Consuming passions

Sue Pritchard on the delicate balance that exists between food, farming and the countryside

David Nutt gives a scientist's perspective on drug consumption

Jeffrey Boakye explores the relationship between masculinity and grime music

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"WHEN WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS CONSUMERS, IT IS EASY TO BECOME PREOCCUPIED WITH PRICE, BUT WHEN WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS CITIZENS, OUR INTERESTS IN THE BROADER QUESTIONS BECOME CLEAR"

SUE PRITCHARD, PAGE 10

"FOR MANY, THE QUESTION OF EXCESS REMAINS AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT"

VIKKI HEYWOOD

For much of the 20th and 21st centuries mass consumption has been synonymous with progress, individual liberty and healthy economies. Consumerism has been embraced not just as the engine of growth but also as a form of self-expression, identity and reinvention.

But consumption has downsides, and today we are confronted with those more forcefully than ever. While we are now able to purchase goods at the click of a button and have them delivered to our doors from around the world, developments in science and technology also mean we are more aware than ever of the effects of our appetites. Social media campaigns rapidly spread information about everything from the damage alcohol can have on our health and the impact of plastics on our oceans, to exploitation of workers within retailers' supply chains.

As we wake up to the effects of our habits, the question of how we can balance the competing needs of economic growth, individual wellbeing and the environment becomes ever more urgent.

The RSA's Food, Farming and Countryside Commission is approaching this question by exploring how we can create a safe, secure and sustainable food and farming system alongside a flourishing rural economy. In this edition the head of our commission, Sue Pritchard, highlights the RSA's long history of tackling these intractable problems and argues that by applying system thinking and engaging the public we will be better placed to understand the challenge and find practical solutions. Sue considers that incidental 'side effects' such as

pollution and soil degradation are often the direct consequences of our own actions.

Society today must also learn to responsibly manage the waste that our disposable culture creates. This is the subject of a piece by the RSA's Sevra Davis, who explores how designers are using their creative talents to engender more sustainable patterns of consumption.

James Williams' article promotes the lessons that the technology sector is learning. His piece is an urgent call for us to comprehend how shifts in our behaviour are undermining democracy. Another plea for rationality comes from former government adviser and professor of neuropsychopharmacology David Nutt. David makes the case for an evidence-based drugs policy and details his research, which is helping to push the boundaries of our knowledge in the workings of the brain.

The car is perhaps the ultimate symbol of consumption, an emblem both of freedom and mass production. But, as Tim Dant explains, with the onset of new technologies, our relationship with cars is about to fundamentally change.

For many, the question of excess remains an abstract concept, with little recognition of how it is influenced by our own life choices. New technologies can be a solution, but also a source of instability. Matthew Taylor explains that progressives must respond to the discontent that is being felt throughout the west by grasping the full scale of the challenge facing society. To create hope for the future, we must develop a programme of reform that encompasses democracy, the welfare state and the market, and that directs technology for human ends. This is a call that we will respond to in greater detail in the next edition of the journal. ■

WORK

ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Economic security will be a major theme in 2018 for the RSA, which has just launched a programme of work on the issue. A series of reports will be used as a springboard for new policy experiments and interventions, including a Future Work Centre, further proposals on basic income, interventions on the future of lifelong learning and the development of our inclusive growth work.

In the first piece of analysis, *Addressing Economic Insecurity through Public Policy*, published in January in partnership with Nottingham Civic Exchange, the RSA argues that tackling economic insecurity should be a priority for policymakers.

In the world's richest nations, the economic challenges of the early 20th century, culminating in the Great Depression, were widely countered by the creation of new social security and national insurance programmes to protect living standards from the impact of unemployment, ill health and old age. In the 21st century, the period of economic restructuring that followed the 2007–08 financial crisis has delivered aggregate economic growth and rising employment

rates. But translating that into rising levels of economic security has been challenging, as the RSA's Inclusive Growth Commission outlined in early 2017.

The RSA's new report shows that this is because the historical building blocks of economic security – jobs, housing and the welfare state – are being fundamentally reshaped as sources of insecurity. In 2018, the report argues, 10 years after the crash and with significant political upheaval, those shaping the future of policy and public services must orient their work to addressing economic insecurity.

Launched at Nottingham Trent University, the report sets out four key implications of reframing policy around an economic insecurity goal.

First, insecurity should be measured at household level because consumption decisions, expenditure and material wealth are often shared at household level, hence more young people living with their parents for longer. Second, anxieties about economic security relate to how earnings translate into living standards. This is not only about the cost of living, but quality of

life. Third, related to this, it is crucial that we look at how people achieve (or do not achieve) economic security across the life course, how people progress through their careers over time and how wealth accumulates over generations (often through housing). Fourth, as RSA senior researcher Atif Shafique explains, "perhaps the most powerful consequence of reframing policy around insecurity is that the economic, fiscal, social and health impacts of subjective, felt insecurity are just as, if not more potent than, the effects of objective insecurity and material deprivation".

Meanwhile, the RSA has published research outlining seven portraits of modern work. *Thriving, striving or just about surviving?* attempts to address these questions by understanding how economic insecurity appears in different forms across the labour market.

▪ *To read* Addressing Economic Insecurity through Public Policy *in full, visit www.thersa.org/economic-insecurity. To read* Thriving, striving or just about surviving? *visit www.thersa.org/modern-work-uk*

IMAGES: ISTOCK, KEARA STEWART

CREATIVITY IN ADOLESCENCE

A new RSA programme will explore how young people could be supported to use creativity in the service of their communities.

Research by neuroscientists, psychologists and psychiatrists agrees that pre-teenage children lack the foundations for creative exploration: the capacity to imagine how things could be, not simply accepting them for what they are. However, the development of creative exploration combines powerfully during adolescence with an increased drive for reward and a propensity to take risks.

Supported by the Templeton Religion Trust and being undertaken in partnership with the University of Winchester's Centre for Real-World Learning, the research will investigate how young people might capitalise on these uniquely creative adolescent years for wider social benefits.

The programme speaks to the RSA's longstanding commitment to ensuring that every human has the power to turn their ideas into action for the greater good of society, and to engaging Fellows.

Fellows can get involved by recommending groups of adolescents (aged 14–18) to be part of the research. We are interested in working both with young people who are already highly engaged in making a change in their communities and those who have never participated in social action before. In particular, the RSA wants to reach young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who risk being under-represented in research on social action.

The project's early findings will be released in May 2018, with a final paper including recommendations to policymakers and practitioners published in the autumn.

To get involved, contact senior researcher Laura Partridge at laura.partridge@rsa.org.uk

SEX EDUCATION

A 'verbatim' play is challenging attitudes towards sex and encouraging people to discuss the topic openly. *The Talk,* by RSA Fellow Neela Doležalová, recreates real-life conversations about sex, which have been drawn from interviews with people across a wide age range, from those in their teens to nonagenarians.

When asked how they learnt about sex, many of the participants mentioned pornography. For young people today, the consumption of online pornography might be chosen, accidental or imposed. Over half of 11- to 16-year-olds have viewed porn, with younger children and girls more likely to report being upset by the content, according to NSPCC research.

Despite a growing independent feminist and ethical porn sector, most mainstream porn provides poor models for consent and safe sex. Additionally, the often male directorial gaze means female pleasure remains, at best, a weak subplot.

Porn is performance, yet it affects young people's ideas about the realities of sex, pleasure and body image. "The notion of porn as a blueprint for sexual expression needs to be challenged without 'othering' any particular emotional response," says Neela.

It is impossible to completely control what young people access online, but it is possible to give them the skills to make informed choices, and the space to ask questions. Educational theatre, such as *The Talk*, can open up such spaces. And verbatim theatre is uniquely placed to recreate conversations on stage that should be happening in public.

The Talk has been written for adult audiences to ensure discussions about relationship and sex education do not stop with their formal education. But Neela will also be creating shows with, and for, young people following an UnLtd Award that she recently received.

For more information, contact Neela on Twitter: @_dolezalova

2017 HIGHLIGHTS

In February the RSA's Trustee Board and Executive Team discussed and agreed the Strategic Plan for 2018–20, with a focus on developing the Society's role as a convener of change. This work builds on the RSA's successes in 2017:

- We held 100 events with over 10,000 attendees, had 590,000 YouTube subscribers and online views from 143 countries worldwide.
- We had 14m views for RSA Shorts and more than 500m minutes of RSA Animate watch time.
- There were more than 3.5m visits to our website and RSA posts were seen over 10m times on Facebook and Twitter.
- More than 1m podcast plays.
- 10,000 hits in print and broadcast media.
- We extended the reach of and strengthened our public events, all of which are now streamed live on Facebook.
- RSA blogs were read 330,000 times and *RSA Journal* was awarded four 'awards of excellence' by the Institute of Internal Communications (IoIC).

Increasing our impact
The RSA's charitable funds were allocated to the following activities: 11.6% lectures and events; 28.5% Fellowship engagement and 59.9% research and action projects. We published 25 major reports covering our three main areas of work: Creative Learning and Development; Economy, Enterprise and Manufacturing; and Public Services and Communities. The RSA's influential work on artificial intelligence and robotics included the publication of *The Age of Automation.* Our *Ideal School Exhibition* outlined a vision for schooling that focused on educating "the head, hand and the heart" of all our young people. And the New Futures Network supported prison leaders to innovate and create new partners for rehabilitation, which has now been taken forward by the Ministry of Justice.

Convening for change
With more local networks developed than ever before, we have now expanded our support for collaboration. This includes RSA Transform, a new programme for Fellow-led ventures, and the relaunch of the RSA's crowdfunding offer, bringing in expertise from our new partners Spacehive.

Our work was supported by 29,000 Fellows from over 100 different countries. And 260 engagement events were held around the world. Of the Fellows who visited RSA House, 48% were from outside London.
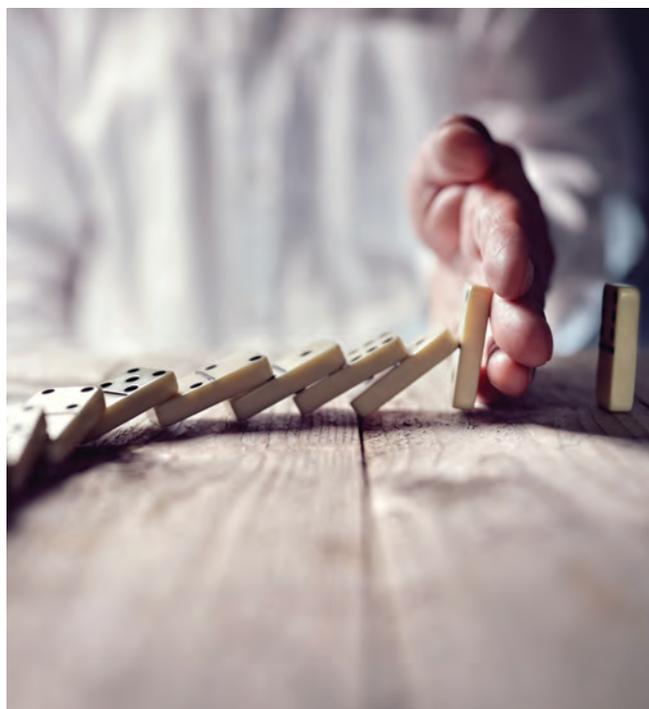
INCOME

THE YEAR OF UBI

The RSA has set out how a universal basic opportunity fund – an unconditional one-off payment to help workers meet the challenges of automation – could pave the way for a universal basic income (UBI). UBI, also known as citizen's income, is increasingly the subject of mainstream debate as the challenges of automation and the gig economy transform the world of work. Over the last few years, the RSA has contributed to this discussion with the aim of developing the concept from a utopian dream to a policy reality. The RSA's analysis, published in the discussion paper *Pathways to a Basic Income,* suggests that UBI could be a pro-good work rather than post-work intervention (as some critics argue). Underpinning all our work in this area is the aim of shifting the debate from whether UBI is a good idea or not, to what model might help meet the challenges we are going to face in the 2020s.

To this end, in Scotland, we are working closely with four local authorities and the Scottish government to explore the design of a UBI pilot aiming to support people into work. Under the pilot we are defining work as employment, caring or creative development. In the north west of England, our work with housing cooperative Rochdale Boroughwide Housing will explore how UBI could unlock the potential of tenants, empowering residents to take more control of their lives.

We are keen to work with Fellows and potential partners on these projects and more. To discuss, please get in touch with Anthony Painter at anthony.painter@rsa.org.uk

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Unmissable online highlights from a packed public events season, selected by the curating team for your viewing pleasure!

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The refugee crisis is a bellwether for how we deal with other crises in our society, argues **David Miliband**, CEO and president of the International Rescue Committee. Shattering some commonly held myths about refugees, David provides a challenge for the west: return to the humanitarian roots laid out in the Atlantic Charter.

Watch now: http://bit.ly/2DyhBrj
#RSArescue

What drives you to achieve goals? External expectations? Your own inner critic? Nothing much at all? Bestselling author and podcasting sensation **Gretchen Rubin** explains her 'Four Tendencies' matrix, and reveals that identifying your type can help you overcome inertia, rebelliousness and lack of motivation.

Watch now: http://bit.ly/2Ffz2xB
#RSAFour

The west tends to believe it is on a relentless march towards progress and widespread liberal values, but is democracy more fragile than we think? Award-winning novelist, public intellectual and political commentator **Elif Shafak** offers cautionary advice about the provisional nature of democracy in the west and the rise of populism.

Watch now: http://bit.ly/2h7fkxj
#RSAShafak

What responsibilities do technology companies have to uphold the public interest and engage with the people they serve? How can we ensure tech contributes to economic and social justice around the world? **Mustafa Suleyman**, co-founder and head of applied AI at DeepMind, answers these questions and more in the annual President's Lecture address.

