

## Proposition Two

### – SHARING FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ONGOINGNESS

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Sitting at my corporate desk, I would dream about being with egalitarian hunter-gatherers. At the time, I did not know that there really still exist groups living in this way. My dream undoubtedly had more of an escapist quality – and then it came true. In 2010, working for the Collaborative Research Centre *Our Way to Europe* at the University of Cologne,<sup>1</sup> I was given the incredible opportunity to spend one year with the Ivindo Baka in Gabon. As described in Proposition One, the Baka have an egalitarian social organisation, which includes economic activities such as hunting, foraging and artisanal gold-mining. These are grounded in so-called *demand-sharing*, meaning that people will clearly and assertively demand the things they want as part of sharing processes. Many people critiquing capitalist practices maintain that a properly functioning economy requires companies to see themselves as contributors to society, not merely as wealth extractors. From my experience with the Baka, I argue that a properly functioning economy requires, in addition, a stronger emphasis on *sharing*. However, this conception of sharing has little or nothing to do with ideas around gift economy, *sharing economy*, or purpose-driven economics, which are or have become mainstream. Sharing here refers to the ongoingness of creating, building and maintaining social relations. This kind of sharing, which interweaves socio-economic and socio-political dynamics, has been essential to the continuation of human social organisations. Finding new ways to put this mode of ‘work’, of sharing ongoingness, at the heart of our economic activities, may offer a deeper and more generative response to critiques of capitalism. If we are able to do this, we would, for example, no

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1     [www.sfb806.uni-koeln.de](http://www.sfb806.uni-koeln.de)

longer have to distinguish between an 'economy' and a 'social economy'. We would no longer differentiate between economic practices which are purely extractive and profit-oriented, and those which take into consideration their impact on society, on the social. Economics could become the term which acknowledges capacities for the social as the generative quality of our daily lives and global economic flows. And 'work' might come to mean nothing but the joy of relating.

## Economics and Economies in Crisis

Income inequalities continue to grow across the world. In Los Angeles in the United States, the region of dishwashing dreams and Hollywood wealth and fame, there are over 65,000 homeless people on the streets.<sup>2</sup> Critiquing the ever more extreme concentrations of wealth, the *Guardian* newspaper summarised the situation as 'our economics is broken' because '8 men own more than 3.6 billion people do'.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, for example, *Amazon* CEO Jeff Bezos gained \$ 74 billion during the Covid pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Acclaimed economists such as Mariana Mazzucato, Thomas Piketty, Kate Raworth, and Joseph Stiglitz, as well as the *World Economic Forum* have identified inequality as a grave threat to the global economy.<sup>5</sup> Such outcries and warnings seem to have little impact, as the pay of CEOs in the US in 2019 surged to up to 320 times as much as that of the average employee.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, investigative journalism has brought to light how these inequalities are exacerbated by systematic tax evasion by large multinational corporations and individual highly wealthy tax refugees. The *Panama Papers*, for example, shed light onto the hidden world of wealth production, documenting how Swiss, Andorran or Central American bank accounts continue to serve money laundering efforts.<sup>7</sup> The num-

2 [www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875888864/homelessness-in-los-angeles-county-rises-sharply?t=1614267048825](http://www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875888864/homelessness-in-los-angeles-county-rises-sharply?t=1614267048825)

3 [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/16/eight-people-earn-more-billion-economics-broken](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/16/eight-people-earn-more-billion-economics-broken)

4 [www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires)

5 Mazzucato 2018, Piketty 2015, Raworth 2017

6 Mishel & Kandra 2020, see also [www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/11/us-millionaire-ceos-saw-29-pay-raises-while-workers-had-decreases-report-says](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/11/us-millionaire-ceos-saw-29-pay-raises-while-workers-had-decreases-report-says) on latest figures.

7 <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de>

ber of people unhappy and angry with this state of affairs is growing, and for example *Occupy* became a persistent global protest movement.<sup>8</sup> Capitalist structures have contributed to world-wide gains in life expectancy and average income, but these benefits are offset by people suffering increased levels of stress, depression, and increasingly mental health issues such as *eco-anxiety*, meaning mental health problems related to people's concern about the future of the environments they live in. Awareness is growing that the joys of consumerism cannot fill the holes which have been ripped into processes of social support and cohesion. In the struggle against ever more perverse levels of inequality, this leaves us with simple questions, which defy simple answers:

*How does the concept of private ownership go together with economic sharing?*

*How do we want to shape relations between consumer choice, maximising profit and shareholder value, and environmental limits to human economic activities?*

*What is the future of 'work', beyond a world of algorithmic control?*

My understanding of the pertinent factors of economic activities has been shaped by my studies of law, my corporate years, and by participating in initiatives around the so-called *sharing economy*. During the corporate period, my (male) colleagues would obsess about getting the best deal for a company car with all the latest mod cons, whilst I became the celebrated 5000<sup>th</sup> member of *Cambio Carsharing*.<sup>9</sup> At the time, sharing a car rather than owning it was just coming up as a concept, and I was smiled down upon. People looked at me sympathetically, as if I had contracted some kind of 'sharing-disease'. Nowadays, a growing amount of (younger) people has no interest in owning very much of anything, and this idea of sharing rather than owning has become mainstream. The Baka and their ancestors have known about it for somewhat longer.

## Baka Egalitarian Demand-Sharing

The economic practices of the egalitarian Baka are grounded in so-called *demand-sharing*. For Baka and other similar groups, demand-sharing means that people will clearly or even assertively demand the things they want. This is not

8 Butler 2011

9 [www.cambio-carsharing.de](http://www.cambio-carsharing.de)

an idealised general reciprocity, or generosity, which is commonly associated with sharing among hunter-gatherers.<sup>10</sup> It is not about polite smiles, being generous, and saying yes. The person demanding has the right to have, and people do not have the right to refuse or withhold items which they are not immediately using! In demand-sharing there is no bookkeeping of who gave what, where and when, and it is difficult to accumulate anything. It is simply about responding to demands as and when they are made. Refusing demands necessarily implies hiding, lying, or other secretive behaviours. There are sanctions for surplus production, and would-be hoarders are shamed without pity. The aim of egalitarian demand-sharing practices is not only to provide food distribution. The aim is equally to generate and maintain social relationships, whereby the practice becomes an interplay of socio-economic and socio-political factors. To recall, in this kind of egalitarian social organisation, both the equality and the demand-sharing are not given but are continuously generated and maintained through levelling mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> This way of intricately interweaving socio-economic and socio-political dynamics has ensured the stability and resilience of these systems over time.<sup>12</sup> Grounded in a deep appreciation and understanding of life as continuity and ongoingness, practices of demand-sharing guarantee, to use common economic parlance, the 'success' and a 'win-win situation' for all.

Arriving in and living with Ivindo Baka communities, I adhered to Gabonese custom and always brought gifts: rice; sugar and salt; cooking oil; *Pastis* (aniseed liquor); and tobacco leaves for the female elders and cigarettes for the men. Tobacco and alcohol were inevitably used straight away to have a song and dance, and these parties celebrating my return are some of my favourite memories of staying with the Baka. Attuning to daily practices of demand-sharing, was, on the other hand, less straightforward. I realised how deeply reciprocity was ingrained in my thinking and doing, and I became frustrated when I had 'given', or done 'something nice' and felt I was not 'given' in return. It took time to understand and get a feeling for how this mode of sharing is not about direct exchange, differing from the other two commonly accepted economic modalities: the giving of gifts and commercial dealings.

