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). By encouraging activities that do not require high levels of individual consumption, and by decommodifying labour, for example, by advocating for shorter working hours, degrowth hopes to challenge the conventional notion that success and happiness is solely linked to productivity and consumption (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

See also: Collectivity, Conviviality, Commoning, Work, Care, Localization, Energy,

Commodification:

Commodification is the process of transforming social products, socio-ecological services, and relationships into commodities that hold monetary value (Kallis et al, 2015). Historically, commodification has been part and parcel of common property enclosures (Gómez-Baggethun, 2015). Once privatized, goods and services become commodities, which are traded on the market. Capitalist economies, driven by market competition, must continually expand commodification (commodity frontiers) into new social and ecological domains in order to remain profitable (Gómez-Baggethun, 2015; Conde & Walter, 2015). This leads to colonization, unequal exchange and issues of environmental and social justice. In this fashion, a society founded on commodification is capitalist, while a society rooted in a commons, or centered on social wealth, would be communalist (or communist) (Robinson, 2024).

Mainstream economics has attempted to green wash the commodification of nature, by applying monetary valuation to ecosystem services and market incentives through biodiversity offsets and carbon trading schemes (Gómez-Baggethun, 2015). Degrowth critiques both economic growth and the spread of market values into social and ecological realms. It calls for the de-commodification of social and human-nature relations and opposes market-based environmental solutions (Gómez-Baggethun, 2015). Alternatively, degrowth calls for the de-commodification of social relations, natural resources and ecosystem services, by reclaiming the commons and creating non-profit seeking models of production and consumption, such as cooperatives (Gómez-Baggethun 2015; Meissner, 2021)

See also: Decolonization, Dematerialization, Work, Finance, Commoning, Cooperatives,

Cooperatives:

The term ‘co-operative’ (or ‘co-op’ for short) usually describes a jointly owned, democratically controlled, autonomous organizational model, where members voluntarily unite to address their common economic, social, and cultural needs (Birchall, 1997; Johanisova et al., 2015). There are four main types of cooperatives: producer or worker co-ops, consumer coops, credit co-ops or credit unions, and farmers’ buying and selling co-ops (Johanisova et al., 2015). The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) lists seven principles for co-operatives: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control (the one-member-one-vote principle; members’ economic participation; autonomy and independence; commitment to education; co-operation among co-operatives; concern for the sustainable development of their communities (Birchall, 1997: 64–71; Johanisova et al., 2015). Compared to the mainstream for-profit enterprise model, which is based on external shareholder ownership, co-operative enterprise model is better suited to a degrowth economy for several reasons (Johanisova & Wolf, 2012):

- Share Ownership Rules: Co-operative shares are usually non-transferable and can only be redeemed at their original value. This discourages growth for its own sake, as share value does not increase with the growth of the co-op, fostering a long-term and place-based membership that prioritizes community and environmental values (Johanisova et al., 2015).
- Governance Structure: The democratic governance of co-operatives includes a wider range of stakeholders in decision-making, reducing the distance between owners, shareholders, workers, and consumers, and promoting a mutual-aid needs-satisfying logic (Johanisova et al., 2015).
- Profit Accumulation: Co-operatives are not bound by the legal obligation to maximize returns to shareholders, allowing them to prioritize long-term organizational sustainability, job protection, and environmental concerns. This principle ensures that financial assets are more equitably distributed among members, satisfying real needs versus cumulative needs (Johanisova et al., 2015).