Watch now: http://bit.ly/2FexNyy
#RSATech

FOOD, FARMING AND COUNTRYSIDE

A fragile balance exists between what we eat, the rural economy and the natural environment, but by choosing to look at them in isolation, we fail to see the vulnerabilities of the system

by Sue Pritchard
🐦 *@suepritch*

SUE PRITCHARD IS DIRECTOR OF THE RSA'S FOOD, FARMING AND COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

I t takes a certain sort of far-sighted and generous commitment to the future to plant a stand of oaks. Two hundred and sixty years ago, the newly formed RSA awarded its first Premiums to two agricultural projects: planting 23 acres of oak trees (so that the UK could have a secure supply of timber for warships) and an irrigation system to manage flooding in low-lying areas. While the need for timber warships has somewhat dissipated now those oak trees are reaching maturity, the importance of planting new broad-leaved and indigenous trees is, once again, understood.

The RSA has a rich history of focusing on the world's intractable problems. Prue Leith's work, when she was chair of the RSA (1995-97), helped establish the charity Focus on Food, which sends 'kitchen' buses round the country to teach children how to cook and teachers how to teach cooking. It is eye-catching and inspiring. Ironically, today we spend less time cooking at home, while obsessively watching cooking programmes.

Fast-forward to November 2017 and the RSA launched the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission. Its work touches profoundly important parts of our lives: what and how we eat, how we produce our food and the health of the landscapes that sustain us in so many other ways. We all have a stake in these perennial questions. And as the UK negotiates its exit from the EU, it is important that we ask them again. The RSA's history of working across disciplines and interests enables us to take a long and broad view. So what can we learn from centuries of effort to bring fresh thinking to the big challenges of the day?

One key insight is now embedded in the RSA's practices: 'thinking in systems'. Complex systems are characterised

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"FOR DECADES, INDUSTRIALISED FARMING PRACTICES HAVE TREATED SOIL INSTRUMENTALLY"

by many interconnections and relationships; they are emergent, adaptive and often unpredictable. To illustrate, consider the honey fungus, rather dreaded by urban gardeners for its persistence in places it is not wanted. But the honey fungus is rather interesting. Scientists in US national parks have discovered that the mycelia of the honey fungus (the fine white fibres) extend not a few metres, but kilometres under the forest floor, making it the largest living organism on the planet. It is able to connect, communicate and coordinate itself across enormous distances. The fruiting bodies – the fungus we can see – monitor and evaluate the biochemistry of the ecosystem where it sits; and, when it notices that this part of the forest needs more (or less) of a particular nutrient, it sends for it, along the microscopic fibres, to another part of the forest, transporting what it needs to where it is needed. This extraordinary story is fascinating both as a metaphor for complex systems – showing us how they operate in ways we often cannot see, let alone understand – and as a literal description of how we have come to understand more about healthy soil ecosystems.

THE SOIL FROM UNDER US

For decades, increasingly industrialised farming practices have treated soil instrumentally, consuming its capacity for growing on a colossal scale. More and more land has been brought into production through forest clearance, ploughing and tilling, spraying and fertilising, largely to grow monoculture crops in intensive systems. New scientific insights tell us that such practices have had far-reaching, unintended, but nevertheless disastrous, consequences, depleting the structures and quality of the soils. As secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs Michael Gove said in his speech to the Sustainable Soils Alliance, "we are only 30–40 years away from the fundamental eradication of soil fertility in some parts of the UK". Decades of intensive agriculture, with two or even three cycles a year of ploughing, planting and cropping, applying fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides for greater yields, have had the opposite effect than was intended. The latest scientific insight into the relationships between roots, fungi and soil – mycorrhizal associations – reveals a new way of looking at soil. Until very recently, we simply did not see or understand, let alone value, what was really going on in the soil subsystem, how its structures and components work together to provide the nourishment needed for the crops to grow.

Thinking in systems means we have to adjust the quality of our attention. It is a feature of western thought that we tend to notice objects first, rather than the relationships between objects. And yet it is precisely in noticing and appreciating this 'relational space' that we learn more about what works and why, what needs to be supported and amplified, and what needs to be reduced or changed.

Applying 'thinking in systems' to how food and farming have changed over generations reveals further stories of the unforeseen consequences of strategies that were set and policies pursued without proper attention to their relational spaces and wider implications. We now spend less on food as a proportion of our household income than we ever have. We have a wider range of products on the shop shelves than we have ever known, from coffee to quinoa. Despite this, diet-related illnesses are rising dramatically; food poverty is on the rise; producers earn less for growing what we eat; and where we can go to buy food is concentrated in fewer, bigger stores.

The Sustainable Food Trust's November 2017 *The Hidden Cost of UK Food* report sets out in detail the serious and far-reaching implications of what happens when you think and work in silos. It states clearly and unequivocally that for every £1 consumers spend on food, another £1 is spent by us as taxpayers on additional costs, incurred by society through the production and consumption of that food, largely in impacts on the natural environment (50p) and in effects on the public's health (37p). In cash terms, this means we spend £44bn a year dealing with food-related health costs; and £60bn on environmental impacts. The cost to the public's health is startling: for the first time people in wealthy countries are becoming unhealthier because the very thing that is supposed to nourish and sustain us is instead damaging us (see page 44).

The public health picture alone should be cause for outcry. It is not just the cost to the NHS in treating avoidable conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers, but also the impact on the quality of people's lives. While the report identifies over £22bn in direct and indirect costs for treating these particular health conditions and tooth decay, it points out that we have no meaningful evidence to calculate the true cost to society; in days of work lost, increased care costs and mental health effects.

All of this does not come about simply because consumers are making poor choices. Changes in the nutritional quality of the food we eat is a critical influence. The 'cheaper food' narrative has pervaded the discourse about what we eat. In the past 20 years, every major supermarket has campaigned on price and value to some extent or another. But there is little profit to be made in today's complex supply chains from simple, high-quality, unprocessed food. Rather, food system investment goes into increasingly elaborate products, with as much spent on marketing as the ingredients that go into them. They use largely cheap, high-calorie ingredients, with poorer nutritional value, relying on sugar, salt and flavourings to provide the taste promised. As one food justice activist said: "We are being poisoned for profit."

However, just as thinking in systems enables us to see interconnections and interdependencies between otherwise siloed topics, it also stops us arriving at simplistic explanations or even having single villains to blame. Closer scrutiny of changes in farming practices reveals similarly complex patterns. Farms are

becoming larger. The average age of farmers – currently 59 – is getting higher. Young entrants to farming are increasingly rare; barriers to entry, particularly the cost of land, are high. For all the talk of excessive farm subsidies, they account for just 2.5p in that additional £1 spent by taxpayers, or £3bn in cash terms. The pressure on farmers to scale up and intensify is strong, requiring investment in increasingly specialist equipment. Since we joined the European Union in the 1970s, the industrialisation mindset has driven growth in the farm sector towards increased specialisation, fragmentation and concentration. This has resulted in large, monoculture holdings, with highly specialised producers growing fewer, less diverse varieties of crops and livestock. Capital and resources have been concentrated into fewer hands, from the global commodity traders to agrichemical companies, supermarkets and landowners.

The foods we consume are produced by farmers for globalised markets, governed by international regulations, traded by international brokers, manufactured by globalised food processers and sold by multinational retailers. These centralising and consolidating pressures at the intersection of food production, processing and retailing – in which regions, even whole countries, differentiate and specialise in particular markets in the name of efficiency – combine to create a perfect storm of fragile, insecure, unsustainable social, economic and environmental ecosystems.

What does this mean in the UK? While we are blessed with a climate and landscape that can grow a wide range of nutritious food for home consumption, we are growing a narrower range of food and importing more of what we could otherwise grow here. In Wales, for example, twice as much land was producing vegetables 40 years ago compared with today. Defra's trade statistics show we now grow just 52% of the food we consume in the UK; about 29% comes from the EU and the remaining 19% comes from the rest of the world, including Africa, Asia and the Americas. We import over 80% of the fruit we consume, and 45% of the fresh vegetables, including 23% of the potatoes. Transporting food across the globe brings additional costs related to fuel and refrigerants, and it adds to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, as well as leaving us vulnerable to changing global conditions – from climate change through to changes to trade agreements.

The distance between consumers and where our food is grown means that we do not witness the environmental
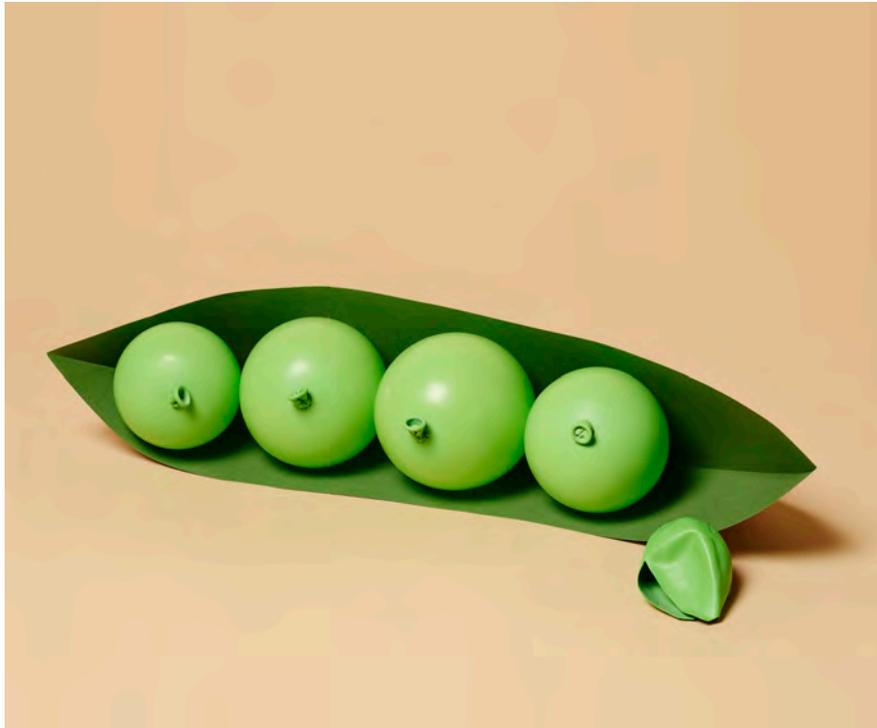
consequences of our eating habits. *The Hidden Cost of UK Food* highlights the case of palm oil, which is the most widely used vegetable oil in the world, despite being associated with deforestation, habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity and the social and ethical costs of land acquisition. As the Food Ethics Council makes plain: "We need to ask 'who owns our food system?' It's clear that market and political power is concentrated in the hands of a few organisations whose dealings along the supply chain are opaque to say the least, and who are not held accountable for their actions."

At the other end of the production-consumption spectrum, WRAP estimates that 7.3m tonnes of food is wasted annually in the UK (see page 16).

STEWARDING THE LAND

Thinking about food and farming through the lens of systems brings us to another current RSA area of research: the future of work. The RSA's programme is underpinned by three questions essential to the considerations for a flourishing rural economy. What does work look like today? What do we want work to look like tomorrow? And how can we use policy and practice to realise that vision? The RSA's *Good Gigs* report estimates there are 1.1 million people in Britain's 'gig' economy. Online platforms have increasingly been used to source small, sometimes on-demand, jobs over the past five years. However, a version of the gig economy has always been a feature of country work. While this is due in part to the seasonality of rural occupations, it also reflects the nature of

small communities, where there are many jobs to do and often not enough people (or a big enough market) to choose to specialise. So diversification, cooperation and collaboration works best.

Before extensive mechanisation (and where small and medium farms still predominate), the most efficient way to farm was to collaborate by sharing kit and labour, assisting neighbours when they need it, knowing that they would repay the favour. During the winter, you might be coppicing or hedge-laying; during the spring, lambing or planting; and in the autumn, harvesting. This is quite different from the industrialised practice of increasing fragmentation, differentiation and specialisation. It is also more resilient and more sustainable. People who can turn their hands to many things in company with others are likely to thrive.

In his 1990 book *Human Scale*, author Kirkpatrick Sale puts it this way: "I want to complexify, not simplify! It is the modern economy which is simple: whole nations given over to a single culture; cities to a single industry; farms to a single crop; factories to single product; people to single jobs; jobs to a single motion." Human systems flourish when they diversify. When people learn many skills, can do many jobs and live many roles, they become capable of adapting to changing circumstances. This is what it means to live a rich and textured life.

This last point is reinforced by the Campaign to Protect Rural England in its August 2016 report *New Model Farming*: "To forge a more resilient future, the government should encourage a mix of farms that produce different foods for local people and varied, thriving landscapes ... A more diverse sector – in

"OUR ENVIRONMENT HAS BORNE THE BRUNT OF CHANGES TO FOOD AND FARMING PRACTICES"

demographics, farm size and production – offers rewards beyond food: beautiful landscapes, clean water, abundant wildlife, better flood management and improved carbon storage." Environmental thinker David Fleming calls this the resilience of multifaceted local economies.

This last quote perfectly illustrates thinking in systems; seeing systems 'nested' in systems, deeply interdependent and connected. Food and farming systems nest ineluctably in the natural environment. However, our environment has borne the brunt of changes to food and farming practices, reflected in the depletion of what we now call 'natural capital'; the stock of natural resources such as air, water, soil, minerals, forests, flora and fauna. Also in the effects of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to global warming and climate change; pollution of watercourses and marine ecosystems; loss of biodiversity, including the dramatic loss of essential pollinators; pesticide, herbicide and antimicrobial resistances; and degraded soils unable to sustain productivity. As we noted earlier, the cost to the taxpayer to manage or mitigate these effects on the environment is huge.

NO SIDE EFFECTS

Many of the examples highlighted here shine a light on what economists call 'externalities': those things that are normally outside of their risk-benefit calculations, and not considered by companies when they set pricing and profit margins. But as economist Kate Raworth puts it in *Doughnut Economics*, what conventional economists call 'externalities' are in fact the "incidental effects felt by people not involved in the transactions that produced them – like toxic effluent down river of a polluting factory, or fumes inhaled by people next to roads". She emphasises the point by quoting MIT management professor John Sterman: "There are no 'side effects' – just effects," he says, the very notion of side effects is "a sign that the boundaries of our mental models are too narrow, or our time horizons too short".