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10 Lavi & Friesem 2019

11 See subheading 'Baka Egalitarianism: Independence within Interdependence' under Proposition One for details.

12 Woodburn 2005

### From Obligation to Opportunity: Shifting Concepts of Sharing

In his recent book *Anthropology and the Economy of Sharing*, anthropologist and hunter-gatherer specialist Thomas Widlok examines sharing practices both amongst hunter-gatherer groups and as part of current economic models from around the world. Widlok shows how contemporary understandings of gift economy and sharing are based on somewhat contradictory readings of concepts derived from ethnographic materials.<sup>13</sup> Both *gift-giving and commercial transactions are two-sided transfers* creating obligations of and through exchange. Marcel Mauss in his famous book *The Gift*, summarises these dynamics of exchange as the *obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate*.<sup>14</sup> Exchanges through gift-giving or commercial transactions are based on an expectation of reciprocity. This can be either immediate reciprocity, in the form of money, or future reciprocity in the form of a return gift. Sharing, on the other hand, is a *one-sided transfer* involving co-presence and co-operation. Sharing and especially demand-sharing is as much about the object in question, the material thing to be shared, as about creating and maintaining relationships between the person requesting the thing and the person responding to the request. Sharing is core to how individuals within egalitarian hunter-gatherer groups manage autonomy and relatedness, and one of the main dynamics of this type of sharing is to avoid creating dependencies. As Widlok has suggested, giving true heed to what is going on in a sharing event is not necessarily about the (Maussian) *obligations to give, receive and reciprocate*. It is a shift to appreciating sharing not as an obligation, but as an *opportunity*. As Widlok proposes,<sup>15</sup> and my research with the Ivindo Baka supports, a more attuned way to understand things, is to grasp how

**sharing is a process, which opens up opportunities  
to request, return and let go.**

My relational and fun way to start each day in the forest was making black tea with milk in the typical English way. As I later found out, the English explorer Mary Kingsley had also surprised locals with this way of making tea

13 See Widlok's excellent summary on the critique of the gift economy: Widlok 2017:2.

14 Mauss 1954

15 Widlok 2017

during her travels in Central Africa in the 1890s. However, presumably differing from her, I always made a large cooking pot full of tea, somewhere between 2-3 litres, which I shared with my Baka host family and whoever was around on that morning. People observed from a distance what was being prepared, moving in closer if they were interested in obtaining a 'share', casually hanging around until they were given some tea. Being there, physical presence, bodying together with others, creates and constitutes the *opportunity to request*. Avoiding any kind of dependency is central to the egalitarian ethos and creating a time gap between request and response is one way of achieving this. To avoid even the semblance of dependency, another strategy is to request via intermediaries, so that adults would ask their kids to hang around me with some kind of pot capable of holding liquid. Once filled, the children would then take the tea back to their parents, thereby creating relation, but negating dependency. Those who are included in this form of sharing may be biological kin, so direct family members, and also classificatory kin, meaning non-biological kin and other relations. As opposed to the ceremonial of barter or gift exchange tied to specific timings, you will be included in the egalitarian sharing dynamic because of your being there at that moment in time. Your practical, bodily presence is important in giving you a share, resulting in the great openness and inclusivity of these types of sharing practices. Most readers would probably share with their direct family members without questioning. In Baka' and similar sharing practices, opening the sharing beyond direct family, means that you are extending and negotiating kinship and (emotional) proximity on that occasion. Life and all social relations form part of this on-going dialogue constituting, negotiating, and maintaining egalitarian values of autonomy and connectedness.

For the Baka, individual autonomy and freedom of association are two central values.<sup>16</sup> Coercion is frowned upon, and egalitarian leadership comes through authority and not through fiat.

**Leadership is situational, accorded when people think  
you are the best person to do the job,  
either because of charisma or expertise.**

Leaders are situationally accepted as such, as long as they remain modest and humble. The most common example is the best hunter leading the hunt; but

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16 Weig 2013, Weig 2017

the hunter will not share out the meat afterwards, so that they cannot abuse their position or skills to accumulate wealth or power. In that way, particular skills are activated for the community, without letting the skill-bearers derive personal advantage and power from them. The freedom to physically move, to be mobile and associate and spend time with the person or people of your choice, is also absolutely key. This freedom includes, that when you arrive in a new place, you become part of the ongoing sharing practices and social relations of that location. In Adjab, I was excited when (in attempting to) become part of the demand-sharing practices, I could *return* and respond to outright demands for small commodity items such as milk powder, cigarettes, or onions. Of course, I never lost my status as the (apparently) rich White woman, and I spent much time explaining the difference between an NGO representative who arrives with money to build houses etc, and a researcher like myself who conscientiously avoids creating any kind of financial dependencies.<sup>17</sup> Preparing for life in the forest, I had taken only very few personal possessions with me. My bags contained survival items such as a ceramic water-pump for filtering water, a portable solar panel, and other electronic gadgets such as camera and laptop. Demands for those items were tricky to negotiate, and when I left for Europe, I *let go* and left as much as I could with the Baka communities, in good researcher tradition. I was also asked to return soon, because who else would now make tea in the morning – but I don't think the Baka missed it half as much as I did.

During my travels around the world, I have often been privileged to receive exceptional Muslim hospitality, hospitality being one of the five pillars

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17 Conscious of the moral and practical obligations towards my Baka host communities, I wanted to do more and each time I returned to the Ivindo, my boxes would contain items I knew the Baka needed and could only acquire with great difficulty or not at all: bed linen; nails; all types of clothes including bras; fishing tackle; oil lamps. I also brought photos, laminated in the hope that the tropical forest would not destroy them immediately, and I offered English lessons. The capacity of the Baka to imitate my British English accent immediately and perfectly was simply incredible! For me, supplying the objects was an additional way of thanking the community for their support, but at the same time it brought on jealousy from the neighbouring village chief (from a different ethnic group) who was also trying to curry favour with the Baka. Interestingly, it was more members of neighbouring ethnic groups, who thought I should be giving away everything to them. The Baka were quite clear that I was struggling and would just laugh or smirk at my attempts to make it all work somehow.

of Islam. But again, food sharing with the Baka was an entirely different experience that had nothing to do with welcoming a stranger or guest with all the politeness and courtesy you hold in your heart. With the Baka, food sharing means that whatever food has been prepared and cooked is shared out equally between those who are present. Children are often given one plate, and they make sure that everyone from the group of children present receives their fair share of whatever is on that plate. Allowances were made for me in terms of which meat I was given, once the Baka women saw that I really struggled to eat very fatty meat. Previously vegetarian, I had reintroduced meat into my diet about six months before travelling to Gabon in order to prepare my digestive system for a life with hunters. Surviving in tropical forests takes a different kind of stamina than slurping a cafe latte in urban Europe, and I am often surprised by outright calls for 'No More Meat Consumption' by climate activists. It seems important to differentiate between areas of the world dependent on mass industrialised animal farming, and areas where hunting is the most appropriate thing to do. Eating freshly hunted bushmeat (bush being another word for forest) in the tropical forests is delicious, healthy and gives you the calories and strength you need to spend a happy but physically demanding day in the forest.<sup>18</sup> What fascinated me most with the Baka, were those moments when there was no food in the village. Three adults would equally share one plate of food, for example boiled *manioc* roots (known as *yucca* or *cassava* in other parts of the world) and some manioc leaves (similar to spinach). This is nowhere enough food for a hungry adult, and yet the practice of sharing makes it enough. This is not to say that low levels of food intake over a long time period do not constitute a serious threat to health. But there is something nearly magical in sharing food in this way; sharing makes it become more than what visibly seems to be only one portion. And

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18 The term *bushmeat trade* refers to the (illegal) commercial hunting and selling of wild animals for food. The expansion of the bushmeat trade to annually over 5 million tonnes in the Congo Basin, is largely due to the increase in commercial logging. Logging activities have opened up forests with new infrastructures, linking hunters and growing numbers of often luxury urban consumers for whom bushmeat is a status symbol. The bushmeat trade is rapidly depleting local animal populations to, or near, extinction, and even I could quickly tell the difference between meat availability in Adjab in 2010/11 and 2019. The extent of the illegal bushmeat trade is threatening the stability of forest ecosystems, the food security of local forest peoples, and public health, as forest diseases are able to move from one species to the next and reach the cities (<http://blog.cifor.org/congo>).



that's enough to get you through until your next food intake; leaving you with deep humility for the food, your fellow beings, egalitarian sharing practices, and the forest which has provided the food.