See also: Commons, Community, Collectivity, Work, Finance,

Decolonization:

Within degrowth, decolonization has two meanings. One gives people and countries the right to autonomy, and the right to organize their resources and citizens - rather than structuring themselves to support the ‘Imperial Mode of Living’ of high-income countries (Hickel et al., 2021). The other pertains to the process of liberating oneself from the neoliberal capitalist narrative, or ‘Decolonizing the Imaginary,’ which leads to economies that harm both human and the more-than-human, by continuously producing an ever-increasing array of commodities driven by interests and profits (Nelson, 2024).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Crackdown on tax havens and tax flight, and implement anti-corruption policies
- Cancel odious debt and debt moratoriums
- Direct transfers and reparations for ecological debt (including biopiracy, carbon, corporate and waste debt)
- End unequal ecological exchange
- Reparations
- Land reform
- Restore stolen land to its Indigenous caretakers in reconciliation

See also: Imperial Mode of Living, Inequality, Dematerialization, Decoupling, Justice,

Decoupling:

Resource decoupling aims to reduce resource use per unit of economic activity, measured by GDP (Lorek, 2015). There are two categories of decoupling: relative decoupling, which occurs when resource use grows at a slower rate than GDP, and absolute decoupling, when the economy grows while resource use remains stable or decreases (Lorek, 2015). For example, in degrowth, dematerialization would be a form of absolute decoupling, in that it requires an absolute reduction in material and carbon use (Lorek, 2015). Strategies for achieving absolute decoupling include developing new technologies and materials, implementing resource productivity standards in construction, increasing the durability and recycling of goods, and promoting resource-extensive lifestyles (Lorek, 2015). Advocates also propose internalizing environmental costs through market-based instruments such as energy or raw material taxes.

Some countries, like Germany and the US, claim to have achieved absolute decoupling through resource efficiency (Lorek, 2015). Yet, material and carbon consumption in these countries continues to rise. This is because the most intensive aspects of production take place abroad, which are then imported. In this sense, these countries are not decoupling, but exporting their material footprint elsewhere, raising issues of colonization, unequal exchange and environmental and social justice (Peters et al, 2011; Lorek, 2015). In actuality, there is no empirical evidence demonstrating that economic growth has decoupled from environmental pressures at a scale sufficient to address environmental breakdown, or that such decoupling will occur in the future (Parrique et al. 2019 [pp 3]; Meissner, 2021).

See also: Dematerialization, Energy, Technology, Earth Overshoot,

Deliberative Forums/Citizen Assemblies:

Deliberative forums, such as citizen juries and assemblies, increase citizen involvement in the democratic decision-making process (Wells et al, 2021). It is contended that the deliberative aspect of these processes fosters an environment where diverse perspectives are heard and consensus is sought, helping participants move beyond the polarized nature of contemporary politics (Dryzek, 2005; Dryzek et al., 2019; Wells et al., 2021).

See also: Governance, Horizontalism, Autonomy, Commoning, Cooperatives

Dematerialization:

Dematerialization refers to the process of reducing the total amount of physical materials and resources used to produce goods and services in an economy. It involves a shift towards less resource-intensive production and consumption patterns, aiming to achieve the same or higher levels of utility, economic output, or social well-being with fewer materials and lower environmental impact.

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Introduce caps on the extraction of natural resources to limit overall consumption and encourage sustainable practices.
- Do away with advertising that fuels consumer desires and encourages excessive consumption, fostering a culture of mindful and intentional consumption.
- Integrate principles of environmental stewardship into development practices, and emphasizing the importance of preserving ecosystems and biodiversity for the long-term wellbeing of communities.

See also: Earth Overshoot, Circular Economies, Commons, Energy, Technology, Voluntary Simplicity, Frugal Abundance, Scarcity,

Earth Overshoot:

Earth overshoot refers to the consumption of resources and ecosystem services at a rate that significantly exceeds the planet's capacity to regenerate them or absorb waste. Indeed, *The Circularity Gap* report establishes a direct connection between resource consumption and six breached 'planetary boundaries identified by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, which define a 'safe operating space for humanity' across nine natural domains (The Circularity Gap Report, n.d.; Stockholm Resilience, 2023). The six breached boundaries include climate change, biosphere integrity, land use, freshwater use, biogeochemical flows, and novel entities (Stockholm Resilience, 2023). This analysis highlights the extent to which current material consumption exceeds nature's capacity, with projections indicating that rising materials consumption will exacerbate our overshoot of nature's resources and potentially extend this overshoot into additional domains (Gardner, 2024).