And so we get to the elephant in the room; we must face up to the moribund, even destructive economic paradigm that tacitly underpins policy debates. What we count and how we count it is a political choice. A choice made about what we value, how we share resources, who takes the risks and the rewards and, ultimately, whose voices count. Our obsession with relentless economic growth regardless of its impact on the planet's resources has been challenged by a new generation of economists, from Donella Meadows to Johan Rockström, Kate Raworth and Tim Jackson, among others. Back in 1972, Meadows was considered 'too radical' when she produced her *Limits to Growth* report. But

the questions she asked then have become more pressing: "growth for what, and why, and for whom, and who pays the cost, and how much is enough…?"

As David Fleming summarises in *Surviving the Future* (2016): "The claim that centralised, industrialised agriculture is the only way of feeding a large population is about as scientific as a belief in creationism – and far more damaging. The real task – to maintain a secure supply of quality, non-poisonous food and sustain an environment capable of supporting it – has been buried by an industry weighed down with [other] preoccupations."

And so, as we negotiate our departure from the European Union, these deep questions are freshly illuminated. When we think of ourselves as consumers, it is easy to become preoccupied with price, but when we think of ourselves as citizens, our interests and responsibilities to consider the broader questions become clear. How are we, as citizens, meant to respond to them in all their nuanced, interconnected complexities? How should we frame the questions, let alone construct the path towards fresh solutions? With the rise of the turbulent forces shaping our public conversations today – a disruptive, populist and tribal discourse – how can we hope to respond to these 'wicked issues' for which there is no route map and no simple answer?

Creating the conditions for new civic conversations is central to the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's work. The antidote to siloed and fragmented thinking (and policymaking) lies in investing in local and horizontal, as well as vertical, structures, to connect people across the identity politics that characterises today's debates. What nourishes and sustains resilient social systems are precisely the same conditions that characterise healthy natural systems. I am coming to the view that there are three critical components to leading change: maximising diversity, creating the conditions for people to meet differently, and public learning. At its most simple, this means bringing people together from different places in society, in more engaging and innovative 'architectures for learning' to tackle the challenges we face, for mutual learning and creative problem-solving. The Commission's work is squarely in service of a safe, secure, sustainable food and farming system and a flourishing rural economy for all.

Where we put our attention determines what we see. On the face of it, it takes about four months to grow a good-sized beetroot from seed. But a good beetroot will only grow well in good soil. And it takes at least 200 years to make one inch of decent topsoil. If we want to carry on growing good beetroots (and other things) in the UK, in the post-Brexit future, understanding more about this simple fact may help. ■

A HEAVY PRICE

We are all guilty of letting food go off in the fridge, but the true cost of this extends beyond our pockets

More than half of people in the UK believe they waste hardly any food. Yet figures from the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimate that in 2015 households threw away 4.4m tonnes of food that could have been eaten. Aside from the economic inefficiency, this habit has a significant environmental impact. The avoidable food waste is associated with emissions equivalent to one in four cars on the UK's roads. Food production is also linked to deforestation, ecosystem degradation and natural resource depletion, particularly water. And as the world's population grows, we will need to feed more people with the same resources.

In the UK, solutions to tackle food waste include better information at the point of sale about commonly wasted foods, digital recipe apps, portioning guidelines on products and engaging retailers in informing the public about preventative behaviours. ■

Household food waste in the UK

4.4m tonnes
avoidable

1.3m tonnes
possibly avoidable

1.6m tonnes
unavoidable

Edible food thrown away by UK households in 2015 was worth

£13bn

That avoidable food waste was associated with

19m tonnes CO_2e*

MIND ALTERING

Professor David Nutt researches drugs that affect the brain and conditions such as addiction. Sacked as the government's chief drugs adviser in 2009 for saying cannabis was less harmful than alcohol, he speaks to commissioning editor Rachel O'Brien about society's relationship with drug consumption

🐦 *@ProfDavidNutt*

O'BRIEN: It seems that human beings have always sought mind-altering substances, but there are particular moral concerns around the consumption of drugs; a sense of purpose about living straight. Yet, this does not apply to alcohol in the same way. Is that just because alcohol is legal and drugs are not, or is there something much more profound about our fear of drugs?

NUTT: There are three things that define humans. One is drug-taking, the others are language and culture. Those are the three things that separate our species from other species. One credible perspective on this is that the drinks industry started seeing competition from drugs in about 1860. In the 1860s you could go down and buy your tincture of cannabis, codeine, heroin, morphine or cocaine, and you could buy your alcohol. Over the past 150 years, the drinks industry has managed to get rid of all competition. It has done that by terrifying people into believing that drugs are bad and alcohol isn't. The reason I got sacked from the government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) was for saying that cannabis is less harmful than alcohol. No one disputes that. And yet, we still can't change our drug laws to fit with the facts.

In the UK, alcohol is now the leading cause of death in men under the age of 50. Last year's data showed a 6% increase in alcohol-related mortality in women in one year; an unprecedented rise in alcohol deaths in women. It will be the leading cause of death in women under 50 within the next two or three years. And we do nothing about it because the drinks industry has so much influence over policy.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned your sacking from the ACMD in 2009. How has that

PROFESSOR DAVID NUTT IS DIRECTOR OF THE NEUROPSYCHO-PHARMACOLOGY UNIT AT IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

experience shaped how you feel about the balance between your ability to influence policy and the freedom inherent in scientific study?

NUTT: I am not an advocate of drug taking, except for scientific research. I'm not trying to change the law because I want to change the law. I'm trying to make the law do what it's supposed to do, which is protect people by being evidence-based. But if you start to argue that the law is wrong, based on evidence, then you somehow become an activist. That is about framing. You say then: "Oh, he's just an activist, he's not a scientist." Maybe that's why I'm scarier to them, because I am a scientist.

I spent nine years chairing the ACMD committee that assessed the harms of drugs. During that time I developed the most sophisticated way of assessing drug harms there's ever been. We came to a conclusion: that our drug laws are completely wrong. Then you're faced with a challenge: you're working in a system where you know that the law is not evidence-based and therefore it's unjust. There are people going to prison for periods that are completely inappropriate. The drug that people get the longest prison sentence for is MDMA; a drug that is less harmful than alcohol attracts the longest prison sentence.

Over the years it became clear that successive UK governments have only been interested in making drug laws harder. The Misuse of Drugs Act was brought out in 1971, and in that period of 40 years now, only one drug has ever moved down a class. Loads of drugs have moved up and got heavier penalties, but only cannabis has moved down. And that created such political havoc that eventually it was moved up again. Our drug laws aren't based on evidence.

You realise the drug laws are not only wrong, but probably doing more harm than good. But at the

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same time, you are responsible for trying to promote the government's position on the drug laws. It was not possible to reconcile these two positions; one's politics and one's science, and in the end, if you don't put science first, you're not a scientist.

O'BRIEN: Recently, your work has focused on the study of psychedelic drugs. What have you discovered about how they affect the brain?

NUTT: Psychedelics are a very interesting group of drugs because they work on the most important system in the brain: the one that is where you have consciousness. It's a very difficult system to study. In fact, when we started doing the psychedelic work, you could only study that system by blocking it. Back in 1984 we did the first blocking study of the psychedelic receptor in the brain and to our amazement not much happened, except people had very deep sleep. But to study this receptor properly you have to stimulate it, and the only way to do that was with psychedelics. So about 12 years ago I thought OK, it's time to bite the bullet: I'm sufficiently old now, I'm the government's chief drugs adviser, if anyone can do this experiment I can. So, working with the Beckley

Foundation, we started doing this research by using the magic mushroom ingredient, psilocybin, because magic mushrooms are ultra-safe. We gave people the psilocybin in a scanner and looked to see the changes related to the psychedelic experiences. With people reporting interesting psychedelic experiences, such as seeing wonderful lights floating around and taking a trip out of the scanner to the moon, you'd expect to see some activation in the brain. But there was no activation, just three areas of the brain switched off.

We thought, this was absurd; you're turning off the brain, not turning it on. In fact it was such a strange result that we repeated the experiment using a different kind of brain imaging and got exactly the same result. Then we realised that the key parts of the brain that are being turned off are the parts that control the brain.

The process of becoming a human being is about making your brain work in the same way as all other human beings. That's why we speak the same language, we understand concepts that we're all talking about. Humanity is about making each brain do very much the same thing, or at least with socially important interchanges. That process takes decades and it becomes extremely fixed. Under psychedelics the nodes that control the brain are switched off, allowing the

brain to do its own thing. It's like an orchestra. A conductor will play exactly the music that Bach or Beethoven wrote. And if you as a musician don't get it note perfect, you'll be sacked. But if you take away the conductor and the orchestra can do its own thing, then you end up with jazz, which breaks down traditional musical barriers.

O'BRIEN: That is partly amazing and partly terrifying. We know more now about brain plasticity, particularly in the teenage years. To what extent is our fear of that 'opening up' actually about mental health? A fear that drug use could leave us in a state that we do not want to be in?

NUTT: In theory, but in practice it doesn't. Before LSD was made illegal, the National Institute of Health in America funded 140 separate studies; 40,000 patients were studied over 15 years. And actually the outcomes for those patients were better than if they hadn't been in a treatment at all. The point is it didn't cause problems. There are other more recent studies too; one from Arkansas showing that prisoners who use psychedelics when they leave prison are less likely to go back, presumably because they change the way they view the world. They can see there's a way of living that isn't criminal. We've got masses of data, from European and American studies, that people who use psychedelics have better mental health. They also live longer. Probably more people have died trying to jump from balcony to balcony in Magaluf when drunk than have ever died jumping under LSD.

Our experiment is an example of what you might call 'pure' science leading to a medical breakthrough. We did this because we were interested in what a psychedelic experience was. Your brain is full of these receptors; we've got more psychedelic receptors in our brain than any other species. And in the bits of the brain that you're using to do your thinking now, there are more of them than anywhere else in the brain. So why are they there?

Experiments with LSD show that in the psychedelic state the brain is much more what we call entropic, much more flexible, connections are more fluid. Under psychedelics, bits of the brain that haven't talked to each other since you were a baby can talk to each other. But one of the other strange things was that when people came out of the scanner, they often said: "Wow that was an interesting experience. And actually I feel better." And of course, history tells us that people take these drugs because they make them feel better. So we looked at the brain scans to see if there was anything in the brain that made sense of this. And we discovered that the part of the brain that causes depression is switched off by magic mushrooms and LSD. And we know that many other treatments for depression switch off that bit of the brain.

O'BRIEN: You crowdfunded part of the LSD imaging study. Do you think this will prove to be a trend in academia? Presumably you did it because it was harder to get government funding for those things?

NUTT: The only money we've ever got from the government to research these drugs was to do that depression study, because depression is a such a big problem. And we were right; psychedelics do switch off that part of the brain and people will get better from depression, even if they've been depressed for years, even if they've failed on other treatments.

We've never got government funding to do the broader brain research. They just think it's too reputationally risky. When we did the first ever ecstasy imaging study, about five years ago now on Channel 4, the day after that programme went out, an MP asked, under parliamentary privilege, if I had a licence to do the study and what would the grounds be to revoke that licence. So we have MPs trying to stop the research, enquiring of the home secretary was she aware that Professor Nutt had done a study with an illegal drug! The idea that science could be determined by whether drugs are legal or illegal, the idea that a politician could even think that, I find chilling. What's even worse is that he was the only pharmacist in the House of Commons.

O'BRIEN: Do you have a sense that the public is actually more informed now when it comes to drugs and policy? In your view are there reasons to be cheerful?

NUTT: I think my sacking was a transition point. For the first time, there was a public debate about drugs. Until I started saying that actually cannabis was less harmful than alcohol, no scientist would dare say it. Because they knew they'd get sacked. But after I was sacked everyone asked: "Is what he's saying true?"