### **Aliveness of Situational Leadership and Levelling Mechanisms**

The immediate consumption of food means the Baka are an example of what is known as an *immediate-return society*, which contrasts with a *delayed-return society*. *Immediate-return* refers to the immediate consumption of what is hunted or gathered, with tools that necessitate a high level of skill but little labour to use them. *Immediate-return* also implies that there is no elaborate food processing or storage. *Delayed-return*, as the term suggests, exactly involves food storage and processing, and those who worked hard for this food, with labour-intensive tools, have specific rights over or resulting from the yields of their labour.<sup>19</sup> On more than one occasion along the Ivindo, food I had intended for another time was gone when I went looking for it. It was one of the challenges to learn to sense into how such occasions were examples of the unquestionable and absolute immediacy of Baka demand-sharing, where if someone asked for that food whilst I was away, the request could not be refused by the people I was sharing the kitchen with, as you cannot have proprietary rights over food. The difference between immediate-return and delayed-return is not just about the timing of food consumption or storage facilities, but also relates to respective ways of socio-political organisation. An immediate-return society emphasises individual autonomy and the lack of authority; in contrast to delayed-return, which is based on proprietary considerations and a resulting hierarchical structure. Eminent anthropologist James Woodburn, who first developed the concept after living with the egalitarian *Hadza* in Tanzania in the 1950s, has shown how the immediate-return model promotes equality and resists the development of inequality based on the interaction of five key mechanisms. These are 1) lack of leadership, authority and hierarchy; 2) individual and group mobility involving freedom of association 3) equal access to food and other resources; 4) sharing; 5) sanctions on the accumulation of personal possessions.<sup>20</sup> Woodburn argues that only the hunting and gathering way of life permits so great an emphasis on equality, showing how this mode of social organisation, considered to be one of the longest-standing

19 Woodburn 1982:433

20 Woodburn 1982

in human history, intricately interweaves socio-economic and socio-political dynamics.

Given the need for a *lack of hierarchy and personal possession* for this form of immediate-return egalitarianism to be able to be practiced, it is seen as strictly opposed to a delayed-return model, such as the capitalist one. You can either have a lack of hierarchy and no personal possessions; or personal possessions are allowed, but then that immediately creates some sort of power dynamics and authority over others by virtue of having things that only one person or an elite group control.<sup>21</sup> This debate around the irreconcilability of egalitarian and hierarchical (capitalist) practices is a passionate one, and as Ivindo Baka increasingly become part of the cash economy, they themselves are faced with this conundrum.

Baka livelihoods, sharing practices, gender roles, music-making, and dancing are today affected by socio-technical and ecological changes.<sup>22</sup> There is considerable diversity amongst the Baka when it comes to embracing these changes. Amongst the older women and men, there is a clear commitment that the Baka still live off the forest and cannot survive without this connection. For example, their time keeping is done in relation to the forest and daylight hours. Amongst the younger generation, and those elder Baka engaged in artisanal gold mining, there exists the wish to enjoy the benefits of 'modern' life, technological inventions, and the sociality of towns. These Baka have mobile phones and radios. Such changes have fuelled outright claims to personal ownership normally related to delayed-return, for example of sacred objects, and resulted in increasing secrecy and hoarding regarding especially money.

Being able to observe and understand how the Ivindo Baka still practice the levelling mechanisms essential to the immediate-return society amidst all these changes, bearing down on individuals trying to live differently, was more than a gift for me. For example, one young man wanted to earn himself some extra cash by making and selling *beignets* (sweet, fried balls of dough) in the morning. With great frustration and sadness, he described to me how he had been forced to stop after just one month. Firstly, he had been faced with constant demands for the money he had made by other group members, and he could not refuse handing over part of it owing to demand sharing rules.

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21 Woodburn 2005:23

22 Weig 2015c

Secondly, extreme social pressure was exerted on him to stop and to not differentiate himself from the group through his individual practice of making the *beignets* and the extra money. Thirdly, he feared the social exclusion, which he would have risked, had he continued. In another case, a woman earned money with meals for (non-Baka) artisanal gold workers. She then built a house independently. This affronted egalitarian values and additionally undermined (changing) gender roles, as it used to be the women who built the house, but nowadays it is a man's task. Putting herself beyond the egalitarian levelling mechanisms and the gender roles proved fatal for this woman. For a Baka person, jealousy can have a political dimension. In a different case, an elder Baka man held singular possession of an out-board motor. Whereas the other two had worked only for themselves, this Baka man employed his skills and the motor for the benefit of his family and the larger community; and no forceful levelling took place. To the contrary, he achieved situational leadership, and was accepted as an authority on the topic of artisanal gold mining, according to Baka egalitarian values and sociality.

Returning to Europe after my year in Gabon, I was stunned by the following situation. A friend who is a kindergarden teacher expressed her outrage at one young boy using another child's blanket to snuggle under during story time. She explained to me that each child must have its own blanket for reasons of hygiene, and to learn the rules of individual property. More than during my time in the forest, I realised there and then how different my experience of Baka sharing had been – and quite how radical the concept of demand-sharing would be for most people in highly industrialised societies. The importance of a system like that of the Baka lies in the fact that sharing is not a form of exchange or reciprocity, but an imposition on the person by society. Sharing is not about generosity, but is linked to building and maintaining social relations and social values. It ensures redistribution of goods amongst the group and promotes egalitarianism and equality rather than hierarchies or dependencies between people. Being Baka can mean giving up everything to someone else. Standing out of the crowd, having a superior status is actively avoided, as it may result in jealousy. As humans, we have known the active repression of prestige-seeking behaviour for much longer than we have known the elbow society of today. So, is there any way we can find compatibility between egalitarian demand-sharing systems and capitalist consumerism, which, with all its obvious faults, offers us fabulous choices no one including myself would easily want to give up? The reason I keep returning to this conundrum are the pressing concerns we have about the sustainability of our

(capitalist) lifestyles, and what kind of world, shaped by modern economic models and practices, we are leaving for future generations to inherit.

*Is there a way to shift and change the inequality of the current system, where many choices are only available to a privileged few? Can we open up consumer choice in a sustainable way, which is compatible with environmental limits? Would that mean leaving profit behind, as some think-tanks like the New Economics Foundation have argued for years?<sup>23</sup> How would living without profit-making as the sacred goal of our economy look like? Or, have profit and avarice not become too ingrained to be sacked from their economic thrones?*

Going back to the Baka, what I want to emphasise again is the larger socio-cultural-political-ecological context of sharing which goes beyond asking your neighbours for milk or sugar. It is not about ideas of *Communism* or *The Commons*, meaning finding ways to share goods equally amongst a pre-defined and exclusive group of people, who have all contributed to the production of those goods in one form or another, and who share the same moral code.<sup>24</sup> Demand-sharing, as we can still find it with the Ivindo Baka, is different as it emphasises the continuity of opportunities for social relating. There is no concentration of property in one person, or private ownership of land. Neither is there a concentration or distribution in commons. Sharing is a form of generalised reciprocity in co-temporally co-present persons, so groups of people being face-to-face at a certain moment or period of time. This is not some kind of 'primitive communism'; rather this form of immediate-return egalitarianism is possibly the longest-standing mode of social organisation in human history, grounded in an ongoing balancing of the tensions between autonomy and connectedness. Generating and maintaining autonomy and relatedness, not telling people what to do, sharing on demand, not having the right to keep property as personal, being subject to levelling mechanisms if you try and stand out – all these characteristics of (Baka) egalitarian society are hard work! It is not about being lovey-dovey, or kind. It is an ongoing, assertive becoming of the egalitarian dynamic through continuous efforts which need to be made by everybody. And those are exactly the aspects and qualities, which, I believe, can truly contribute to queries and discussions around devel-

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23 <https://neweconomics.org>

24 Graeber 2011:95

oping *alter-economies*, to alternative ways of doing human economic activity.<sup>25</sup> The question is,

*whether or how we can (re)integrate a quality of ongoing-ness into our ways of thinking-perceiving economic activity, knowing that it cannot be about finding easy solutions?*