See also: Polycrisis, Decoupling, Resource Use, Energy, Commoning, Alternative Indicators

Education:

Instead of commodifying education, by focusing solely on marketability, work outcomes and productivity, degrowth prioritizes education systems that emphasize holistic wellbeing, personal development, and critical thinking (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). This includes implementing curriculums that raise awareness about the environmental and social consequences of

excessive consumption, fostering responsible consumer behavior, and foster education and knowledge-sharing initiatives to empower marginalized communities and reduce disparities in access to information and skills (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Education level is also an important indicator of overall societal health and wellbeing.

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Universal education to all levels
- Mandatory high school education
- Free training/apprenticeships
- PPP (Public-Public Partnerships)

See also: Work, Governance, Cooperatives, Wellbeing, Alternative Indicators

Energy:

As fossil fuels are phased out and humanity confront the physical limits of renewable energy, it is reasonable to expect that future energy availability will not exceed current levels, or at least not by very much (Guenot & Vetter, 2022). While capitalist green growth sees corporate-led renewables and carbon capture as the future of energy, degrowth sees both of those technologies as important, but places the emphasis on energy reduction, efficiency and energy democracy (Guenot & Vetter, 2022). Traditionally, energy, or the energy system, is not something more people have a choice about. Rather, degrowth sees energy as a public resource, and advocates for localized, community-led energy projects.

Community energy projects empower communities to take control and ownership of energy utilities, allowing them to collectively enjoy the benefits, including autonomous management and organization of energy production and consumption (Muñoz, 2022; Seyfang et al., 2013). While it's important to recognize that collectively owned energy projects can still be oriented towards growth, collective ownership often serves as a prerequisite for achieving political agency and setting broader goals (Muñoz, 2022). These goals may include social measures such as redistribution, reciprocity, equity, and justice, thereby fostering opportunities for social-ecological transformations (Kunze & Becker, 2015; Muñoz, 2022).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Complete ban on fossil fuels and energy intensive industries such as resource extraction, most manufacturing, large scale agriculture, waste processing, transportation, etc.
- Community owned utilities.
- Energy curfews based on time of day and supply.
- Energy banks: limit electrical supply per business or household, based on needs
- Community sites for energy intensive activities, such as kitchens/ovens, laundry, etc.
- Emphasis on insulation and energy efficiency

- Conversion from speed and convenience to passive or energy neutral transportation, such as kite-shipping, sailboats and electric trains in place of transport trucks, cruise ships or airplanes,
- Ban on SOVs and subsidies on bikes, e-bikes, scooters, etc.
- Free public transportation

See also: Decoupling, Dematerialization, Autonomy, Earth Overshoot, Localization, Technology/Trade

Finance:

Shareholders often expect a significant returns on their investments, leading to a relentless drive for financial capital accumulation, which inevitably leads to environmental destruction (Aigner et al., 2022). At the same time, everything is commodified, including the atmosphere, ecosystem services, and natural disasters, which are converted into quantifiable units and transformed into abstract financial instruments, like derivatives, used for hedging against weather-related risks (Aigner et al., 2022). In the context of degrowth, de-financialization involves separating labor and financial markets from social activities, and turning things like healthcare, education, housing, food, transportation, energy, and social security, into public goods. Additionally, ownership models need to be reformed to ensure that social provisioning aligns with social well-being and sustainability (Aigner et al., 2022).