My own view is that there are two things that will change the public mind. The first is the neuroscience argument. When we give these drugs to people, their brains don't fry. Our recent paper on changes in the brain connections after psilocybin treatment for depression was the highest impact paper in neuroscience last year. So people are interested. The second is the therapeutic value of these drugs. It's outrageous that we don't have medical cannabis. Cannabis was a medicine, put it back as a medicine. The psychedelic drug psilocybin was a medicine in the 1950s and 60s, put it back as a medicine. And that pressure, I think, is going to be the most important. Because why would you deny someone who's going to take 20 years off their life because they're an alcoholic access to a drug like psilocybin, which won't harm them? Why would you deny that? ▪
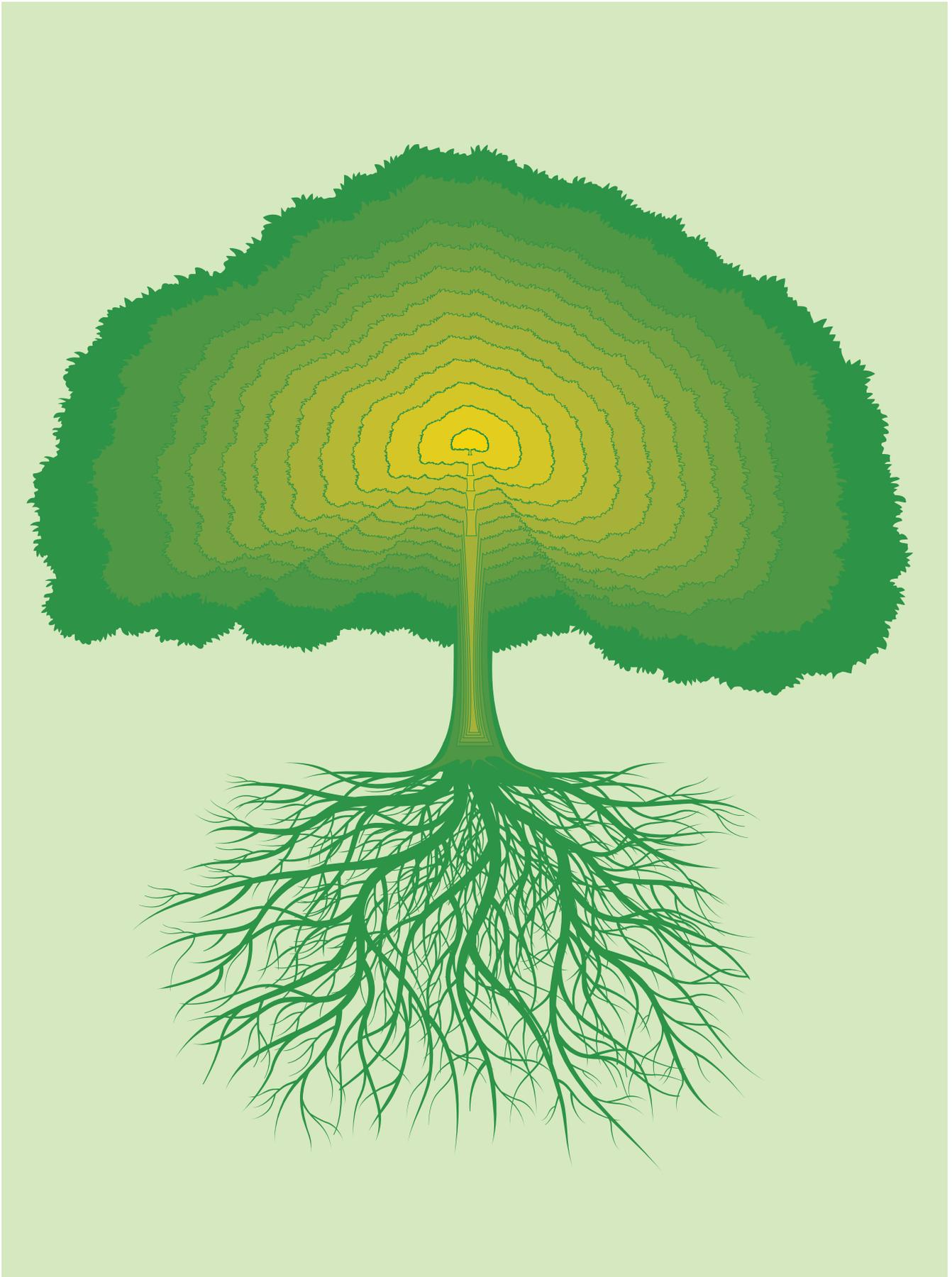
REPROGRAMMING THE FUTURE

Our entire social system is in need of renewal. If progressive institutions such as the RSA, which seek to improve society and advocate reform, are to rise to this challenge, they must create a model of change that balances state, market and civil society

by Matthew Taylor
🐦 *@RSAMatthew*

The greatest question of our time is perhaps whether the change wrought by technology will benefit humanity as a whole. For progressives, technological advance provides an opportunity to develop a much-needed story of hope. But to be credible as inheritors of the future, they must first show their willingness and ability to grasp the scale of the challenge society now faces.

The complex structure of a broadly liberal society such as Britain's rests on three pillars. First, welfare, comprising transfer payments, public services and security, but also the wider responsibility of the state to maintain social cohesion. Second, the modern marketplace, comprising elements such as property rights, competition between businesses and consumer culture. Third, the democratic pillar, comprising elements such as contested and fair elections, freedom of speech and assembly, and the rule of law. All three pillars have been battered in recent times.

The first to be systematically assailed in the modern era was the welfare state. Based on longstanding ideas, and especially the work of economist Friedrich Hayek, a set of thinkers sometimes grouped under the name 'the New Right' rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s. They shaped the reforming policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and have continued ever since to be an influential strand of ideology and public discourse. The New Right were ostensibly champions of the free market, but rather than extolling the virtues of enterprise, they focused on seeking to demonstrate the structural failings and poor outcomes of welfare systems. Public choice theorists such as Mancur Olson and James M Buchanan argued that politicians and state bureaucrats were bound to maximise their own interests rather than act as the impartial guardians of social progress. Followers

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of economist Milton Friedman argued that state spending crowded out private investment and enterprise. Other research and commentary argued that welfare was generating malign consequences. The narrative blamed the state for dependency, voluntary unemployment and family breakdown.

But critiques of public services have not been restricted to the political right. Progressive commentators and community activists have complained about the bureaucratic, even inhumane nature of welfare rules and service silos. They have similarly bemoaned the focus on the consequences of social problems rather than their causes. To use a metaphor popular in the 1990s 'we need fewer ambulances at the bottom of the cliff but more fences at the top'. In Britain today, the failings of welfare and public services are more likely to be put down to austerity than the intrinsic weaknesses of state provision, but the basis of the deeper critique persists.

The apparent backlash against the second pillar, market economies, has been a more recent phenomenon, but with a long intellectual history. Critiques of capitalism are as old as capitalism itself. Schumpeter, Veblen and Keynes, and of course Marx, recognised the strengths of capitalism, but also its structural frailties. Yet the widespread revival of these ideas has only come about in the last decade. The 2008 credit crunch and its consequences provide the current momentum for public disenchantment with financial capitalism. According to a recent survey, less than half of people think British business behaves ethically. The conditions for this disenchantment were created by the banks and their champions in as far as they caused the crisis, the fact that no one was punished, the decade-long stagnation of living standards for most people in most developed countries and the steady drip of stories of corporate misbehaviour.

The third pillar, democracy, has like capitalism always had its critics. But, again, a number of current

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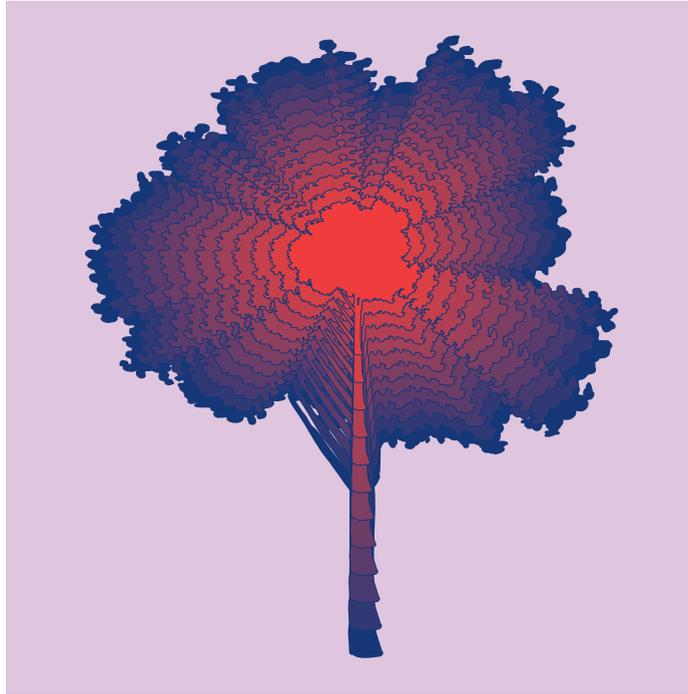
factors have combined to increase the volume of detractors. Democratic institutions and the politicians who occupy them have become even less trusted and more unpopular than usual, something reflecting both the failure of leadership and policy, and a succession of exposés of misbehaviour. Democracies have also generated outcomes – particularly Trump and Brexit – which seem to go beyond the normal swings of party politics into acts of collective self-harm. Finally, the capacity of Putin's Russia to get away with aggression, dishonesty and sabotage and, more profoundly, the economic performance and apparent political effectiveness of Chinese leadership, have led more people to question whether representative democracy really is the most resilient basis for either political authority or social progress in the 21st century.

This state of disenchantment is not just unhappy, but could be catastrophic. Because, despite all the negativity we direct at the status quo in countries such as ours, there is as yet no viable or popular alternative to these systems in their current form. It could be said of democracy, the welfare state and financial capitalism that 'we can't live with them, but we can't live without them'. Unless we can renew the dominant systems of the western world, their failings and our disillusionment could drive us into making even more profound mistakes than the ones we and our leaders have already committed.

FOUR WAYS OF COORDINATING HUMAN ACTIVITY
In developing a programme of reform we must try to think more deeply about this system as a whole. I have written before about an approach (based on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas and her followers) that views societies, and systems within those societies, through the prism of four ways of coordinating all human activity: three active and one passive. The active forms are 'the hierarchical', 'the solidaristic' and 'the individualistic'. Each of these forms of coordination is complex and ubiquitous and each is reflected in everything from our day-to-day choices to political ideologies and organisational forms. In modern societies the primary hierarchical institution is the state. Individualism – albeit a partial form – is most powerfully expressed in the dynamism of the market. While solidarity tends to be gauged by the level of social justice and welfare on the one hand, and the strength of shared civic identity and belonging on the other. Right now we are experiencing a crisis of confidence and legitimacy in each domain. One sign of this is the fact that the fourth major way of thinking about social change – fatalism – has become ever stronger.

History offers two important lessons in assessing whether societies such as ours can be renewed. The first lesson is that liberal democracies can achieve major advances when they get each active form of coordination working together at a societal level. For example, this was the case during the decades of the post-war economic miracle, when GDP growth and living standards rose, welfare expanded, inequality fell and the state was more confident and trusted. Even now Scandinavian countries generally manage to achieve a better balance between state, market and civil society, which is probably why they come top of most surveys on social outcomes and citizen wellbeing.

The second lesson is that these periods of healthy balance are more the exception than the rule. Economist Thomas

Piketty has revealed the tendency in market societies for rising inequality, driven by diverging returns to labour and capital. Historian Walter Scheidel goes further, arguing that the trend of rising inequality in all societies has only ever been broken by plague, war or bloody revolution. Historians remind us that from the Neolithic to the industrial revolutions technological change often makes things worse for most people before it makes them better. With the next industrial revolution looming, it is not clear that modern societies are willing to endure impoverishment on the promise of better times over the horizon.

Politicians and campaigners tend to focus on just one dimension of the system-wide loss of confidence. They choose either business as their target, or the state or, more abstractly, individualism or liberalism. But it is the social system as a whole that needs renewal.

This argument is illustrated by the hard case of technology, the subject of a fascinating and brave lecture at the RSA by DeepMind's Mustafa Suleyman. In addressing the vital challenge of aligning technological change with human progress, Suleyman suggested that traditional, hierarchical, governmental solutions – principally regulation – are inadequate. The unprecedented assets – financial, informational, human – of the major technology companies, their immense scope to do good or harm, and our growing dependence on them means that we cannot allow the traditional market goals of profitability and market share to be the only or even primary drivers of these companies' behaviour. Finally, as consumers and citizens we do not have the knowledge, norms or embedded practice to know what technology is doing to us, let alone know how to make it a force for good. In shaping the digital age, hierarchical methods are too weak, individualist drivers wholly inadequate and solidaristic expectations and norms as yet inarticulate.

The potential scale and pace of technological change may be the strongest reason to think about future society as a whole. But we are not used to taking a system-wide perspective. When one type of social coordination feels underpowered in any system, a sense tends to grow that it needs to be strengthened. We can see this when public opinion shifts from support for lower taxes and restraints on public spending to greater demand for public investment and action on inequality, as it is now. While these cycles of opinion and policy bring stuttering progress, they do not address growing foundational weaknesses.

THINK LIKE A SYSTEM, ACT LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR
The starting point for a modern progressive programme has to be the attempt to renew each dimension of social coordination, expressed at the highest level by the state, the market and the sites of civil society, while also recognising how these systems react with and against each other.

The RSA's work has contributed to many of these debates. Ideas for the reform of welfare and government include further devolution of power to cities, the greater use of participative democratic processes, and attempts to reconfigure public services at the individual level as relational, but also as social movements that draw on and add to the resilience of civil society.

In the realm of markets, a programme for 21st-century capitalism would involve scaling up alternative forms of control – for example, mutual or municipal – to challenge existing models of shareholder and private equity ownership. This is particularly important in sectors such as utilities and technology. More fundamentally, the potential of technological change, such as AI, robotics and blockchain, to challenge systems of value creation, production and control, means that progressives at every level – from the global to the local – must move beyond primarily seeking to ameliorate the impacts of markets. Instead we must design social inclusion, human dignity and environmental sustainability into business models.

The civic sphere is more complex and less concrete, but no less important. On the one hand, as economic historian Richard Henry Tawney once argued, the progressive story needs to be as much about what the good society requires of citizens as what the state promises them. On the other hand, we need mobilising narratives about identity, place and belonging that are more generous and ambitious than nationalism, more textured and grounded than liberal universalism and more unifying than identity politics. Above all, we need a new generation of civic institutions suited to modern needs, capabilities and expectations.

To outline a feasible future is only half the task. Reform in any part of the social system will have knock-on effects in other parts; sometimes diminishing its impact, sometimes magnifying it. Progressives need to think hard about our model of change, about gaining influence and about using it. The RSA's approach here is summed up in our injunction to change-makers to 'think like a system and act like an entrepreneur'. This implies a strategy for reform that is deeper, more ambitious and more long term, but forms of action that are more agile, engaging and experimental. It means, for example, not choosing between hierarchical and networked models of change, but exploring how institution leaders and social movements can work together, continuously challenging and learning from each other.

From the global rise of nationalism to the depressed state of our economy, from the unprecedented and virtually unaccountable power of the global technology corporations to our apparent inability to look after the most vulnerable in the world and in our own country, things can look gloomy and frightening. But, as the song says, the darkest hour is just before the dawn. In the wrong hands, and put to the wrong purposes, technology could lead to profound division and escalating conflict. Directed to human ends, it could enable the next leap forward in human opportunity and fulfilment. It is time to reprogram the future. ◾

DEMOCRACY DISTRACTED

In Brave New World Revisited, *Aldous Huxley lamented that the defenders of freedom of his time had "failed to take into account … man's almost infinite appetite for distractions". In the design of digital technology, we are making exactly the same mistake*

by James Williams
🐦 *@WilliamsJames_*

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Five years ago I was working for Google, advancing a mission that I still admire for its audacity of scope: "To organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Then I had an epiphany: there was more technology in my life than ever before, but it was harder than ever for me to do the things I wanted to do.