## Alternative Economic Models and Sharing

The economic model currently dominating local and global trade is that of *Capitalism* which entails the right to profit from your economic activities. This right to maximise your yields, earnings, profits is paramount. Private ownership of goods is sacrosanct and can be defended by law. Critiqued since its early days, in its current incarnation this human way of doing things is referred to as *late capitalism* or *neoliberalism*. The term highlights the extreme spread of profit thinking over the last 30 years, which, more than ever before, benefits only an elite few, a continuously decreasing number of people.<sup>26</sup> Marketing strategies reinforce models of ownership and identitarian thinking underlying such neoliberal success stories. International broadsheet columnists, (European Union) government reports, and critical thinkers such as Franco Berardi or Charles Eisenstein all emphasise the increasing social isolation, loneliness and other health problems resulting from these capitalist economic practices.<sup>27</sup> We can fulfil our individual desires with near immediacy, but we are losing our capacity for direct healthy social interaction, our sociality, as the foundation of our existence. Socio-economic changes resulting from capitalism, initially offered greater wealth and upward social mobility for many, but now bring mostly increased job insecurity and income instability, recently exacerbated by the *Covid* pandemic. The drive to develop established technologies and novel artificial intelligence in advantageous ways, in order to offer relaxation and more free time to many people, seems more utopian than ever. Working nowadays still entails working ever more hours

25 I use the term 'alter-economies' with reference to the neurodiverse activities and explorations of the *Senselab*, headed by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, around what might become postcapitalist economic practices, following what Manning terms 'Finance at the Limit' (Manning 2020:289) and Massumi has written on as the *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value* (2018).

26 Klein 2008

27 Eisenstein 2011, Berardi 2018.

and has turned 'being stressed' into a global way of life. The gloomy outlook is heightened as these circumstances are becoming a continuous way of existence for an entire generation. Taken together with predictions on climate change and environmentally-rooted social conflict, these changes result in anxiety as a prime quality in the societies of today, manifesting especially as eco-anxiety or climate anxiety among children and teenagers.<sup>28</sup> Resultingly, many people have started to question relations between consumerism, possession, and identity based on social status, between wealth and health. Evidencing the sometimes-bizarre nature of humans, research has shown that even those who should be free of the above-mentioned fears, millionaires and billionaires, are assaulted by worries and anxieties around loss.<sup>29</sup> No amount of financial wealth and accumulated goods can protect you from fears around having to let go, of not being in control, of losing your personal autonomy.

The success of late capitalism is also based on the types of bodies it forms, and which correspondingly populate central business districts around the world. The *City of London*, for example, refers to London's central business district, a defined area of 1.12 square miles that is guarded by cast-iron dragon statues, the so-called *Griffins*. Walking through this area as a child and teenager, I was fascinated by the beautiful skyscraper architecture; the speed of everything; and how the predominantly men managed to look so important; the rush and purpose everybody seemed to have. People appeared to love and need it that way, building their lives and identities around working in the City, and especially around the unfathomable sums of money that can be made there. This dynamic replicates everywhere in the world, where the need to feel the rush of this mode of working in a vortex of energy dominates, sucking up human manna, spitting out triumphant winners or empty shells, permitting yet others to swim along with the tides, somehow. Central business districts come with incredibly high levels of (illegal) drug use such as cocaine. Everybody knows it, many people do it, and it is undoubtedly one of the greatest modern taboos. It has been suggested that many of those involved in the financial crisis of 2008/9 were high, as they took decisions affecting the lives and bank accounts of people in the UK, and around the

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- 28 Louv 2010, Cunsolo & Ellis 2018 [https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/20/half-of-child-psychiatrists-surveyed-say-patients-have-environment-anxiety?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/20/half-of-child-psychiatrists-surveyed-say-patients-have-environment-anxiety?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other); <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health>
- 29 [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/)

world.<sup>30</sup> So how can a much-loved place like the City of London, with all its thrills and joys, exist without having such a negative impact on those whose bodyings are not directly related?

There are many fresh ideas emerging around 'economy', which focus on social impact and community, rather than profit and individual ownership. Core innovations in this sector revolve around concepts of *Social Economy* or *Social Enterprise*, meaning that companies offer solutions to achieve not-for-profit aims and putting the planet before profit.<sup>31</sup> These ideas have given rise to novel legal company forms such as the *CiC* (Community Interest Company) introduced into UK law in 2005, the *Benefit Corporation* in the US, or the *gGmbH*, a non-profit company with limited liability under German law. Another key idea is that of the *Basic Income*, which means that a sum of money is given regularly and unconditionally, so without a means test or work requirement, to residents and citizens of a town, region or country.<sup>32</sup> The idea is being advanced in several of the industrialised nations, and political parties in Europe and further afield have adopted basic income into their party manifestos. Pilot projects testing the viability of a basic income have taken place in Namibia, Finland, and Scotland. The *Covid pandemic* has intensified the need for such alternative models, and variations on the pure basic income are currently being implemented, for example in Spain. A further and growing trend is that all types of companies, from SMEs (SME is short for Small to Medium-sized Enterprises) to large corporations, are seeking a new communion of business with *purpose*. For example, Google invited Buddhist spiritual leader *Thich Na Than* to act as advisor on developing 'mindful business'. However, Google's core purpose remains generating a profit and benefitting shareholders from the surplus, and this aim continues to outweigh any other considerations regarding Google's business practices. Google is only one of many examples highlighting that the majority of current approaches and attempts to doing things differently are merely scratching the surface and making things look nicer. Questions around how we can get deeper into topics such as (in)equality, sustainability, and (re)generative cultures remain vibrant. Maybe the crassest example of things gone wrong was developing

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30 [www.theguardian.com/business/shortcuts/2013/apr/15/cocaine-bankers-global-financial-crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/business/shortcuts/2013/apr/15/cocaine-bankers-global-financial-crisis)

31 [www.socialeconomy.eu.org](http://www.socialeconomy.eu.org); <https://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2012/may/15/myth-social-enterprise-profits-re-invest-community>

32 Werner 2008

the aim to be more 'social' into concepts of *sharing economy* and *collaborative consumption*.

For some time, the so-called *sharing economy* has been advocated as a more sustainable economic strategy than pure late capitalism. New technologies enable community-based online services, with the aim of people having mutual access to products or services, rather than having individual ownership over them.<sup>33</sup> These online platforms do focus on *peer-to-peer exchange*, meaning the exchange between persons presumed equal, but, however, not necessarily in order to share. Most of the platforms rather optimise the use of resources for profit, and the term sharing economy is now considered a misnomer by many. If there is a company or online platform acting as intermediary between consumers who don't actually know each other, and the consumers are paying to access someone else's services or goods for a defined period of time, then this is not considered to be sharing but a straightforward economic exchange.<sup>34</sup> For example, the best-known sharing economy platforms are *Airbnb* and *Uber*, which both started their existence with claims of sharing hospitality and travel mobility alternatives between equals, but nowadays clearly maximise profits for only some of the participants. In the case of *Airbnb*, cities like Berlin, Barcelona, and many others, have seen professional entrepreneurs buying up flats in city centres and turning these into short-term, highly profitable tourist lets via the *Airbnb* platform. This commercial activity results in soaring inner-city rents, forcing local residents to move to cheaper areas of the city, with knock-on social pressures and issues. City centres appear more like theme parks, and the original idea of private persons welcoming visitors into their homes got lost along the sharing economy way. At the outset, a central idea underlying the sharing economy model was that consumers would move beyond utilitarian profit thinking and focus on social values. The idea was that 'sharing' the excess capacity in goods and services would translate and lead to an exuberant growth of trust and social interactions. However, the sharing economy emerged and took force during a financial crisis, in times of need. In hindsight, it became clear that consumers were simply focused on lower costs and convenience; creating and maintaining social relationships with other participants on the online platforms was not their primary concern. It was not trust but sheer economic need or greed that led to people opening up their homes, or sharing car rides and other things with complete

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33 Rifkin 2000

34 [www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all](https://www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all)



strangers.<sup>35</sup> As sharing is still defined by writers on current economic models as ‘without profit’, it has been suggested to instead use the term ‘access economy’ to describe current economic practices of market-mediated ‘sharing’ such as with *AirBnb*.<sup>36</sup>