Specific policies include (taken, in part, from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Local currencies
- Jobs in necessary sectors only, e.g. service industry, environmental, government or 'non-profit' sectors
- Ban on advertising
- Ban on harmful extractive industries
- Ban on convenience and/or luxury items: cars, motorboats, private jets, property, fashion/beauty, overseas tourism, out of season or tropical fruits/vegetables and processed foods
- Emphasis on social enterprise
- Community owned utilities
- End to patents
- Timebanking
- Melting or time-based currencies
- Cooperative banks
- Regional (non-debt) currencies;
- Local or regional nonmarket exchange systems
- Ethical banking
- Nonconvertible currencies
- Rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAS);
- Proof-for-cooperation cryptocurrency

- No interest banks
- Collective finance
- Highly progressive income tax, wealth tax, consumption tax, negative income tax
- Tax and/or cap and/or abolish inheritance (e.g. cap inheritance to a work free monthly salary birth to death)
- Global minimum corporate tax
- Progressive cap-and-dividend schemes
- Crackdown on tax havens and tax flight, and implement anti-corruption policies
- Cancel odious debt and debt moratoriums
- Direct transfers and reparations for ecological debt (including biopiracy, carbon, corporate and waste debt)

See also: Commons, Commodification, Work,

Food/Agriculture:

Food systems encompass the entirety of food production, from seeds, agricultural inputs, and how food is grown, to processing, transportation, retail, all the way to the consumer, and whether or not that consumer is able to purchase culturally appropriate and healthy food (otherwise known as food security). Like the financial system, people do not often have a lot of say on how the food system works, beyond 'voting with their dollar.' Food sovereignty, on the other hand, gives individuals the right to democratically determine the food system, including how food is produced, distributed, and consumed, all the while ensuring that no harm is inflicted upon others or the environment (Fehlinger et al., 2022; La Via Campesina, 2003). The concept of food sovereignty aligns well with a degrowth understanding of how the food system should function.

Specific policies include (taken, in part, from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Ban on large-scale, intensive agriculture
- Ban on factory farms and the industrialization of food
- Strict animal to land ratios
- Mandatory rotational grazing and cropping, with fallow years
- Ban on farming in ecologically sensitive areas
- Shorten supply chains. Food grown for local economies. Minimal international trade except where necessary
- Community-shared agriculture, agroecology and permaculture
- Ban on highly processed foods
- Restrictions on energy intensive foods, such as meat, dairy and seafood
- Restrictions on out-of-season and imported produce

See also: Localization, Commons, Dematerialization, Transportation/Trade, Localization,

Frugal Abundance:

The capitalist economic system has simultaneously resulted in over-abundance (as in the high-consumptive lifestyles of the minority) and under-abundance (as in the relative poverty of the majority) (Nelson, 2024). In order to reduce their environmental impact, it is imperative that people living high-consumption 'affluent' lifestyles embrace 'simpler' lifestyles of reduced or restrained consumption (Alexander, 2015). While many in degrowth term this lifestyle choice as 'voluntary simplicity,' others prefer to call it 'frugal abundance.' Frugal abundance advocates for enjoying the cultural, emotional and spiritual richness of a simple life, fulfilling one's necessities through collective sufficiency, while at the same time, respecting Earth's limits (Liegey & Nelson, 2020; Nelson, 2024). While ideally such a transition would be voluntary, or in degrowth language, would happen through a 'planned economic contraction,' a simpler way of life might ultimately be forced upon people through recession or even collapse (Alexander, 2015).

See also: Voluntary Simplicity, Sufficiency, Scarcity, Dematerialization, Energy, Economy

Governance:

Despite reactionary politics, the institutional structures of industrial-capitalist liberal democracies offer limited avenues for concerned citizens to engage in transformative action (Cole, 2021). So, while Western society proselytizes democratic values, most critical decision-making, such as work, the food system, the economy/finance, and scientific research/technology, are left in private hands (Carlsson, 2015). For example, while current political systems are dominated by those with economic power, real democracy calls for economic democracy - the democratic self-management of neighborhoods, work, and production (Asara & Muraca, 2015). Besides, true democracy requires more than just changes in political representation; it necessitates social rights and wealth redistribution to ensure genuine participation (Asara, 2014; Asara & Muraca, 2015. Thus, real democracy envisions democratic principles applied to all areas of life (Asara, 2014; Asara & Muraca, 2015).