If you have never pulled back the curtain on technology design, if you have never spent week after week monitoring dashboards of user engagement metrics, you might be forgiven for thinking that our guiding lights are somehow hard-coded into the brains behind our screens, that there is moral fibre in the wires.

I had quickly come to understand that the cause to which I had been conscripted was not the organisation of information, but of attention. The digital technology industry was not launching and iterating neutral tools, but directing flesh-and-blood human lives. I began imagining my own life reflected in the primary-colour numbers on screens around me: 'number of views', 'time on site', 'number of clicks', 'total conversions' and so on. To me, these goals suddenly seemed petty and perverse; they were not my goals, or anyone else's. They were the goals of a system that was not on my side.

Though we call our time the Information Age, a better name for it would be the Age of Attention. As Herbert Simon, the American political scientist and computer technologist, pointed out in the 1970s, when information becomes abundant, attention becomes the scarce resource. The advent

of digital technology, and especially the emergence of the smartphone, has now effected this information/attention reversal across the entirety of our day-to-day lives.

As the newly scarce resource, attention is now the object of intense global competition. The large-scale effort that has emerged to capture and exploit our attention as efficiently as possible is often referred to as the attention economy, where winning means getting as many people as possible to spend as much time and attention as possible using your product or service. (Although, as it is often said, in the attention economy 'the user is the product'.) This results in design that fundamentally and intentionally diverges from the interests of users. As Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix, has said: "We are competing for our customers' time, so our competitors include Snapchat, YouTube, sleep, etc." Most of the information in the world is now being monetised via this competition for our attention.

As a result, digital technologies now privilege our impulses over our intentions. As information technologies have enveloped our lives, they have transformed our experiential world into a never-ending flow of novel attentional rewards. The ubiquity, instantaneity and randomised delivery of these rewards has imbued our technologies with a distinctly dopaminergic character: it has turned them into informational 'slot machines'. Like regular slot machines, the benefits ('free' products and services) are upfront and immediate, whereas the attentional costs are paid in small denominations distributed over time. Rarely do we realise how costly free things are.

The new challenges the attention economy poses for life and politics are thus fundamentally challenges of self-regulation. "Who will be great," wrote Goethe, "must be able to limit himself." Yet this greatness is impeded by the wholesale exploitation of our non-rational psychological biases by design. In recent decades, psychologists and behavioural economists have catalogued myriad non-rational biases that shape our thought and behaviour. These include loss aversion (for example, fear of missing out), social comparison, the status quo bias, anchoring, framing effects and countless others. An industry of authors and consultants has emerged to help designers and marketers exploit these cognitive vulnerabilities and hook us on their persuasive technologies. The political and ethical acceptability of this state of affairs has, to date, gone broadly unreviewed.

THE CITIZEN IS THE PRODUCT

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government." If the digital attention economy were compromising the human will, it would be striking at the very foundations of democracy.

Attention, in its wider sense, extends far beyond what cognitive scientists call the 'spotlight' of attention, or our moment-to-moment awareness. Ultimately, it converges on conceptions of the human will. William James, the American philosopher and psychologist, pointed this out as early as 1890, calling the effort of attention

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"TECHNOLOGY HAS CROWDED OUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION AND REPLACED LEISURE WITH ENTERTAINMENT"

"the essential phenomenon of will". Yet societal discussion lacks this wider view of attention; as a result, we have failed to account for the wider set of technological distractions that threaten the will most.

In the short term, the externalities of the digital attention economy can distract us from doing the things we want to do. In the longer term, they can distract us from living the lives we want to live, or, even worse, undermine our foundational capacities, making it harder, in the words of philosopher Harry Frankfurt, to "want what we want to want". In this way, a primary effect of digital technologies is to undermine the operation and even development of the human will. This militates against the possibility of all forms of self-determination at both individual and collective levels, including all forms of politics worth having.

CLICKS AGAINST HUMANITY
Beyond the surface level of what we might call functional distractions, or frustrations of action in the task domain, the persuasive designs of the attention economy can habituate us into living in ways that are misaligned with our desired values. The proliferation of pettiness is a highly visible example of this. Pettiness may be understood as the pursuit of a low-level goal as though it were a higher, intrinsically valuable one. Pettiness is what I discerned in the character of those engagement metrics on the product-design dashboards. It is why 'clickbait' headlines make us squirm. And it is on brazen display in the comment made by Leslie Moonves, CEO of CBS, in February of 2016, when he said, "[Donald Trump's candidacy] may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS".

Trump is very straightforwardly an embodiment of the dynamics of clickbait: he is the logical product (though not the endpoint) in the political domain of a petty media environment defined by impulsiveness and zero-sum competition for our attention. One analyst has estimated that Trump is worth $2bn to Twitter. His success metrics – the number of rally attendees, the size of his 'buttons', the grandiosity of his imagined military parades, or the number of retweets his trollish fusillades receive – these are attention-economy metrics. Given this, it is remarkable how consistently societal discussion has completely misread him by casting him in informational, rather than attentional,

terms. Like clickbait or so-called fake news, the design goal of Trump is not to inform but to induce. Content is incidental to effect.

During the 2016 US presidential election I encountered a highly moralised variant of pettiness coming from unexpected places. Over the course of just a few months, I witnessed several acquaintances back in Texas – good, loving people and deeply religious 'values voters' – go from vocally rejecting one particular candidate as being morally reprehensible and utterly unacceptable, to ultimately setting aside those foundational moral commitments in the name of securing a short-term political win. By the time a video emerged of the candidate bragging about committing sexual assault, this petty overwriting of moral commitment with political expediency was so total as to render this staggering development barely shrug-worthy. By then, their posts on social media were saying things like, 'I care more about what Hillary did than what Trump said!'

Consider that across many liberal democracies, the percentage of people who say it is 'essential' to live in a democracy has in recent years been in a freefall. The starlight of democratic values seems to be dimming across diverse cultures, languages, political systems and economic situations. However, one of the few factors these countries do have in common is their dominant form of media, which just happens to be the largest, most standardised and most centralised form of attentional control in human history. It is also one that is structured to undermine our higher values by design.

THE LAST SHADOW OF LIBERTY
But there is an even deeper level of distraction we must contend with: the undermining of fundamental capacities that can make it harder for us to 'want what we want to want'. This deepest sort of 'distraction' can take many forms. We see it in the way endless distractions decrease our intelligence. We see it in the way technology has crowded out opportunities for reflection and replaced leisure with entertainment. We see it in the physiological stresses of perpetual informational barrage, as in the phenomenon of email apnoea, where people unconsciously breathe shallowly or even hold their breath when responding to their emails or texts. In last year's US election we also saw people's

faculties of prediction subjugated to the incentives of the attention economy, as insignificant day-to-day changes in a candidate's probability of winning served as the 'reward' drawing readers back to websites whose ultimate goal is to drive page views and clicks.

However, the most visible form of this deep distraction in the political domain is perhaps best seen in the production and amplification of moral outrage. Moral outrage consists of more than just anger: it also includes the impulse to judge, punish and shame someone you think has crossed a moral line. Today, because the targets of moral outrage can no longer be burned at the stake (in most places), the implicit goal becomes to destroy them symbolically, reputationally – we might even say *attentionally* – for their perceived transgression. Moral outrage played a useful role earlier in human evolution, when people lived in small nomadic groups; it enabled greater accountability, cooperation and in-group trust. However, the amplification of moral outrage on a societal, or even global, scale carries dire implications for democracy.

In *The Republic*, Socrates identifies mob rule as the main route societies take from democracy back into tyranny. Mob rule is unfortunately hard-coded into the design of the attention economy, and this is apparent in the way the internet now functions as an outrage machine. Whether Cecil the Lion, Kony, Gamergate, or countless other outrage cascades, the rewards of outrage serve as extremely powerful tools of 'virality'. It may seem odd to describe outrage as a reward, but it is, at least psychologically speaking; it provides a sense of purpose, moral clarity, social solidarity and an opportunity to signal our trustworthiness to others. And Trump has mastered these dynamics to an extraordinary degree.

When the attention economy amplifies moral outrage in a way that moralises political division, it clears the way for the tribalistic impulse to claim for one's own group the mantle of representing the 'real' or 'true' will of the people as a whole. For Princeton's Professor of Politics, Jan-Werner Müller, such a 'moralistic imagining' of the political realm, which involves more than mere anti-elitism or anti-pluralism, is the essence of populism. Division itself is not objectionable; indeed, it is inevitable and desirable in a free and diverse society. However, when division becomes moralised in such a way that it leads to the delegitimising of others in society, then it can be fatal to the pursuit of the common interest. The digital attention economy is effectively a utility function for maximising moral outrage, as well as other forms of extremism, and thus militates against the kind of thought and discourse that democracy requires. Importantly, these dynamics beleaguer both the political left and right. (Here, as before, content is incidental to effect.)

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The Canadian media theorist Harold Innis once said that throughout his career, his work began with the question, "Why do we attend to the things to which we attend?" Asking this question about our turbulent political landscape leads us to the inevitable conclusion that it is our communications media, engineered primarily to capture and hold our attention, which serve as the lens through which we engage the political realm, and thus are the formal cause of our political world.

EMPIRES OF THE MIND

The proliferation of ubiquitous, portable and connected general-purpose computers has enabled this infrastructure of industrialised persuasion to circumvent all other societal systems and open a door directly onto our attentional faculties, on which it now operates for over a third of our waking lives. In the hands of a few dozen people now lies the power to shape the attentional habits – the lives – of billions of human beings. This is not a situation in which the essential political problem involves the management or censorship of speech; the total effect of these systems on our lives is not analogous to that of past communications media. The effect is much closer to that of a religion: it involves the installation of a worldview, the habituation into certain practices and values, the appeals to tribalistic impulses, the

hypnotic abdication of reason and will, and the faith in omnipresent and seemingly omniscient forces that we trust, without a sliver of verification, to be on our side.

This fierce competition for human attention is creating new problems of kind, not merely of degree. Via ubiquitous and always-connected interfaces to users, as well as a sophisticated infrastructure of measurement, experimentation, targeting and analytics, this global project of industrialised persuasion is now the dominant business model and design logic of the internet. To date, the problems of distraction have been minimised as minor annoyances. Yet the competition for attention and the persuasion of users ultimately amounts to a project of the manipulation of the will. We currently lack a language for talking about, and thereby recognising, the full depth of these problems. At individual levels, these challenges threaten to frustrate one's authorship of one's own life. At collective levels, they threaten to frustrate the authorship of the story of a people and obscure the common interests and goals that bind them together, whether that group is a family, a community, a country or humankind. In a sense, these societal systems have been short-circuited and the operation of the will – the basis of the authority of politics – has also been short-circuited and undermined.

Today, as in Huxley's time, we have failed to take into account our almost infinite appetite for distractions. They

guide us and direct us, but they do not fulfil us or sustain us. These are the distractions of a system that is not on our side.

It is instructive to note that the gover- in 'government' and the cyber- in 'cybernetics' derive from the same Greek root: kyber-, meaning to guide or to steer. The digital technologies that now guide our attention are our new empires of the mind, and our present relation with them is one of attentional serfdom. Rewiring this relationship is a political task in two ways. First, because our media are the lens through which we understand and engage with those matters we have historically understood as political. Second, because they are now the lens through which we view everything, including ourselves. "The most complete authority," Rousseau wrote in *A Discourse on Political Economy*, "is the kind that penetrates the inner man, and influences his will as much as his actions". This is the kind of authority that technologies now have over us. We must therefore begin to understand them as the ground of first political struggle, the politics behind politics. It is now impossible to achieve any political reform worth having without first reforming these totalistic forces that guide our attention and our lives.

FREEDOM OF ATTENTION

What form would such a project of reform take? First, we must acknowledge what we must not do. We must reject the impulse to ask users to 'just adapt' to distraction, as well as the illusion that mere education about the nature of the problem will ever be enough. Nor can we reply that if someone does not like the choices on technology's menu, their only option is to unplug or detox. This is a pessimistic and unsustainable view of technology. And, of course, we cannot expect the attention economy to fix itself.

We must, then, move urgently to assert and defend our freedom of attention. Asserting our freedom of attention means developing its conceptual and linguistic foundations. We can find precedent for such a freedom in Mill when he writes, in *On Liberty*, that the "appropriate region of human liberty … comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness … liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative". "This principle," says Mill, "requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character." This sounds to me like the beginning of a freedom of attention.

Defending the freedom of attention requires reforming the attention economy. Such an effort will involve, among other things, a fundamental re-evaluation of the nature and purpose of advertising in an environment of information abundance, as well as the imposition of systemic constraints to move advertising away from the mere capture and exploitation of user attention, and towards the active support of users' intentions. New business models, organisational structures and incentives, and measurements of both harms and benefits to users, will be essential components of such a project.

Doing anything that matters requires giving attention to the things that matter. Reforming the digital attention economy may therefore be the major moral and political task of our time. Future generations will judge us not only for our stewardship of the outer environment, but also of the inner environment. Our current global crisis takes the form not only of a precipitous rise in global temperatures, but also in our injured capacities of attention and will. Rejecting our present attentional serfdom – a task no more utopian than the pursuit of democracy itself – is now a necessary condition for the preservation of democracy at all. ∎

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

SPEAKING WITHOUT WORDS

Lensational helps women to share their stories on a global stage and comes from a very personal place for founder Bonnie Chiu. The inspiration to start Lensational came from her grandmother. A refugee from Indonesia, her grandmother had to give up education because of difficult circumstances and cannot read or write.

For her, photography has always been the way that she expresses herself. "I thought about photography being something that transcends universal language barriers," explains Bonnie. "Today there are around 520 million women in the world who can't read or write and so the idea of Lensational is to equip women with an outlet and the means to tell their stories."

It is a social enterprise and is moving towards its goal of being 50% funded by the sales of the photographs from women around the world. Lensational has partnerships with stock photo companies such as Getty Images to help generate income.