*Can platform technologies facilitating community-based online services, enable and promote values of social responsibility, accountability, and collaboration, which come before a derivative that we may still call economy?*

No writing on new economic (sharing) practices is complete without speaking more about the digital transformations rolling over, under and through human bodyings. On a hands-on level, we have the *Maker Culture* and the global network of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) *Fablabs*, which use the latest technologies to invent, 3D-print, and take DIY (Do-It-Yourself) to new levels. We can now independently download instructions for mobile phone cases or underwear from the Internet and 3D-print or otherwise ‘make’ them at home. On a less tangible and more ephemeral level, alternative currencies and cryptocurrencies such as *Bitcoin* as well as the platform technologies underlying *Blockchain*, propose and were initially dedicated to revolutionising global financial systems. The original idea behind *Blockchain* is that it allows users to ‘transact directly without any third-party intermediary’, meaning transacting from peer-to-peer and cutting out all the (greedy) middlemen, including the banks.<sup>37</sup> *Blockchain* was all the hype, but in a way similar to what we saw with the development of the (access) sharing economy outlined above, what has become clear is that *Blockchain* technologies do not focus primarily on peer-to-peer interaction and community building, but do continue to enable companies to do or offer the best deals in no way different from established commercial profit-oriented practices. One example concerns the daily lives of Puerto Ricans following the devastating Hurricane Maria of 2017. An award-winning online documentary from the *Washington Post* illustrates how one year later, island locals were still facing life without electricity, water, and decent transport; whereas members of the cryptocurrency movement, many from Silicon Valley, had moved to Puerto Rico following the hurricane in order to set up

35 [www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all](http://www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all)

36 Rifkin 2000

37 Swan 2015

‘Sol’, a ‘crypto utopia’.<sup>38</sup> One member of the crypto community referred to Hurricane Maria and the investment interest that has followed as “While it was really bad for the people of Puerto Rico, in the long term it’s a godsend if people look past that”.<sup>39</sup> In this situation, what was a continued and catastrophic state failure around life’s basic needs for locals, became a lucrative opportunity for members of the blockchain and cryptocurrency movement, enabled by that exact same state.

Economic models mirror and expound the socio-cultural values of their respective society and systemic context.<sup>40</sup> Current alternative economic ideas seem to circle around tensions between securities and freedoms, as most of us waiver between wanting as much autonomy and freedom as possible; and at the same time wanting and needing to be part of something bigger, to feel safe and secure. In that way, we are no different from Ivindo Baka, or the many other groups and cultures that have struggled with these issues during the course of human history. The potential of what technology allows for nowadays is simply incredible, but for example Blockchain is replicating existing late capitalist values.<sup>41</sup> It seems that with all the excitement around the latest apps, we are not inventing at a deeper level. We take huge strides forward – only to then saunter straight back to where we came from. These movement patterns are comparable to traditional circular or line dance practices, based on taking two steps forward, to immediately taking one step back. For the time being, no matter the technologies, we continuously enact the movement patterns we have followed for centuries. A deeper shifting-sliding-shaping towards *alter-economy* practices, goes hand in hand with a qualitative reshaping of values, as critical philosopher Brian Massumi closely outlines in his 99 *Theses on the Revaluation of Value*.<sup>42</sup> As Massumi writes, it is time to take back the concept of value from being predominantly used to make possible economic oppression. The call ‘is to revalue value, *beyond normativity* and standard judgment’, and ‘to *uncouple value from quantification*’ so that it can become

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38 [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/puerto-rico-life-without-power/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.ec784aac4dbb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/puerto-rico-life-without-power/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ec784aac4dbb)

39 [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html)

40 Massumi 2018

41 People who want to see an emphasis on social responsibility, community, collaboration and sharing developed *Holochain*, in order to avoid exactly the appropriation of new technologies and their promises of more equality by big industry players: <https://holochain.org>.

42 Massumi 2018

'irreducibly qualitative'.<sup>43</sup> Online platforms built around user reputation systems as much as the overall market-system are considered to be self-regulating. However, what matters in these markets and who earns money for which activity, is related to the value system of the decision-makers, which suggests that there is no such thing as market-neutrality.<sup>44</sup> In his assessment of capitalist economics, Massumi, who was central to developing a relational understanding of 'body' and bodily excess through the field of affect studies, emphasises how capitalist practices can (detrimentally) mould and harness the potentials of bodily more-than. Bringing together value with the vitality of life as a way of countering oppressive economic practices, he suggests to '*make qualitative excess a postcapitalist virtue - beyond the myth of equal exchange, the fairness of the market, and the rhetoric of commensuration*'.<sup>45</sup> As the waves of scandals around the misuse of *facebook* data rise and fall, we are just starting to appreciate how the *like*-button and anonymous market algorithms are affecting our personal lives and economic livelihoods. On the other hand, the desire for personal encounters still emerges as a key value in ideas around sharing. Attuning to this continued valuation of bodily sharing and the power potentials of bodily excess, ...

*which are the postcapitalist values we want to shift-slide towards? Could these values be moved-sensed together with a notion of sharing as the ongoing creation and maintenance of social relations?*

## Tensional Novelty: Beyond Scarcity-Abundance Binaries

The damaging influences of mass tourism on sensitive ecosystems evidence, as one example, that unbridled economic growth is not sustainable. The abundance of amazing places to visit has been eagerly consumed, and nowadays impressive landscapes with human infrastructure like *Macchu Picchu* or cities like Barcelona are showing extreme signs of wear and tear. Nevertheless, the belief in the capacity of favoured tourist sites to magically bounce back unscathed from any amount of pollution and destruction, is unfailing. One

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43 Massumi 2018: 1-2, emphasis in the original

44 Massumi 2015, Raworth 2017

45 Massumi 2018: 6, emphasis in the original

might say that this unshakable fascination, perception, or belief in abundance, is something we share with our hunter-forager ancestors.

Most hunter-gatherers consider themselves to be living in a world of abundance, and they think-perceive their worlds in terms of profusion. In the case of forest foragers, surrounding forest ecologies are seen as giving and plentiful. In the forests along the Ivindo and in other parts of Central Africa, there is a particular type of nut called *mengoum*. It is about the size of a table tennis ball, and the edible part is hidden inside a solid casing, so it takes effort and a good machete to free the nut from its outer layers. As you move through the forest during the day, you munch away at these delicious nuts and other forest delicacies. Imagine for a moment a similar experience you might know from your local (temperate) forests: the delicious taste of wild berries, maybe brambles or strawberries, which you have just picked, and one after the other, you're enjoying the taste of these sweet forest gifts. The first few times when I returned to the village Adjab and somebody mentioned food, I was surprised to find that I did not feel hungry. Walking through the forest, chatting away, observing plants and animal tracks, we had often eaten enough, 'consumed' what we needed as a group during a joint activity. Even more than with wild berries in (European) temperate forests, it was clear that walking through tropical forests, most of the time there is always something to nibble or chew on.

This abundance is part of how Baka and similar groups share the forest, perceived as an ecosystem with human and more-than-human beings and qualities.<sup>46</sup> The forest is a permanently becoming sociality, where Baka, all kinds of animals, plants, mycelia and other beings form living social relations. Baka sharing practices derive also from a strong faith in the ability of the forest to provide abundantly. Singing-dancing in resonance with this abundance, but without asking for anything in particular, is one way to communicate and 'wake up the forest' in a happy state.<sup>47</sup> Addressed in such a way, the forest will provide whatever is needed. Baka love abundance and they say that a lot of any kind of thing is good, *djoko*; a lot is power, a lot is potency. Most importantly, the presence of *bo dadi*, meaning lots of people, is essential to having a decent party, and having enough women bodying volume into polyphonic tunes.