Direct democracy is considered the most effective approach for achieving true democratic participation (Tarinski, 2024). It fosters community engagement and empowers individuals to actively participate in decision-making processes, allowing them to shape their own development paths and priorities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). It also keeps power decentralized at the grassroots level, preventing the emergence of a central authority or bureaucratic class with exploitative agendas (Tarinski, 2024). This way, national and local governments could enhance their legitimacy by establishing climate or citizens' assemblies to deliberate on and determine climate-related policies (Muñoz, 2022).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Economic democracy and participatory budgeting
- Voluntary work parties (eg. voluntary committees, working bees and local town meetings)

- Replace representative democracy with multi-level, confederational, direct and participatory democracies (democratic experimentalism)
- Small-scale self-organisation with networks of collectives
- Citizen-initiated referendums, deliberative forums, citizen assemblies and boards
- Consensus building

See also: Deliberative Forums, Finance, Cooperatives, Commons, Horizontalism

Gross Domestic Product (GDP):

See **Alternative Indicators**

Horizontalism:

Horizontalism refers to the establishment of horizontal relations and organizations (Nelson, 2024). This approach is characterized by mutually respectful, non-hierarchical interactions that emphasize shared power (both 'power-with' and 'power-to'), and the collaborative sharing of skills and knowledge (Nelson, 2024). Horizonalism utilizes processes such as citizen assemblies, networks, and self-organizing working groups, ensuring accountability and transparency in all activities and relationships (Nelson, 2024).

See also: Governance, Deliberative Forums, Finance, Cooperatives, Commons,

Housing:

Under capitalism, housing becomes a commodity when land is enclosed into private property. Degrowth proposes to decommodify housing by making it a public good. In this way, degrowth hopes to provide decent and affordable housing: firstly, by increasing housing justice and the more equitable utilization of housing stock; and by ensuring minimal environmental impacts by discouraging new builds, and instead renovating and retrofitting existing built infrastructure to meet current and future housing needs (Cattaneo, 2015; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a; Lietaert, 2010; Nelson & Schneider, 2018; Xue, 2022). One way to ensure affordable housing for all socio-economic groups is through rent controls and subsidies, along with expanding social housing options (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). Another way is to replace private stock, with non-profit housing, such as cooperatives, housing associations, trusts, and co-housing projects (Parrique, 2019; Schneider et al., 2010**;** Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a). However, not all non-profit housing is anti-ownership. For example, Limited Equity Cooperatives (LECs), allow members to buy their shares at very low prices (and required to sell them at a low price), creating homeownership opportunities for low-income individuals, while ensuring that housing remains affordable for future residents (Huron, 2015; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023a).

Specific policies include (taken in part from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- No ownership of land or property
- Accommodation based household needs (number of bedrooms equal to family size)

- Timeshares
- Emphasis on retrofitting over new builds (turning large houses into apartments, turning garages into apartments, etc)
- Emphasis on density over sprawl
- Emphasis on insulation
- Mixed use and mixed 'income' communities
- No empty roof space: Green roofs and or solar heaters and solar panels

See also: Commoning, Community/Communalism, Cooperatives,

Imperial Mode of Living:

The term "Imperial Mode of Living," was coined by Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen in their 2013 article: *Crisis and Continuity of Capitalist Society-Nature Relationships: The Imperial Mode of Living and the Limits to Environmental Governance*." The article describes the resource and energy-intensive lifestyle enjoyed by the wealthy minority, which is maintained through the exploitation of labor and natural resources from the poor majority (Brand & Wissen, 2013). This generally refers to the unequal exchange of labour and resources from poor countries in the Global South, to wealthy nations in the Global North. However, this can also represent the unequal exchange that exists within countries, such as Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups located within the Global North, or the ultra-rich located in the Global South.