A £10,000 RSA Catalyst Grant will assist Lensational in expanding its reach and creating a community through social media and other digital channels. This is where it hopes to source more volunteers from. It operates in 25 countries and has approximately 120 volunteers to date.

MAN AND MACHINE

A startling victory by the Astros baseball team shows that success in the age of data hinges on the combination of artificial and human intelligence

by Ben Reiter
🐦 *@BenReiter*

By the summer of 2014, the Houston Astros had established themselves as the worst professional baseball team in half a century. The Astros had lost 106 games in 2011, 107 games in 2012 and 111 games in 2013, and they were on pace for another dreadful, last-place finish. So the cover of the 30 June 2014 issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine took the sporting world by surprise. It pictured a young Astros outfielder named George Springer in mid-swing, along with a bold proclamation: "Your 2017 World Series champs."

The cover and the 5,000-word feature inside were received with instant and nearly universal derision, even from the Astros' hometown. Especially from there, actually: it was "more of an attention-grabbing, perhaps even tongue-in-cheek projection than a prediction," sniffed the *Houston Chronicle*.

On 1 November 2017 the Astros won the World Series.

Sports Illustrated certainly intended the cover to spark debate, but its now internationally famous prediction was not flippant. Rather, it grew out of the story we uncovered with rare access to the inner workings of a sports team. The Astros' front office was led by baseball outsiders drawn from some of the world's most innovative organisations. The general manager, Jeff Luhnow, had worked as a management consultant for McKinsey. The director of decision sciences – a roundly mocked position the Astros had created – was Sig Mejdal, formerly a NASA engineer. The new process these executives had developed to find success would pay dividends sooner than anyone might expect, we predicted.

In his seminal 2003 book *Moneyball*, journalist Michael Lewis revealed how the perennially cash-strapped Oakland Athletics used cutting-edge metrics to identify market inefficiencies, rejecting the wisdom and experience of their hard-bitten scouts as hopelessly outdated. But rivals had long since gotten wise to their approach and their competitors eventually overtook them.

Back then, instant feedback as to the spin rate of a pitcher's curveball or the launch angle of a slugger's home run was only a fantasy. By 2014, such information was readily available and the Astros had built one of sport's, and perhaps the world's, most advanced data-processing departments to exploit it. Every decision they made was vetted, often suggested, by an internal database that centralised the organisation's collective brainpower.

The real genius of the Astros' executives, however, was to recognise the value of their scouts' judgement; to reintegrate the human factor into their decision-making. In many cases, they worked out how to quantify that judgement, which enabled them to perform sophisticated analyses on their projections. If an experienced scout had assigned a particular grade to a current prospect's work ethic, they would analyse how the scout's past evaluations had turned out.

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Ideally, the scouts and analysts agreed, making for an easy call, but those cases were relatively rare. Often, the data alone identified an undervalued asset; for example a pitcher, such as Collin McHugh, who was getting hammered every time out, but whose curveball came in with an elite spin rate, suggesting he would excel if only he threw the pitch more frequently. At other times, the scouts saw something in a player the computers had trouble quantifying, and the Astros, knowing that even their advanced datasets could not account for everything, gave those observations precedence. That explained the surprise selection of Puerto Rican player Carlos Correa as the first of 1,238 amateurs picked in Major League Baseball's 2012 draft. In one notable instance – their trade for ageing ace pitcher Justin Verlander in August 2017 – they allowed their gut instinct to override their probabilistic models, which suggested the move was unwise.

The goal was to use all of the predictive information to produce decisions about players that were as simple as those in blackjack, a game with which Mejdal – who spent his college summers as a casino dealer in Lake Tahoe – was intimately familiar: hit or stay. "How do you combine soft information with hard information in a way that allows you to make the best decisions?" asked Luhnow in 2014. "That is the crux of what we're trying to do here."

TRUST IN THE FORMULA

When Luhnow and his staff arrived in Houston at the end of 2011, their process led to even more losses in the seasons that followed. They had judged the organisation they had inherited to be devoid of talent, but they refused to take a single decision that might create short-term wins at the cost of long-term success, even if it might have saved them from embarrassment and television ratings of zero. Gradually, as thousands upon thousands of decisions accumulated, the team improved, until in November 2017 it beat the Los Angeles Dodgers – which had Major League Baseball's highest payroll – in the final game of the World Series.

Correa, at just 23, had become one of the game's best shortstops. Justin Verlander performed to a level the Astros assessed to have fallen in the 99th percentile of the range of potential outcomes their models had projected for him. And George Springer, who had graced *Sports Illustrated*'s ridiculed cover three and a half years earlier, was named the World Series' Most Valuable Player.

There had been setbacks along the way, and in June 2014 they had only a glimmer of an idea how they would win. But they had their process in place, and they believed in it, even if almost no one else did. We might see their World Series victory as proof of concept for a new way of thinking, not just about how to build a baseball team, but of how humans and computers can bring the most out of one another. In an age when we are deluged by data, with the spectre of job-killing artificial intelligence looming on the horizon, success is not a matter of man or machine, but of man plus machine. As long as man remains in charge. ■

A MUSICAL MOVEMENT

On the surface, grime music embraces a hyper-masculine ideal, but underneath this packaging it is a voice of cohesion in a conflicted world

by Jeffrey Boakye
🐦 *@unseenflirt*

I'm trying to win this article. Six words in, and I'm already setting out my stall. I'm determined to use every last weapon in my journalistic arsenal, my wit, my knowledge, my turn of phrase, to fully convince you of whatever it is I'm trying to convince you of. I'll do whatever it takes. Look at the language: 'determined', 'weapon', 'arsenal', 'win'. And it's working because you're still reading.

And I've broken all the rules. Two sentences beginning with 'and', seven colloquial lapses into the first person, one random ellipsis... the RSA style guide has gone clean out the window in a deliberate act of maverick abandon. This rather left-field introduction is my opening jab. Maybe this is unsurprising. The idea of 'winning' this article is a very masculine approach to take, seeking blunt success, status, power even. There is ostensibly nothing to win here, but masculinity often sees competition and conflict in circumstances where collaboration and community might be found. And like a Lancaster bomber with engine failure, masculinity needs an awful lot of hot air to stay airborne. Of which I am providing plenty, I am well aware.

Enter grime: the hottest musical genre to detonate into the mainstream in recent years and the first major millennial cultural artefact to emerge from the UK this century. For the uninitiated, grime is a highly lyrical genre of electronic music originating from east London in the early 2000s, with a lineage that reaches deep into black British heritage. Characterised by a restlessly electronic audio palette and frenetic, ballistic energy, grime can be read as a soundtrack to the urban experience, inviting listeners to dance along to the gritty realities of harsh, city environments. Now, grime is big news, stepping out of the shadows of its own adolescence with a brooding confidence met with a jittery energy that pulses at

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140 beats per minute. Stoked in the post-Thatcherite fires of Blair's New Labour vision for Britain, grime is a punkish scream of discontent, protest music from society's margins, throwing disenfranchisement back into the world via pirate airwaves, digital media, festival stages and, now, mainstream channels, in that order. It is black music in every sense of the word, born of urban contexts from a minority group with something to shout about.

But for all its seemingly impenetrable posturing, idiosyncratic energies and spiky abrasions, grime very much plays by the rules, and masculinity is the referee. Grime is stereo confirmation that masculinity remains one of the most successful product launches of the modern age, continuing to fly off the shelves as we approach the 2020s. As a lyrical genre, it unwaveringly promotes those same macho ideals that run through our global community: extroversion, power, control, status and aggression, a reflection of wider paradigms that act like gravity on our core values. In 2017, grime soars on the heavy wings of masculinity.

A case in point is *I Win*, a song by two of grime's young forefathers, Lethal Bizzle and Skepta. It is an incendiary celebration of individual success, an anthem of exuberant bravado, peppered with Skepta's trademark taunt "Go on then" and Lethal B's emphatic "POW!" The machismo just leaks through the page. I win. Because the key objective of the masculinity game is to win. But at what cost? Toxic masculinity is something the world has lived to regret in the past and may well again. The Cold War took international posturing and military grandstanding to an almost nuclear level. 'Developed' nations across the globe continue to arm up in the name of defence, seeking an impossible invulnerability born of fear. And lessons seem to go unlearned as two men with terrible hair continue to do what men do so badly, so well: trading shoves, pulling faces and dangling matches near unlit fireworks.

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ILLUSTRATIONS: SERGIO ALBIAC
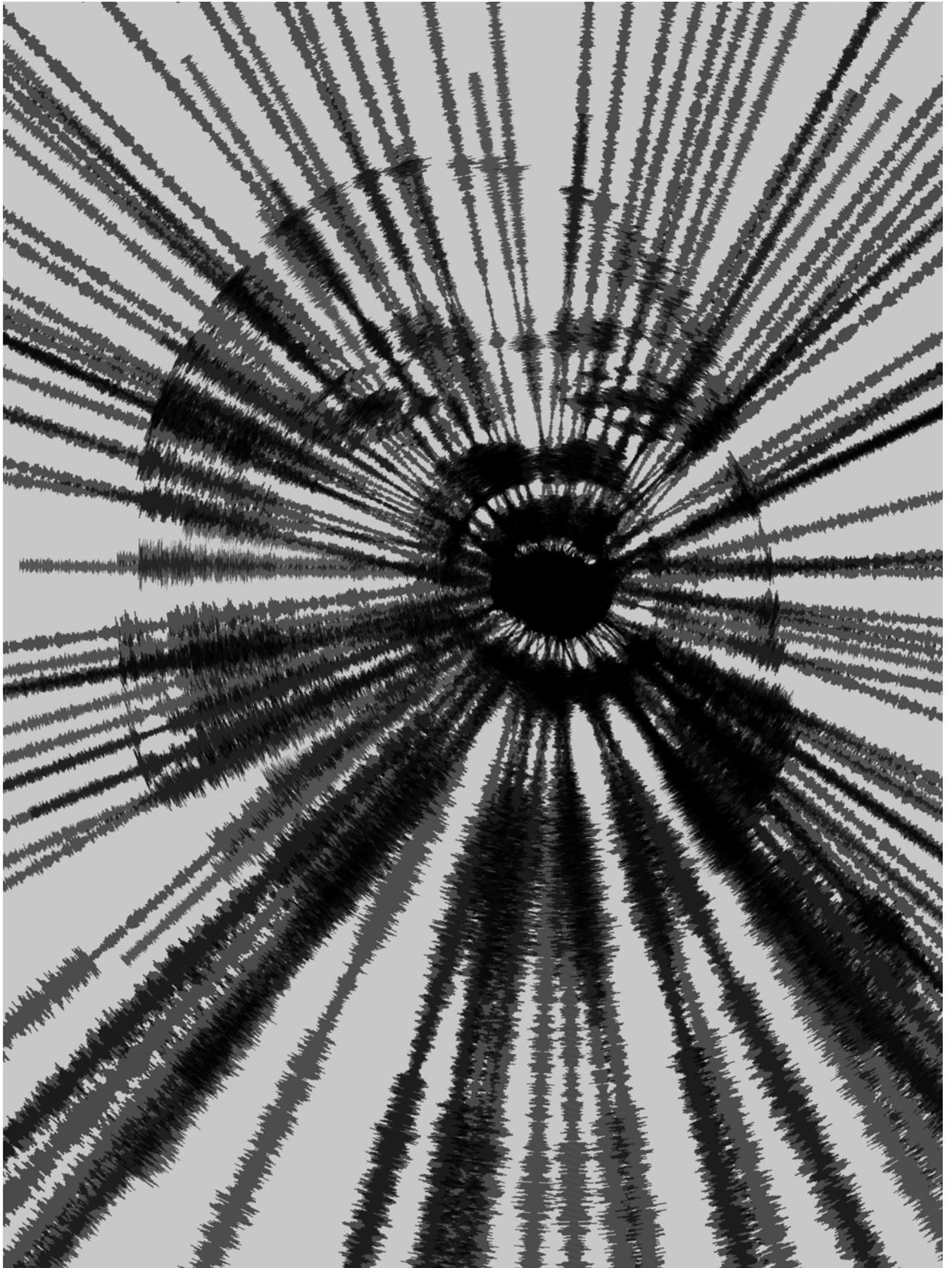
Despite deriving from the same source, there are obvious, profound differences between the masculinity politics of grime and the masculinity politics of international military brinkmanship. Jong-un vs Trump is an egocentric, toxic game of 'I win' in which both sides are saying "go on then", whereas Lethal B x Skepta is a point of collaboration in which they both win. This is where grime gets important. Yes, it is full of hot air, but it is full of hot air of the best kind; incendiary, forthright, impassioned, empowered. Grime is the furnace that offers deep warmth. It has a beating heart that pulses audibly, offering vitality. Grime has animated the millennium in a uniquely passionate manner, offering a cultural shake of the shoulders to a generation faced with aggressive consumerism and the detached, distancing relationships of so-called social media.

It is collaborative, communal, creative and collegiate. For all its machismo and competitive conflict, grime represents a fundamentally unified culture that celebrates the tribe as much as it promotes the individual. Think about it. The soundclash (a musical face-off in the reggae-dancehall tradition) might look like audio warfare, but is actually a ballet of musical coordination, each competitor contributing to a shared, joyous experience for the assembled crowd. 'The cypher' (a lyrical showcase in which MCs trade bars in an assembled circle) might look like crabs in the bucket, but is actually a synthesis of creative energies. *I Win* is a song that leads with egocentricity in its title but ironically thrives off the energy of two people. Is this really a case of 'I win'? Or is 'we win' the more appropriate description? This is the crux of the argument: that grime represents a very modern kind of cultural cohesion that supersedes the egocentricity we have gotten so used to.