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46 Lewis 2002

47 Turnbull 1987:93, Rouget & Buckner 2011:105

Such a belief in *abundance* contrasts with an equally strong concept of *lack* in modern economic thinking.<sup>48</sup> For example, NGOs working in environmental conservation or similar fields, look at the world through the eyes of what is lacking. Concepts of scarcity govern NGO worldviews, and to a certain extent this is necessary to acquire funding, but it also means that conservation NGOs introduced 'lack' to the Baka and other forest foragers.<sup>49</sup> Importantly, the concept of lack is intimately intertwined with the concept of profit. Creating a (perceived) lack or scarcity makes profit-making easier, true to the market dynamics of offer and demand.<sup>50</sup> Correspondingly, if there is no scarcity (of animals or products), then no profit can be made, or at least only a smaller profit. The Christian view of 'nature' as a wilderness to be subjugated and exploited, rather than of land as spiritual home and the source of all good things, as a giving environment, strongly plays into this dichotomy of abundance and lack.<sup>51</sup> In the mythology of the *Anishinaabe* people of the American Great Lakes region, as Robin Wall Kimmerer describes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the *Windigo* is the 'name for that within us which cares more for its own survival than for anything else'.<sup>52</sup> This 'monster of overconsumption' is strongest during winter, when hunger rages as the earth is covered by ice and snow. Nowadays, *Windigo* stories tell of insatiable multinationals, whose commercial practices fail to respect the world as one of giving, with which we do and must live in reciprocity. How environments and ecosystems are perceived or constructed as either abundant or lacking, has a direct impact on the how of the economic practices which are able to take place. Depending on the region of the world you live in, learning respect for the finiteness of resources and seasonal scarcity may be an important story-telling. Additionally, animal and plant species are disappearing from certain regions or going extinct - we are losing fellow beings - and biodiverse ecosystems will 'lack' these contributors in keeping the respective systems healthy.<sup>53</sup>

*How can we learn to relate and resonate differently with these intensities, with the shifting-sliding-shaping qualities of systemic abundance and boundaries? Can we bring to-*

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48 Lewis 2015

49 Lewis 2015

50 Sahlins 1968

51 Ingold 2000

52 Kimmerer 2015

53 European Environment Agency 2020

*gether the generative emergent ongoingness of sharing as a way of life with qualities of sensitively responding to tension and limits?*

### **Achieving Equality as a Myth**

About thirty years ago, fields such as *Ecological Economics* pioneered a systems approach to economics, aiming to address the interdependence and coevolution of (human) economies and (natural) ecosystems. Unfortunately, the field became dominated by a narrow micro-focus on 'ecosystem services, monetary valuation and conventional economics',<sup>54</sup> highlighting nevertheless, how capitalism itself is based on a fundamental tension of 'nature' perceived as both finite and infinite. Humans live, and in many places today just about survive, somewhere in the matrix of this tension between qualities of abundance and scarcity, between finite and infinite. Geologists tell us that the Earth has been around for more than for 4 billion years, so one can safely say that 'nature' has been going on for a rather long time. 'Nature' knows neither endless expansion or growth nor infinite decrease or de-growth, only adaptive cycles of these phenomena. In ecology and systems theory, for example, the term *panarchy* refers to systems of nature and/or humans as interlinked in continual adaptive cycles of *growth, accumulation, restructuring, and renewal*.<sup>55</sup> So,

*how can we bring together perspectives of abundance and scarcity into economic systems which transcend sectorial, institutional, and regional specificities?*

Since 2009, the concept of the *Planetary Boundaries* has enriched this discussion. 28 Earth scientists led by Johan Rockström and Will Steffen, analysed the *anthropogenic*, meaning man-made, pressures on Earth System, during the *Anthropocene*. Anthropocene refers to the current geological epoch as shaped by human activity.<sup>56</sup> Rockström and colleagues identified nine categories, the *Planetary Boundaries*, with which to gauge human impact and destruction on Earth System beyond the limits of which human demise is certain.<sup>57</sup> Challenging restrictive silo-thinking, the approach analyses the estimation of safe (economic) spaces for human development overall. Biodiversity or freshwater

54 Hagens 2020, Plumeccq 2014

55 Gunderson & Holling 2002, Lovelock 1979

56 Rockström et. al. 2009

57 Rockström et. al. 2009

cycles are two examples of the nine sector-transcending categories. Planetary boundaries and similar approaches serve as indicators of how contemporary ways of living will not sustain the human niche in Earth system, and are helpful in the effort to create awareness for these issues. Given current political and economic developments, however, humans, as apparently rational beings, are overstepping and not respecting the limits flagged by the various fields of Earth scientists.

A tasty step towards (re)generative futures within planetary boundaries are *Doughnut Economics*, as developed by Kate Raworth. As Raworth writes, the essence of the Doughnut is ‘a social foundation of well-being that no one should fall below, and an ecological ceiling of planetary pressure that we should not go beyond. Between the two lies a safe and just space for all’.<sup>58</sup> She critiques theories describing the economy as if it were ‘a stable, mechanical system’, emphasizing, by drawing also on systems theory, how it is far better understood as ‘a complex adaptive system, made up of interdependent humans in a dynamic living world’.<sup>59</sup> Beyond the myths of *rational economic man* and unlimited growth, Doughnut Economics underline moving towards a new shape of economics which requires building a system that meets all humanity’s needs without exhausting the planet.<sup>60</sup>

Calls to cut and redistribute the excessive wealth of the richest to invest in and support social goods such as affordable housing, universal healthcare, education, equality, and more recently basic income, have been strong since the earliest days of capitalism. Different areas of the world have given importance to such calls in different ways. Many are wilfully ignoring how human activities affect Earth System in order to continue pursuing short-term commercial profits. As things stand today, the focus cannot be merely on social freedoms and constraints; the debate unquestionably extends to considering more openly ecological concerns and ideological movements around abundance and scarcity. The Doughnut Economics approach recommends itself to appreciating adaptive cyclicities also by advocating to move away from the human obsession with equilibrium. However, as do many other economic textbooks and theories,<sup>61</sup> the references to hunter-gatherers underlying Doughnut Economics seem to insufficiently portray or theorise the di-

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58 Raworth 2017:29

59 Raworth 2017:243, 266

60 Raworth 2017:177, 208

61 For example, Dobelli 2011

versity of our ancestors ways of doing things. Thinking-perceiving together planetary boundaries, with the rich diversity of 'hunter-gatherer situations'<sup>62</sup>, with the contemporary requirement for a new shape of economics, opens novel paths of inquiry. Building also on Proposition One ...

*can we find spaces of encounter for thinking-perceiving together the intricate relations of economic needs and ways of bodying in the world? Can we join up capacities for institutional plasticity, with achieving equality as a myth, with sharing as ongoing processes of relating to human and more-than-human, in order to attune contemporary economic practices to larger seasonally adaptive cyclicities?*

The questions are grounded also in the notion to move beyond 'use' and 'output', to adopt modes not of 'finding' but rather of continuous shifting-sliding and moving-sensing, with emergence and aliveness. *Emergence* refers to the formation of collective self-organisation, in which the formation generates and follows its own rules of forming as well as its modes of connecting and organising. Emergence is an invitation to explore the unknown, allowing diverse ways of being, knowing, doing, relating to emerge through process. *Aliveness* adds to this how true wisdom and potential for shaping change arise in social organisations that enable and accord social value to ongoingness, allowing space and time for bodily excess and the wisdom of the 'extra' and more-than-human. Allowing for qualities of emergence and aliveness, which characterise also egalitarian systems, can be helpful in shaping our journeys towards ongoing processes of generating and maintaining which are no longer caught in the binary of abundance-scarcity. This further supports widening our human transactional understanding of how the world works, as advocated by Widlok, Massumi,<sup>63</sup> the international movement around *Regenerative Cultures*,<sup>64</sup> and here. However, you may have noticed that I have vari-ously put the 're' of regenerative in brackets, as moving beyond predominantly transactional thinking-doing, also involves leaving behind the idea that there is anything to 're'turn to. Moving-sensing emergent alive bodyings are never quite the same.

As we saw with the *Palaeolithic politics* outlined as part of Proposition One, the adaptation of human social organisations to whatever was best at the

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62 Widlok 2016, and as described in Proposition One.