See also: Decolonization, Inequality, Justice, Decoupling, Dematerialization, Voluntary Simplicity, Frugal Abundance, Scarcity, Sufficiency

Inequality:

Degrowth advocates for an economic system that prioritizes justice, challenges power imbalances between high-income and low-income countries, supports fair trade and ensures just compensation for producers and ethical consumption by consumers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). One way it does this is by integrating environmental justice into its strategies, in order to prevent vulnerable communities from bearing the brunt of environmental degradation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). It also acknowledges the disproportionate impact capitalism has had on marginalized populations (including Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, Women, Gender Diverse peoples, etc.), and tries to ensure that these voices are heard, and have a hand in shaping policies that affect them (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Some policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Progressive taxation
- Social safety nets
- Equitable access to essential services
- An inclusive and participatory decision-making process

See also: Decolonization, Governance, Resource Use, Decoupling, Justice, Care, Eco-Feminism,

Justice (Environmental and Social):

Inequalities, both social and environmental, exist, not only in the accumulation of wealth, access to opportunities, and the distribution of resources, but also in the allocation of pollution, poor health outcomes, and lack of social services (Anguelovki, 2015). Environmental Justice (EJ) movements in the Global South tend to advocate for the right to stay in one's community and environment while being shielded from unchecked development, pollution, land grabbing, speculation, disinvestment, and neglect, while groups in the Global North tend to campaign for accessible, affordable, and clean urban transit systems, healthy and affordable local food, green and healthy housing with integrated recycling practices and green spaces, as well as training and jobs in the green economy (Anguelovki, 2015). Many in degrowth believe that the Environmental Justice movement(s) is a natural ally, especially when it comes to uniting with movements in the Global South (Kaika et al., 2023).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- END THE MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
- Promote alternatives to incarceration (e.g. rehabilitation and social programs);
- Oppose all forms of racism (i.e. be anti-racist);
- Implement restorative justice measures;
- Dismantle colonialism and its structures;
- Free access to legal services for all;
- Redefine the principles of discrimination and equality embedded in human rights law
- Mandatory citizen engagement via citizen assemblies and other decision-making bodies or processes (think juries)
- Mandatory community maintenance and improvement (think coop building chores)
- Shift from extractive and manufacturing jobs, towards environmental remediation, restoration and regeneration
- End unequal ecological exchange
- Land reform
- Restore stolen land to its Indigenous caretakers in reconciliation

See also: Decolonization, Inequality, Dematerialization, Decoupling, Imperial Mode of Living

Localization (Glocalism/Cosmopolitan Localisms):

Unlike the dominant centralized, top-down modern systems and infrastructures which embody a hierarchical model of organization and social life, localized distributed systems operate through decentralized elements that interconnect to form broader networks (Escobar, 2017). Degrowth promotes the creation of decentralized, community-focused, democratic economies that prioritize local needs and well-being over global market interests (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

By supporting small-scale businesses and alternative business models (non-profits, worker-owned cooperatives, community-owned infrastructure, and social enterprises), degrowth hopes to localize production and consumption, thereby reducing long-distance transportation and its environmental impacts. Degrowth also encourages the development of sharing economies, where resources, goods, and services are shared within communities to promote efficiency and reduce the demand for new production (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). For example, in order to re-localize food production, degrowth encourages organic community gardening and farming, community-supported agriculture, and food cooperatives (Escobar, 2017).

Specific policies include (take in part from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Short supply chains aka locally focused trade
- Locally-owned and operated credit unions, banks, and financial services
- Local exchange and trading systems (LETS)
- Local mutual-credit systems
- Create national local currencies and distribute as a basic income

See also: Horizontalism, Governance, Cooperatives, Commons, Food/Agriculture, Dematerialization, Transportation/Trade, Energy,

Pluriverse:

The pluriverse recognizes the existence of diverse understandings, spiritual beliefs, and ways of organizing the world (Escobar, 2017). This perspective highlights the importance of respecting various worldviews, cultural perspectives, and ways-of-life/ways-of-being, placing the emphasis on diversity and the interconnectedness of human societies and ecosystems (Escobar, 2017). A pluriversal approach attempts to shift the focus away from Western-centric views (universalist thinking), by acknowledging the intrinsic value of more-than-humans (biocentrism) and by adopting a relational understanding of all life (Escobar, 2017).