PARTY POLITICS

Which takes us back to politics. In 2017, millennials across the country stepped up to put their cross next to a socialist vision represented by a kind of new, Old Labour, led by veteran backbencher turned frontman Jeremy Corbyn. Part idealism, part protest against an unsatisfactory status quo, we saw the electorate nudge Labour towards a triumphant loss, winning 32 seats and knocking the Conservatives out of their Commons majority. Meanwhile, the youth turnout hit its highest peak since 1992. One political sociologist, Paula Surridge of Bristol University, proposes that increases in turnout were linked more closely to factors of ethnic diversity than an increase in young voters, suggesting a complex relationship between youth and minority ethnic status; both of which are defining factors in grime. Culturally, what is significant here is how grime quickly became the unofficial soundtrack to the Corbyn renaissance. A line-up of prominent grime artists including Jme, Novelist, AJ Tracey and Stormzy came out in open support of Corbyn, encouraging their fans to vote accordingly. There was even a hashtag (that

ubiquitous, millennial authentication strip), #Grime4Corbyn, which spawned digital campaigning and a series of events in the real world alike.

When David Cameron said "we're all in this together" back in 2012, I do not think he imagined how and where this sentiment would be realised: in 21st-century black music from the grimy streets of east London. If nothing else, grime has invited the selfie generation to dance along with anti-establishment energy. This might be what aligns it so comfortably with left-wing sensibilities, echoing the politics of marginalised, disenfranchised groups. It is proving to be not only pervasive, but inclusive, inviting one and all to join the party, pun intended. It looks like we have finally learnt to hug hoodie, if not in the way some Conservatives hoped.

There is an appetite at the moment for counter-dominant, below-the-line politics that we can see embodied in grime, a black British artefact rooted in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora that has been shunned for years but is now recognised as culturally, socially and politically important. The brittle masculinity of 'serious' politics is often attributed to the right wing, with small 'c' conservatism seen as proper and correct while the liberal left is often derided as being idealistic, antagonistic to order and basically unrealistic. This liberal realm is the yin to the conservative yang, offering wholeness through a necessary softening of hard, masculine, above-the-line attitudes. Fail to embrace the feminine, the non-masculine 'other', and you risk ending up like Theresa May on results night, wondering how the attempt to be strong and stable left you broken, shaken and bruised. The prime minister, too distant perhaps from the realities of life below the line, found herself struggling to get a response to her call from above. Political parties rely upon understanding the voting public to win and retain support, a kind of empathetic literacy that support hinges on. And sometimes, when you play the masculinity game too well, you become too brittle to withstand even the tiniest fluctuations in air pressure.

WINDS OF CHANGE

In stories, as in history, elements can emerge from the shadows to provide resolution, where recognition of oppressed groups becomes a catalyst for positive social change. This sits at the heart of the US Civil Rights movement, in which decades of subjugation stemming back to transatlantic slavery evolved into a dream for racial unity, rather than a desire for white annihilation. The hashtag #blacklivesmatter might be the 21st-century iteration of these ideals, seeking the global empowerment of a spectrum of marginalised communities via the exposure of police brutality and structural racism in the US. On this side of the Atlantic, at a time when young black people in the UK are nine times more likely to be imprisoned than their white counterparts and black men remain disproportionately incarcerated overall, grime can be read as a celebration of black empowerment. It is a
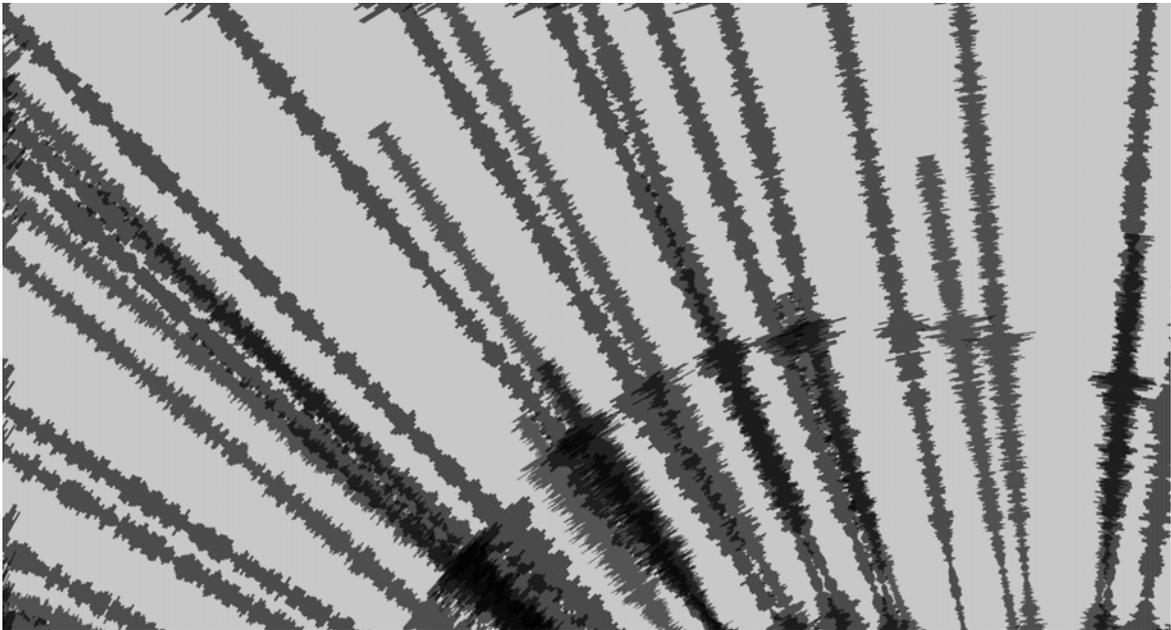
millennial success story that thrives not due to, but in spite of, its hyper-masculine bent.

As a millennial artefact, grime bristles with contradictions. As a saleable commodity watermarked by entrepreneurship, it plays neatly into neoliberal ideals, despite leaning into a well of socialist values. It is as bound by masculinity as any other product of society at large, but, beyond the noise, is empathetic and communal. Macho posturing turned up to eleven that also operates on the level of social protest music. Less brattish than punk, more grown up, with deeper roots perhaps, grime is able to connect with the mainstream in mature, often endearing ways, be it Lethal B teaching Dame Judi Dench how to rap, Jeremy Corbyn becoming 'Uncle Jezza' or Stormzy acting as unofficial laureate in the poignant opening of the Grenfell Tower charity single. It speaks to a generation that wants more from life than digitised distraction.

A generation that has been failed by the structures and promises of above-the-line politics. A generation unable to empower itself according to the old rules. A generation fighting toxic masculinity and engaging with social inequalities, sexism, racism, gender inequality and homophobia as new. Our values are shifting, our politics are changing and maybe our relationship with masculinity, black or otherwise, is getting healthier. For modern liberalism, this might ultimately be the biggest win of all; that disenfranchisement is not terminal, that society can lead with cohesion rather than conflict and that masculinity does not have to end in toxic destruction; dreams we can hopefully all believe in. ■

THE ROAD AHEAD

Automobiles have sustained our economies and been a token of individual identity for nearly a century, so what will happen when they become autonomous?

by Tim Dant
🐦 *@TimDant1*

Recently, I was given a lift by my friend Erik and we fell to talking about cars. He works with young people and commented on their interest in noisy, fast, flashy cars when they could neither drive nor afford any motor vehicle. But then he surprised me by speaking with some passion about his own car; how it fitted with his identity, with the sort of man he was, particularly his aesthetic values and taste. His car was not ostentatious or 'making a statement'; it was a grey Ford Focus. What was important to him was the restrained choice, the newness of the vehicle, its tidiness and functionality and its continuity with his way of dressing and generally 'being in the world'.

Erik may not be typical, but his car is for him a substantial and consistent material confirmation of his personal identity, common to many people and heavily promoted in consumer capitalism. As cars became key items of personal consumption over the last century, men, and then increasingly women, took pleasure in choosing, driving and being seen to own and drive, particular models of car. But perhaps this is about to change. Perhaps we are passing 'peak car', the point at which as many people as possible own their own car in the rich northern cultures. The arrival of the truly autonomous automobile, the 'autonomobile', one that can drive itself with as little direction as a chauffeur or taxi driver, will change how we move about.

The appeal of cars has always been their capacity to give their owners mobility. Being able to walk a few yards, get into one's car and drive oneself to a chosen destination is very attractive. Journeys that would otherwise involve more time, effort and waiting about are greatly simplified by a car, and that is taken for granted by much of the population in the rich North American and European countries. As with many inventions and artefacts, why would we go back to the discomfort of trying to manage without them?

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PROFESSOR
OF SOCIOLOGY

However, the idea, beloved of advertisers, of the open road winding across beautiful rolling countryside along which the driver can effortlessly steer their car, is a long way from most drivers' experience of driving. As long ago as 1947, philosopher Max Horkheimer pointed out in his book *Eclipse of Reason* the paradoxical refashioning of freedom that came with the car: "There are speed limits, warnings to drive slowly, to stop, to stay within certain lanes… We must keep our eyes on the road and be ready at each instant to react with the right motion. Our spontaneity has been replaced by a frame of mind which compels us to discard every emotion or idea that might impair our alertness to the impersonal demands assailing us." Since then, driving has become ever more 'managed' by lines, signs, lights and hatched boxes and the experience of most car commuters is of a nose-to-tail progression that frequently grinds to a halt, leading to frustration and missed appointments. Unlike the train or bus commuter, the car driver can choose alternative routes, control the heat and sounds in their environment. But driving as a 'pleasure' and an expression of freedom has become ever more constrained to improve safety and to maximise the 'flow' on motorways and urban routes. As a result, advertisers increasingly link the pleasure of the car to its material form; its look, its mechanical and electronic capacities, its comfort and the status accruing to its owner.

ECONOMIC CARS

Sociologists used to talk about 'Fordism' to refer to the emergence of mass, industrialised production with automated assembly lines and machine tools making standardised parts. Factories such as Ford's paid good wages and extended car ownership down the social scale, but distinction in ownership was at the expense of distinction in style. Ford famously offered his cars in any colour so long as it was black (because of the difficulty of rapidly curing paints of any other colour)

IMAGES: ISTOCK

"NOBODY WILL WORRY MUCH WHAT SORT OF CAR THEY GET INTO OR OUT OF, EXCEPT THE RICH"

and the models changed little because of the high cost of retooling the bespoke machines for manufacturing.

The second half of the 20th century saw the development of design and manufacturing techniques that produced a range of appealing and different cars. Marketing began to address the individual taste of buyers and the style and capacities of a car became linked to the desire to purchase it. Shape of bodywork and colour were especially important in the 1950s and 1960s, but the last quarter of the 20th century saw a turn to the more functional features of cars: power-assisted brakes and steering, automatic gears and cruise control, comfortable seating, 'in-car entertainment' systems and so on. The car was established as a consumer item, linked to personal identity and freedom from limits on mobility.

Throughout the 20th century the car maintained its core role in industrial production, with factories linked to the economic destinies of major cities in the US and Europe. Competition from Asian factories changed production techniques and reduced workforces as machine tools gave way to robots. Financialisation of the car industry decoupled the links between brands and countries, as corporations moved production to wherever there were tax incentives and a supply of cheap labour.

Capitalist development was tied to the car through low-rise suburbs, and the expectation of longer commutes to work. Borrowing money to buy cars became a significant feature of consumer culture and contributed to the 'debt state', in which ordinary living is sustained both by national debt and by personal debt. Borrowing from the future can work while interest rates are low and there is confidence in sustained income, but it is risky economics and puts consumers in the hands of the finance industry. A new generation of entrants into economic life is already faced with substantial debt from student loans and a blend of high rents and insecure employment. And they are showing signs of postponing learning to drive as the number of people with full licences drops in the UK. But for many people, owning a car has given way to leasing on a personal contract plan (PCP), with a manageable initial payment and the option to 'upgrade' after a few years, rather like the model for mobile phones. Although in 2014 there were just under 32 million cars on the UK's roads, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, numbers of new car registrations are in decline and there are fears of collapse in the second-hand market, leaving the car industry exposed.

STATUS OBJECTS

Some of us continue to desire the flashy red sports car with an attention-grabbing roar, but that is not how most of us choose to spend our money. The car as a means of expressing personal identity is less attractive than it was 50 years ago because they have become so ordinary, ubiquitous and similar; they are even less colourful (in 2014 54% of new cars were black, silver or grey). At one time, to have multiple enclosed headlamps or a reverse sloping rear window showed one was in touch with what was new, modern and 'trendy'. Today, most cars are variations on the pebble shape with the highest status reserved for the bloated luxury 'utility vehicle': the powerful four-by-four, high-up car that protects its occupants in comfort and road-dominating style.

The 20th century saw the development of cars, roads and driving ability that was remarkable in accommodating the increasing volume of traffic and distances driven. But still, the car is a killer, particularly of pedestrians and cyclists who are not protected by a steel carapace, and the chemicals and particulates exuded by cars lead to death and disease through air pollution. Two high court judgments have castigated the failure of the UK government to develop a policy for dealing with air quality. Reluctant to constrain car use, its response has been to build more roads to bypass congested areas of cities, but eventually the 'business interests' in mobility will have to give way to citizens' interests in health and life.

The personal contract plan model of financing encourages drivers to lease more expensive cars – the extra monthly cost seems easier to manage – and the prestigious German-made cars are more popular in the UK than vehicles from any other country. But this will change as the autonomobile becomes a simple functional device, hired rather than owned by users, and each will look more or less the same, just as London taxis do. Nobody will worry much what sort of car they get into or out of, except the rich. Hopefully the rest of us will worry more

about the consequences of our use of cars, such as CO_2 and air pollution from emissions (although air pollution by rubber tyres is important) and the consumption of the road space to the detriment of less space-demanding modes of transport, such as foot, cycle or bus.

THE POST-CAR WORLD

But what will replace the car as we know it today? With four wheels, four seats facing forward, a steering wheel, a metal frame and body, and an internal combustion engine, the UK's most popular car, the Ford Focus, has much in common with Ford's Model T of a century ago. The energy source and engine is already changing with the phasing out, first of diesel, and then petrol, in favour of electricity. But more importantly, the driver is already being phased out, as servo systems reduce physical effort and sensors and electronics replace driver judgement. The self-driving 'autonomobile' is already on the roads, although it still looks like a car and requires a designated human driver. But the steering wheel will soon go and with it the need for forward-facing seating.