63 Massumi 2018: 131

64 Wahl 2016



time, egalitarian or hierarchical, has always been possible.<sup>65</sup> So, if we take off the rose-tinted capitalist spectacles of limitless extraction and consumerism, and move-sense with the irreducibility of the 'qualitative excess', as Massumi would write, we hold the potential and the power to change the shape, quality and values of our current social organisations and derived economic practices. Learning from our egalitarian ancestors and contemporary egalitarian groups of today such as the Baka, we can come to appreciate that both political and economic equality, as promoted nowadays, have a strongly mythological quality. Such ideas do not correspond to the lived egalitarianism which has characterised much of human history. Egalitarian systems do not foster equality as a stable, enduring fact, as personal or group identity, or as moral harmony. Equality can never be 'achieved'! It must be continuously generated and maintained, through levelling mechanisms, which necessitate work and effort, and which are mostly entertaining, becoming very serious only when necessary. Equality, like the bodyings involved in creating it, is not a concept of fixture, but one of movement and ongoingness, of tension and resonance.<sup>66</sup>

### Socio-Ecological Modes of Economic Practice

One aspect of this tension-and-resonance, is how sharing ensures (re)distribution of goods at the same time as enabling and demanding the creation and maintenance of healthy, vibrant social relations. Another inspiring *what else* aspect is to think-perceive concepts of social and sharing economy truly as a richness in people equal to and beyond material goods, and to develop 'social economy' into including the more-than-human.

Maintaining a share in the continuity of social process includes both relations with humans and equally more-than-human beings and qualities. It is a sharing of the cyclicity of seasonal abundance and scarcity. In the temperate regions of Europe or Northern America, cyclicity is evidenced by picking berries in summer, or fearing the Windigo in winter, and even within the

65 Wengrow & Graeber 2015

66 Whether we think about equality or inequality, their maintenance is permanent work. As example of systems of inequality, we can take slavery in the Americas or concentration camps in South Africa, and how it took a tremendous amount of force to keep these systems going. Nowadays, the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal, for example, showed the (invisible) financial power needed to maintain the unequal power structures in the US.

perceived plenty of tropical forests, each delicacy has its season. Our socialities and those of our ancestors cannot be understood without attention to these larger cyclical intensities. Nested hunter-forager bodyings perceived, organised and evaluated ecosystemic information to adapt to changing circumstances. The impact of the Industrial Revolution, where ‘economic and technical abstraction conspired to remove the body from its sensual relationship with the environment’,<sup>67</sup> is exacerbated today by the globally operating algorithms of online platforms. The distance between our online and offline ecosystems (if we can even make that differentiation) and our (in)capacities to perceive, organise and evaluate information from those diverse ecosystems, is possibly growing faster than the exponential growth curves of Moore’s law. And yet, humans hold, as part of their microbial ecologies and cellular make-up, the memory and the potential to transform, to shape-shift-slide socio-economic systems towards equality and sharing as qualities which are never achieved, stabilised, finalised; but always remain as yet-to-come, ongoing, continuous, infinite, fractal, emerging processes. How can this type of knowledge become part of values and modes of adaptable social organisations for a future of humanity within planetary boundaries, towards something we might call *socio-ecological* modes of economic practices? As we ponder such complex challenges, we can begin by bodying forth not only socio-somatic, but eco-somatic tools and techniques. Such techniques would emerge from spaces of thinking-perceiving and generating novel capacities for the social inclusive of the more-than-human, from the middle of that dynamic universe of tensional responsiveness.

## What could The Future of Work mean?

Imagining human futures, there are two clear trends we cannot ignore: the changes in our planetary system and the changes to ‘work’ through automation and artificial intelligence. Neither of these have nicely predictable or quantifiable outcomes. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and non-human algorithms are making our worlds faster and (seemingly) more complex; be it the trading systems of global stock exchanges, or *facebook* news feeds. Automation has long revolutionised especially Fordist style production lines, and today robots are taking over mundane occupations such as filling the fridge as well

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67 Ellen 2017:62

as increasingly most of what we still label ‘work’. Not just jobs requiring hard labour from factory line employees, but professions from doctors to lawyers will be replaced by robots and artificial intelligence.<sup>68</sup> For example, in the US, in the first 10 years of the 21st century, nearly 90 percent of manufacturing jobs were lost to technological automation, with a predicted further 40 percent disappearing within the next 15 years.<sup>69</sup> The argument goes that new AI technologies will enable the majority of people to do what they want with their time and engage in lifelong learning. Working less and having more time for family, friends, and other interests, is surely a dream shared by many people around the world. This dream was part of what made ideas around the *Original Affluent Society* famous, whereby affluence in hunter-gatherers societies is understood not only as material wealth, but more importantly as wealth of time and quality of human relations.<sup>70</sup> More recently, the book *Sapiens* has again made these ideas accessible to a large audience, evidencing that most of the time a hunter-gatherer lifestyle is much more relaxed and certainly offers more ‘leisure time’ than that of people in highly industrialised nations.<sup>71</sup> However, in most contemporary societies, ‘work’ and employment are still what gives people and their lives meaning.

*How are people going to experience meaning if ‘work’ and most things related to it progressively disappear?*

The uncertainty around ‘work’ colours societal horizons, and, for example, *Microsoft* owner Bill Gates has advocated for a tax on the robots that take over the jobs.<sup>72</sup> Alternatively, basic income models have been suggested as buoys and buttresses for the rocky path ahead, with not only politicians worldwide, but even *Tesla* owner Elon Musk arguing in favour.<sup>73</sup> However, these approaches seem predominantly focused on economic uncertainties, giving little or no attention to the ‘socio’ part of socio-economics, and even less to intertwinings with socio-political dynamics relevant to creating and maintaining stable (eco)systems. In his last posts, physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking advocated wealth redistribution as the only way to stem the

68 <https://hbr.org/2016/10/robots-will-replace-doctors-lawyers-and-other-professionals>

69 PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018

70 Sahlins 1968

71 Harari 2015

72 [www.cnbc.com/2017/06/02/bill-gates-robot-tax-eu.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/02/bill-gates-robot-tax-eu.html)

73 [www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-universal-basic-income-2017-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-universal-basic-income-2017-2)

inequalities that come with technological advances, especially as the powers derived from these tech advances have become somewhat frozen in the hands of the GAFA tech elite (GAFA refers to the ‘Big Four’: *Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple*). Given how this power freezing worsens inequality, and acknowledging automation and AI as part of (human) daily lives, the tech imperative could become focused on the need to learn to shift-slide *with* algorithms and growing complexities. Environmentalist and futurist James Lovelock, famous for co-creating the *Gaia Theory*, argues that if we do not, the machines may know how to make good use of us. Lovelock suggests that AI machines will need organic life to keep the planet at a habitable temperature for (easily overheating) machines, so that human with all other (microbial) organisms may have no choice but to put some new magic into their bodying relations to ensure mutual survival.<sup>74</sup> From a current bodying perspective, ‘socio’ involves knowing how much personal information *facebook & Co* have, and how that feeds into *Surveillance Capitalism*.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the workings of the human body are still so little understood that machines just do not come close. Take for example the seemingly simple act of a robot walking. It took SONY many years to copy basic human steps, and it will take many more before true 3D-movement like that of dancing can be emulated by a machine.<sup>76</sup> Another example concerns automated vehicles driving in heavy snow. In such conditions, human drivers will drive in-between lanes, to avoid getting stuck in the ruts of the normal lanes, and hence drive more safely. Automated vehicles, on the other hand, stick to the prescribed lanes, as they have no common-sense response to snow. Blindly following their programming, they cannot adapt to unforeseen weather circumstances, thereby endangering human drivers. Devices or algorithms simply cannot truly copy or control human bodyings. Maybe it’s a question of ‘yet’, but for a long time to come, *Angst* energies could be focused on thinking-perceiving how to bring more sensorial awareness into how we relate and spend the ‘working day’, and to what we think of as ‘work’.