See also: Decolonization, Justice Commons, Reciprocity, Inequality, Technology/Science, Localization

Polycrisis:

The term polycrisis is used to describe a situation when numerous, interconnected systems are simultaneously under strain, or experiencing extreme upheaval. Examples include the effect COVID-19 had on the global food supply, energy market volatility, wars, political instability, ideological extremism, and climate change (Hoyer, 2024).

See also: Earth Overshoot, Justice, Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity

Prefigurative Practices:

Prefiguration is the act of living futures in the present (Meissner, 2021). Prefigurative practices involve building alternative lifestyles in the margins (or the cracks of) the dominant way of life (Chertkovskaya, 2022; Burkhart et al., 2022). In a degrowth sense, these practices can include intentional communities, cooperatives, grassroots initiatives, or any other actions that model degrowth values and principles (Burkhart et al., 2022). Be that as it may, collective endeavors operating outside of the mainstream frequently encounter obstacles from authority, in the form of regulations and taxes, as well as competition from capitalist entities (Nelson, 2024). Meanwhile, focusing exclusively on prefigurative practices risks degrowth remaining fragmented and marginalized (Schulken et al., 2022).

See also: Voluntary Simplicity, Commons, Cooperatives, Community, Localization, Food Systems, Sufficiency,

Reciprocity:

Reciprocity is a fundamental principle in many Indigenous cultures. At its most basic, reciprocity emphasizes taking only what is needed and always giving back. However, more than simply giving back, reciprocity honors the spiritual relationships with all forms of life through ceremonies, songs, and prayers (McFarlane & Schabus, 2017). Moreover, many Indigenous Peoples believe that all things possess a spirit (including rivers, rocks, trees, etc), and their oral histories and teachings warn that deviating from principles of reciprocity and respect for all creation leads to hardship (McFarlane & Schabus, 2017). This respect extends to kin, agreements with neighboring Indigenous nations, and the natural and supernatural worlds around them (McFarlane & Schabus, 2017).

See also: Dematerialization, Frugal Abundance, Pluriverse, Voluntary Simplicity

Scarcity:

The connection between capitalism and scarcity has already been discussed in Chapter 1. However, the link between degrowth and the narrative of scarcity is one that I wasn't able to elaborate on in my synthesis paper. If the opposite of scarcity is sufficiency, then degrowth suggests that continuous development is unnecessary, since many people already have more than enough (Kallis & March, 2015). As a result, collective self-limitation (voluntary simplicity), ending enclosures, and sharing the commons, can all help eliminate both scarcity and accumulation, allowing us to live within ecological limits (Kallis & March, 2015).

See also: Sufficiency, Frugal Abundance, Voluntary Simplicity, Commoning,

Sufficiency:

Sufficiency is another core degrowth concept, and provides a counter narrative to scarcity. It is about providing for basic needs, and switching the focus from material wealth to cultural wealth. To achieve sufficiency, degrowth advocates for collective self-provisioning, co-

governance, collaborative work and sharing the output to meet everyone's basic or essential needs - creating what could be considered a caring-commons economy (Nelson, 2024). Degrowth also highlights the importance of creating *local* collective sufficiency, since the most ecologically and socially efficient methods to meet our essential needs is through self-organizing communities that practice commoning and produce goods as close as possible to their end-use (Nelson, 2024).

