

The Making of Regenerative Culture

A Review of the third volume of Everyman's (published in 2137) *The Shift Towards Oikos: A Short History of the Twenty-First Century*. Commons Ebook, xxii+210 pp., 70 photographs and interactive illustrations, 68 hours of original footage, 15 maps, 40 reproductions of documents.

The third and final volume by the international collective of authors documenting the unravelling of the latter part of the twenty-first century (2069-2100) is yet another splendid accomplishment. It is richly embroidered with relevant illustrations, first-hand audio and video witness accounts and infographics characteristic of the time, original footage, and photographs. The *End of Growth* moves with ease between personal accounts of personalities such as Rob of the Elders, Charlotte of the Luxembourg Progressives and the Order of the Raven, more systemic views of policy and paradigms shifts, interweaving of historical footage with explanatory narrative and myths pertaining to the era under scrutiny, and analysis of documents of various digital or analogue archival materials.

Shifting Ground

While the paradoxes and utter limitations of the now defunct political and economic system had been apparent for a number of decades, the events that ultimately brought about the necessary paradigm shift in thinking and practice were not as catastrophic as collapse theorists and apologists of early 21st century economic orthodoxy had imagined.¹

Just as the collapse of the so-called communist bloc (late 20th century) and its consequences on people's economic and social lives had been difficult to predict, the events of 2025-2030 were remarkable and unprecedented, because they were largely driven by collectives that sought to unify theory and practice, in ways that drew on multiple traditions, including

non-Western ones. The use of open-source, transparent processes and heart-based intelligence were decisive elements in the unification of Technophile and Biophile factions, which in the end recognized their various strengths and convened to direct the course of action. This was the birth of the so-called Shifting Ground approach to politics and governance that put an end to 20th century political thinking and the kinds of alliances that it had formed, as they no longer served a common interest, and were often too imbued and distorted by a hunger for power and other individualistic, head-focused validation.

The End of Growth explores the dynamics involved in these complex international processes in a rather peculiar fashion, making sure that the formerly nationalist and supranationalist 'European' efforts at keeping up the old ideology of 'progress' and 'growth' through denial and the appropriation of what counted as 'realistic' are thoroughly understood, but also making very plain the desperate need for transcending this approach in the light of ever crazier politics of exclusion. Some examples are early 21st century migration politics and populist 'right-wing' appeals to the so-called 'national' level, policies of economic and political dispossession directed at the younger generations, and the hijacking of continued efforts at decolonisation of former territories by profit-prioritising corporations.

Oikos

The volume provides a splendid overview of the ways in which 20th century thinking and practice rife with fragmentation and division, transported into the changing cultural narrative and values of the 21st century, could no longer serve humanity. The

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rift caused by the act of separating the *polis* and the *oikos* is traced back to early modern times, and, to some degree, to the philosophers of Greek Antiquity. 20th century structures of political and economic governance were not aligned with planetary boundaries, and this fact became ever more obvious in the 21st century, as the population pressure of the wealthy – correlating closely with their ecological footprint – became ever more unbearable. Belittled and derided at first as the strange spawn of eccentrics, new takes on economic theory started to gain ground precisely due to the multiple crises abounding both in what were then thought of as the ‘developed’ as well as the ‘undeveloped’ areas of the world.

The current *oikos* that joins, in an interesting etymological return to its roots, the idea of *oikos* as ‘household’ and as ‘world’ or ‘ecological system’, is explained and analysed at length. Particular attention is paid to its first faltering steps, when it seemed far from obvious that things such as complementary currencies, time banks, and the principles of gifting and fair shares could be successfully integrated into economies of scale. As the 21st century drew on and as energy needs of the former ‘developed’ countries were progressively scaled down, it became clear that small-scale, human-powered, sustainably-sourced, cooperatively governed projects of food and energy production were the true wealth of humanity and the ecologies that it inhabited.

The characteristic old-order use of land as a separate, ‘dead’ resource to be exploited for human benefit that resulted in practices like state borders and national administration between the 17th and 21st centuries became, with deepening resource depletion and the manifold expressions of ecological ‘collateral damage’, ever more filled with anachronism as the decades passed. The volume details the destruction inherent in the old economic system became apparent in swathes of deforested areas to be used for palm oil extraction, filthy, bare craters and canyons eaten out of the earth’s bowels fuelled by the hunger for mineral resources, oceans brimming with plastic but devoid of wild fish and sea critters, but also, in the temperate area that I am writing from, increasingly out of joint seasons that proved a serious challenge for twentieth century fossil-fuel agriculture.

With a growing recognition that microorganisms, fungi and bacteria were invaluable participants in the life of the soil that had, for decades been sprayed and controlled by chemical assault, white humanity started to see the flaws in its history carved largely by anthropocentric and Eurocentric decision-making patterns. The volume also includes a close reading of how ecocide was finally, after a lot of struggle, re-

cognised alongside genocide as a crime against humanity in 2044. Some landscapes that were thought to be lost to life, were remediated through biological intervention, and flourished again, but there was no replacing of those beings that had become extinct in the Sixth Great Extinction era (2010-2050). The struggles of 21st century pioneers to create viable closed-loop agricultural systems owned and managed by communities are well documented through a solidly grounded analysis in terms of the philosophies that underpinned their projects as well as drawing on these collectives’ extensive documentation and sharing practices of those landscapes they turned productive and brimming with life under the shifting conditions of advanced climate change.

The Advent of A Culture of Regenerative Design

The mountains of waste generated by the discard culture of the 20th and early 21st centuries started to be a serious issue around 2015, when a landmark study was published and hit a nerve with engaged citizens in over 80 countries, where a simultaneous, playful, nonviolent uprising was organised in order to shift public opinion rapidly. The fact that Shifting Ground cohered around the topic of rubbish still serves today as a wicked old chestnut, but back then, it was an existential, pressing issue to resolve, and no laughing matter at all. Shifting Ground’s collective purpose to create a culture of regenerative design, one that takes seriously the theory and practice of systems design that, from the outset aims at improving the resource base, human wellbeing and equality of opportunity of every being involved, going beyond previous attempts at closing loops in industrial systems (such as, for example, cradle-to-cradle, industrial ecology).

By taking the idea on board that only living systems could endure and provide worthwhile habitats for humans and other beings, the industrial system and associated practices became obsolete before 2050. The diverse, culturally grounded practices of regenerative ecosystem design took its place, developing ever more functionally sound and truly sustainable architectural and organisational solutions to the myriad human conundrums. The demise of the defunct industrial system was most certainly not a single outcome of Shifting Ground’s appearance on the historical stage, but a confluence of many factors, including the dwindling of fossil fuels, and an accompanying realisation of the many ways in which human greed had widely exceeded human needs. ♦

1 For an account of the ills of the early twenty-first century, including rising inequalities, unfettered financial profit-seeking, the concentration of power in agri-food and energy corporations, widespread loss of wellbeing, widespread environmental crisis, see Volume 2.