The proposition is to

**Redefine growing our capacities for the social  
inclusive of human and more-than-human  
as what we mean when we say ‘work’.**

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74 Lovelock 2019

75 Zuboff 2019

76 [www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press\\_Archive/200312/03-060E/](https://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press_Archive/200312/03-060E/)

This is not a romantic argument for ‘back to nature’. Many technical inventions are just fabulous, and I bet, there is no woman who would want to give up her washing machine, in order to go back to spending hours scrubbing clothes clean. The same goes for healthcare. Many Baka couples have lost children to illness and disease (in one case that I documented three children in four days), and no matter the differences in terms of livelihoods, the grief over losing a loved child is the same for parents everywhere. If Ivindo Baka could protect better the lives of their children through access to biotech healthcare in addition to traditional medicinal practices, they would. Overall, few people would want to give up the machinic and algorithmic niceties of life in order to return to the daily chores of how for example Baka supply for life’s basics. In neoliberal terms, the concern is how to reallocate the large amount of labour energy freed up through automation. A different way of phrasing and perceiving the situation would be to say that what we have erased for a large part, is the effort involved in what in demand-sharing practices concerns the material aspects of goods. Leaving aside planetary boundaries for a moment, getting food and ‘stuff’ is easy. What remains open, is a different appreciation of labour and ‘work’ as the ongoing process of building stable, reliable social relations (supermarkets still don’t sell love). This calls for techniques towards shaping and creating *alter-economies*, which lessen the effect of gaping inequalities and anthropogenic factors, and align humans with larger imperatives of coherence. Such techniques invite becoming tensionally responsive also in relation to ‘work’.

*Can we learn to un-separate social lives and economic livelihoods, to do away with notions of Work-Life Balance, because we are always in the process of negotiating relational dynamics?*

Such an open re-evaluation of what is ‘work’ could possibly challenge the successful grip of capitalism in maintaining the illusion that contemporary humans do not need to do this ‘work’ of deeply engaging with other beings and qualities. Moreover, it could give a different ring to what David Graeber has called *Bullshit Jobs*. The theory of *Bullshit Jobs* contends that there exist many meaningless jobs which cause societal harm, exactly because they are pointless.<sup>77</sup> Considered from a purely economic perspective, I certainly agree

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77 Graeber 2018

with Graeber about how the activities of, what he calls *flunkies*, *goons*, *duct tapers*, *box tickers*, and *taskmasters*, are mostly futile and destructive in the sense that they serve to keep the system running, but are devoid of any economic viability. Especially, *flunky jobs* are those that exist only or primarily to make someone else look or feel important, buttress up egos and in other ways give people a sense of purpose and status.<sup>78</sup> Another way to look at these Bullshit Jobs is that they are the most obvious examples of how the intricate intertwining of socio-economic and socio-political has been manipulated and pushed out of view in contemporary industrialised and high-tech societies. Can we not shift the bullshit quality of the Bullshit Jobs, if we give awareness to how what is going on, no matter which elaborate economic or political framework has been found for it, is simply humans relating? *Flunkies*, *goons*, *duct tapers*, *box tickers*, and *taskmasters* are predominantly involved in processes of giving other humans attention, or even love and affection. However, in most cases, they will consciously or unconsciously be under an *obligation* to do so. Recall here the shift in the theory of sharing, where previously sharing was considered as the *obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate*, and where a more fine-tuned perspective is to understand sharing as the *opportunity to request, return and let go*.<sup>79</sup> Imagine cracking the *obligations*, and shifting the potential of people in bullshit jobs into qualities and intensities of *opportunity* for requesting and returning attention, and for letting go when the moment is right.

*Can we imagine full awareness being given to how working is about the how of relating? How can such novel ways of attending and attuning to 'work', bring about a shifting-sliding towards (economic) futures grounded in generating and maintaining human capacities for the social in resonance with planetary boundaries?*

Such a shift would necessitate especially those deciding on internationally applicable economic regulations learning to move-sense from a different mode of being present on the planet they live on (aka doughnut rings). Contextual awareness, design thinking-perceiving and a transdisciplinary approach are grounding activities for a sensorial awareness of ecosystems and alternative modes of economic practices including more-than-human beings. An awareness where economy is always 'social', defined not by the striving for equality but for a shared ongoingness at the heart of socialities. Rather

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78 Graeber 2018:46

79 Widlok 2017

than separating between a 'normal' and a 'social' economy, bodying sensorial awareness becomes constitutive of and integral to business practices as much as law-making. Towards a world, where 'Earth has a seat at the boardroom table';<sup>80</sup> where concepts such as *Corporate Social Responsibility* and corporate accountability have become of a different quality; where we simply implemented new norms and laws which limit extractive profiteering. We made the company form of CiC, the Community Interest Company, the dominant legal form. We were able to do this, because we came to appreciate that the economy is not really about money; it is all about relating and enacting our values,<sup>81</sup> about energy flows, and visible and invisible vibrating resonances with what is around 'us' as nested ecosystems. We came to appreciate the different economic temporalities: the immediacy and finiteness of monetary exchange in daily life, and that of generating ongoing capacities for novelty and becoming more-than-humanly social as potentially infinite. We forgot to be scared of qualities of abundance, and welcomed the flows and tensionally resonant universes undulating in cycles and spirals of profusion and scarcity. Leaving behind our fears around limits, resulted in withdrawing the hold of marketing strategies over profitable, identitarian individuals. We learned that moving-sensing limitations is not about chastising each other with norms, rules, restrictions, and punishments. We absorbed how the best life comes through generating and sharing life with other beings, not through external force.<sup>82</sup> Sensing limits and limitations is knowing-perceiving exactly the tensional field resonating with qualities of lack, abundance and all other hues. Sensing-knowing when is the moment to move and act to create a new business relation, not because we as humans think it is the best moment, possibly driven by an egotistic individual purpose, but because it is the right moment, occasion, event inspired by a larger collective coherence and (planetary) intelligence. Can we as humans learn to not abuse the power that comes with such knowing which is equally a sensing in relation to others? Or are we only capable of this if we live in tropical regions, in immediate-return societies? Another way of phrasing the proposition around redefining 'work' is to say that the future of 'work' is the process of searching for intensities of ongoingness in social relations.

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80 This phrasing emerges from an ongoing discussion with lawyer and tree-lover Thea Connolly.

81 Masumi 2018

82 Widlok 2017:80

**‘Work’ can become the bodying awareness and attunement to learning what, where, and how are movements of shifting-sliding-shaping with qualities of tensional responsiveness.**

The response to this proposition lies not with corporate, top-down ‘innovation’. Both Baka demand-sharing and my later work with contemporary dancers highlight the importance of socio-somatic presence in generative processes. True creativity comes in these moments, when we merge with and move from the middle of the intelligence of the group we are in; and even with an intelligence larger than the group, involving the more-than, when we stop trying to plan. ‘Innovation’ can be understood as one of the semantic tropes which keeps capitalist dynamics firmly in place. With its individualist competitive focus, devoid of connecting-with group, let alone honouring planetary boundaries, the ‘innovation’ discourse prevents exactly the necessary changes it claims to initiate. ‘Innovation’ keeps people in a constant loop of breathlessness, precluding any appreciation and perspective around ongoingness. If tackling problems like climate change is more than rhetoric and keeping the relevant designated climate institutions busy, then the problems of trying to find adequate answers through planning and structured means have become painfully evident. Letting go of cognitive dominance in those moments of looking for (economic) alternatives, could mean activating more clearly socio-somatic dynamics of bodying together. Maybe, instead of innovation, we could say we are bodying novelty. *Novelty* meaning creative advance, in the terms of *Process Philosophy*, is a creativity which is ongoing, excessive and without ‘outcome’, is an *adventure* that can never be fixed and pinned down into workplans and milestones.<sup>83</sup> The adventure of bodying novelty, creativity, continuity, and change, entails doing the opposite of what productive capitalist individuals should: relaxing, singing, dancing, and aligning to the group of people you are co-present with, to enjoy each other and the more-than of the occasion, to share and celebrate right here and now the beauty and preciousness of the continuity of life.

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83 Whitehead 1978 [1929]:21