See also: Scarcity, Frugal Abundance, Voluntary Simplicity, Dematerialization, Localization,

Technology/Science:

Degrowth is not opposed to technology, but advocates using technology to prioritize the common good over profit interests, thereby promoting both social justice and economic democracy (Guenot & Vetter, 2022). A communal approach to technology would harness knowledge and scientific advancements, but would align them with communal principles, making them more efficient and equitable (Escobar, 2017).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Create digital commons, e.g. copyleft, Creative Commons, Cybersyn, Wikipedia, etc)
- Re-structure social media from privately owned to a common or public good
- Open-source drug network
- Repurpose military facilities to produce socially useful and ecologically sensitive goods
- Limit the use of Information and communications technology (ICT), digital devices and professional services, e.g. self-tracking

See also: Conviviality, Commons, Dematerialization,

Transportation/Trade:

Degrowth proposes to transition away from vehicle ownership, not just adopting electric vehicles, to alternative modes of transportation (Henderson, 2010; Szabo et al., 2022)**.** This means putting an end to subsidies that support high-emission transportation like private vehicles and air travel, and imposing taxes or outright bans on polluting transport methods (Szabo et al., 2022). Literature on trade from a degrowth perspective is somewhat limited, beyond the need to end the unequal exchange of resources, and the exploitation of labour, from the Global South to the Global North. That said, fair trading practices and limiting long-distance trade, especially unnecessary intra-industry trade between nations, would be key objectives (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Specific policies include (taken from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Limit long-distance trade
- Export quotas
- Transition road freight to electric train

- Reduce transport demands, especially aviation
- Establish cooperative port systems with traffic limits
- Reduce intra-industry trade between similar countries
- Shorten supply chains
- Conversion from speed and convenience to passive or energy neutral transportation, such as wind-harnessed cargo ships, sailboats and electric trains in place of transport trucks, cruise ships or airplanes

See also: Work, Localization, Food/Agriculture, Energy, Justice, Decolonization, Dematerialization,

Voluntary Simplicity:

Voluntary simplicity is a key degrowth concept, and involves challenging the constant pursuit of growth through consumption, by embracing alternative measures of well-being (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). It proposes that people can lead meaningful, happy, and diverse lives while consuming an equitable share of nature (Alexander, 2015). Promoting voluntary simplicity requires individuals to reassess their needs and prioritize meaningful experiences over material accumulation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Specific policies include (taken from Latouche 2009; D'Alisa, 2015; Kallis & March, 2015):

- Work-sharing
- Co-housing and communes
- Car and bike sharing
- Regaining the collective control of water or energy
- Commoning reclaiming and sharing public spaces

See also: Frugal Abundance, Wellbeing, Conviviality, Sufficiency, Imperial Mode of Living, Scarcity, Commons, Collectively, Community

Work:

Work and production are essential to sustaining a growth-oriented economic system, both as inputs for production and as drivers of consumption (Kreinin & Latif, 2022). By amplifying workers' voices, providing alternative economic/business models, and introducing ideologies that challenge capitalist economic production, degrowth can help decommodify work and orient the system away from wage labour (Kreinin & Latif, 2022). Other measures include: reducing work hours, reallocating productivity gains to allow for working less, ensuring rights to part-time employment, and promoting a gender-sensitive redistribution of paid work (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Similarly, from a degrowth perspective, commons and cooperative methods for organizing production, consumption, and distribution could also help decommodify work and orient the system away from wage labour (Vieta, 2010; Kreinin & Latif, 2022).

Specific policies include (taken in part from Fitzpatrick et al., 2022):

- Universal basic income (UBI), reduced work weeks, working-sharing, job guarantee, work-from-home or shared office spaces, etc.
- Universal disability, sick benefits and universal pensions
- Minimum living wage, maximum incomes and wealth caps, and maximum income/wage ratios (e.g. 6.5:1, 10:1, 15:1, 20:1)
- Max company size. Once a company workforce gets to a certain size or profits get to a certain level, it gets broken-up into smaller or competitive businesses

See also: Horizontalism, Localization, Commons, Collectively, Decommodification, Care, Dematerialization, Sufficiency, Autonomy,

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