Autonomobiles will enable many more people to work on the move and will even be able to deliver the holidaymaker or business traveller to their destination while they sleep. This could amplify consumer culture's mobility fetish, leading to many more journeys, many more road miles, more pollution and more congestion. Road haulage and public transport will no longer be constrained by expensive drivers needing breaks,

with the effect of destroying millions of jobs. It remains unclear how autonomobiles will interact with pedestrians, cyclists and old-fashioned human-driven cars, but once those problems are solved, road deaths should reduce dramatically, so the post-car will not need a heavy protective steel shell.

Although users will decide where the autonomobile will take them, it, together with road systems, will decide how: by what route, at what speed and how to interact with other road users. Owning an autonomobile will mean it needs to be garaged, maintained and parking paid for. The rich – already used to chauffeurs – may continue to mark their distinction with more ostentatious versions of the post-car, but for most people, hiring one for a journey will be more appealing. Smartphone technology has already changed the notion of hailing a taxi (a loud whistle and waved arm look rather gauche nowadays) and will fit well with a vehicle that is built around information and communication systems.

Some will no doubt be persuaded to enter into PCP leases and car clubs may be attractive, but the link between ownership and driving that has sustained the car at the centre of consumer capitalism over the last 100 years will surely go, and with it the connection between personal identity and the car that my friend with the Focus expressed. But then it is only a matter of time before the autonomobile becomes a self-reproducing consumer in its own right, earning enough as a taxi to collect and pay for its own fuel, taxes and repairs, and then, to pay for its replacement. ■

DESIGNER SOLUTIONS

Creativity spawns over-consumption, but design is also helping to solve today's social challenges. Can these inherent tensions be reconciled?

by Sevra Davis
🐦 *@sfgirlinlondon*

In 2014, Katie, a final year graphic design student at University College Falmouth picked up an RSA Student Design Awards brief challenging designers to increase everyday behaviours that build mental health and wellbeing. As with all RSA student briefs, the wording was deliberately open to encourage a range of responses, from products to services and systems. Katie's winning project was a campaign to encourage people to put down their devices, step away from screens and leave the 'stuff' behind to spend time with friends and family. Her design solution was, in effect, an anti-consumerism campaign encouraging face-to-face social interaction and engagement in free activities.

At the RSA, we relish our role in shifting the mindsets of emerging designers like Katie, helping them to reflect on how they might use their skills in the future for a positive social impact. But Katie's story is part of a larger changing narrative about what it means to be a designer today. More designers are questioning design's links to hyper-consumption and growing waste patterns, while struggling with the tensions inherent in design's evolution and the fact our power to create – to make 'things' – is increasingly seen as a core part of human fulfilment.

Modern design was born out of the growing mass production capabilities of the industrial revolution and the resulting everyday consumerism of the early 20th century. It was a means to create products to enhance everyday lives and, in turn, increase competitiveness by bestowing objects with an ever-greater marriage between form and function. The success of design has resulted in greater public awareness of the concept, with many consumers readily describing their style using design terms, such as mid-century modern or minimalist. But it has also played its part in driving unsustainable patterns of consumption,

SEVRA DAVIS IS RSA DIRECTOR OF DESIGN AND OVERSEES THE STUDENT DESIGN AWARDS

leading to difficult questions about whether or not design and designers are still meeting real needs in the 21st century.

Consumption is driven by a range of factors: wider advances in technology from 'just-in-time' production to the advance of rapid manufacturing techniques, together with our tendency as consumers to embrace short-lived trends. While we must not unwittingly fault designers alone, the sector is increasingly acknowledging its role; it is now commonly accepted, as stated in EU research, that 80% of a product's environmental impact is determined by decisions made at the design stage.

CREATIVE THINKING

The work of designers is imbued with practical optimism. We have always worked towards a better possible future and thrive on creative problem-solving. Increasingly, we see our thinking and methods lauded for addressing everything from business to complex 'wicked' problems. 'Design thinking' – broadly defined as the creative process that a designer goes through to create a product, with an emphasis on matching needs with the best possible solution – is now widely applied in a range of contexts and sectors from business to policy creation and organisational change. Many firms now employ designers at senior and executive levels. For example, the newest addition to the executive team is the chief design officer, who is responsible for overseeing all design and innovation aspects of an organisation, from strategy to products and services. Companies taking on chief design officers include Apple, Coca-Cola and Philips, and they have further elevated the use of design, particularly design thinking, at a strategic level. This has proven benefits: the Design Council's 2015 report, *The Design Economy,* noted that in 2013, the design economy – defined as a mix of capabilities, roles and methodologies across all sectors – generated £71.7bn in gross

value added (GVA), equivalent to 7.2% of the total GVA across the UK economy.

But there is a tension in this greater adoption of design. Designers relish seeing their skills and methods being deployed in more areas, but there is also some discomfort as the language of design shifts closer to that of business. Many designers, like Katie, see a chasm between design for commercial objectives, for simply selling more 'stuff', and design that does good in the world. The growing 'social design' movement sees designers tackle unprecedented challenges facing society in an effort to move us toward a happier, healthier, more equal and more sustainable future for all. From innovations in bioplastics, to improving access to education, the social design movement has inspired and motivated a new generation of designers.

We are at a key juncture where these two major evolutionary areas for design – design as strategy in business and social design – have resulted in a discipline that is now often seen through a binary lens of either being about growth or being about good.

There is an increasing number of businesses and organisations challenging this binary split and for whom economic growth and social and environmental responsibility are not incompatible. The most well-known of these is the California-based outdoor clothing company Patagonia, which has a well-documented 'anti-growth' strategy that in fact is anything but. Patagonia wants to grow by making and selling more products, using less harmful manufacturing methods, that people will keep for longer. As Patagonia expands its market share, it sees that it is contributing to a new narrative that belies old patterns of consumption and replaces them with new, more sustainable ones. Design has also been fundamental to the success of the sharing economy, where the most successful platforms have placed design and usability at their core. Those platforms have opened up conversations about and challenged traditional patterns of consumption and usage.

Design cannot afford to be binary. Contributing to inclusive economic growth and supporting positive social and environmental change must be at the heart of the future of design. As designers, we must take responsibility for the impact of our work in every sense and demonstrate that we can do more with our skills and our expertise as we move design further into the 21st century. At the RSA, our challenge is to provoke and convene conversations about how design can fulfil this role in an increasingly accelerated and disrupted economy. And to understand through education what new skills, new sectors and new collaborations are needed by designers to ensure a happier, healthier and more prosperous future for everyone. ■

BODY POLITIC

Solving a problem like obesity requires more than just policy measures; it takes true public engagement

by Jerril Rechter
🐦 *@JerrilRechter*

L ast year, the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition made the case that unless policymakers apply the brakes on weight, obesity and diet-related disease and accelerate efforts to reduce undernutrition, everyone will pay a heavy price: death, disease, economic losses and degradation of the environment. Almost a fifth of the world's obese adults live in six high-income countries, including Ireland, New Zealand and the UK.

This is the challenge we face also in Australia, where obesity is one of the most significant health challenges of our generation, accounting for about 7% of Australia's burden of disease. Some 11.2 million Australian adults, or 63% of the adult population, are overweight or obese, according to a recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. More than a quarter of Australian children and adolescents aged between two and 17 years also fall into that category. Like in many other western nations, higher rates of obesity occur in areas of social disadvantage and outside our major cities.

Beside the human impact, the cost to the health system of obesity is unsustainable. In 2008, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates, the cost of obesity to the Australian economy was A$58bn, including health system, loss of productivity and carers' costs.

So what can be done? Experience tells us that complex public health issues, such as obesity, can elicit polarised responses. On the one hand, the food systems that determine what we put in our mouths are massive social and economic networks. Proposing changes to food manufacturing or retailing can generate significant resistance from both large and small businesses. At an individual level, people's daily food choices represent much more to them than simply fuel for their bodies. The foods we choose carry cultural, emotional and social meanings. Changing the availability of food and eating habits for the »

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IMAGES: © PHOTOGRAPHER: CHARLOTTE MAY
SET: MORNING SETS – JESS MARTIN + CHARLOTTE OSBORN

better is not easily done, especially among populations that suffer economic or social disadvantage.

In responding effectively to these challenges it will not be possible for one agency, or indeed government, to succeed alone; work must occur across public agencies, government, business and industry and with the community to build consensus and create solutions that benefit the whole population. And this work needs to draw on the growing body of evidence that suggests greater democratic participation is proving effective in finding long-term policy solutions to such issues.

CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

That is the approach we have taken in Victoria, drawing on the expertise of the UK's Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). In 2014, David Halpern, who has run BIT since its inception in 2010, started a two-year residency with us at health promotion agency VicHealth, with a focus on obesity. He challenged us to consider how we might apply behavioural insights to health promotion, and to imagine a policy development process that enabled citizens to engage directly with complex public health issues.

If citizens could understand the influences shaping their health decisions, he argued, and if we could build government, industry and community consensus on the required actions, we might 'shift the dial' on obesity by providing an enabling environment for government, industry and community action. And so, the Citizens' Jury on Obesity was born.

The jury was asked to come up with solutions to the simple yet challenging question: how can we make it easier to eat better?

VicHealth worked with the newDemocracy Foundation, a leading Australian research institute in democratic innovation, and a diverse range of other stakeholders and experts to develop the jury process. This independently designed and facilitated process took 100 everyday Victorians on a journey of discovery

about the factors influencing the way they ate. It allowed them to make their own decisions on obesity, and to determine how they would like government, industry and the community to respond.

A total of 64 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders were presented via an online portal to the jurors. After six weeks of review and facilitated discussion online, the jurors met for two days at a face-to-face forum to deliberate, debate and create their 'asks'. They read and watched a diverse range of material on food and obesity and considered evidence, opinions and policy and programme options. They also called for additional experts to present at the forum.

An essential aspect of the process design was to build broader awareness of this initiative in the wider Victorian population. VicHealth partnered with the *Herald Sun* – a major regional newspaper read by 1.3 million Victorians every weekday – to promote the jury through a series of news articles, profiles of jurors, opinion editorials and a poll that elicited the views of its readership and which was shared with jurors.

ASKS AND IMPACTS

The focus on food and the way we eat as factors in obesity resonated strongly with the jury. Of course, everyone has a relationship with food; it plays a central role in society and psychology, with influences such as social setting, colour and context affecting our food choices.

Twenty 'asks' emerged from the forum and formed a blueprint for coordinated action by government, industry and the community. These 'asks' included support for a sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) tax, mandated healthy food labelling, multimedia education campaigns for healthy eating, subsidising those on low incomes to purchase healthy foods, and increasing the availability of drinking water at public events, parks and shopping centres. These were presented to a Citizens' Jury

"A TRIAL AT A HOSPITAL REMOVED SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES FROM DISPLAY IN THE CAFÉ"

Steering Committee that included representatives from the food and beverage industry, health sector, retail industry, government and policy experts, consumer advocates, academics and sporting organisations for consideration and public response.

VicHealth's evaluation of Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity found that more than a third of jurors reported their understanding of obesity had changed a lot. Many were motivated to take personal action or to influence family behaviour. Some jurors wanted to become involved in advocacy activities. Of the stakeholders surveyed, 69% saw citizens' juries as an effective way to involve everyday Victorians in public decision-making, and 50% of stakeholders said they would use the jury's report in their work. Feedback from the jurors themselves also highlighted the power of this participatory approach to engage people in collaborative decision-making and to promote consensus building.

Media activities generated significant public debate on overweight and obesity issues. The VicHealth-*Herald Sun* Readers' Poll held in October 2015 yielded 2,580 responses, the highest response rate the newspaper has ever had to a survey.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

A number of initiatives across Australia – before and since the Citizens' Jury – are leading to positive change, albeit with a long way to go. A recent trial at a major Victorian hospital removed SSBs from display in the main café. Sales of these drinks fell by 36,500 a year without affecting the retailer's bottom line. Consumers simply substituted sugary drink purchases for healthier options, such as bottled water.

This year, 13 Victorian health services discontinued the sale of SSBs on their premises, while the New South Wales Government had phased them out of vending machines, cafés and catering services in hospitals and health facilities by December 2017.

The report *Tipping the Scales: Australian Obesity Prevention Consensus* was recently published with the endorsement of 34 medical and public health groups in Australia, calling for obesity prevention to be recognised as a national priority. The report includes a range of recommendations that would underpin a national obesity prevention plan. Among these are calls to restrict junk food advertising to children and to introduce a new tax on sugary drinks.

VicHealth also drove a highly successful public awareness campaign between 2015 and 2017 to make water the beverage of choice at major Melbourne sporting events, and to increase the availability of water where people exercise.

In 2014, the Commonwealth Government introduced the Health Star Rating System for packaged foods in supermarkets. The system rates the overall nutritional profile of packaged food. The more stars, the healthier the choice. While Australians generally support the Health Star Rating System, public health experts agree that changes are needed; for example, making the system mandatory across all food categories, including fresh fruit and vegetables.

From May 2018, Victoria will join four other Australian state jurisdictions and introduce menu labelling for ready-to-eat food at food chain outlets and supermarkets. This will show consumers the energy content of food when eating out or at the supermarket, giving them more information with which to make healthier food choices.

When we are faced with complex challenges such as obesity, legislation can seem to offer the best hope for change, as it holds the power of compliance. Yet the power of true public engagement should not be downplayed. Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity helped foster a broader discussion about obesity. Though the changes resulting directly from the process were limited, the experience does show the power of engagement when it is linked to the key stakeholders that can make change happen. There continues to be significant resistance from food manufacturers and large retailers to reforms that would decrease their sales of highly processed foods. It will take time, concerted advocacy and greater public accountability to drive multi-sector action to address obesity in Victoria. VicHealth's experience is that innovative, evidence-based actions that empower healthy choices will be a key part of the solution to this critical issue. ■

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

INSPIRING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

London-based Accumulate uses creativity to empower young people who are homeless and living in hostels. Director and founder Marice Cumber says that this means more than just learning a creative skill. "It enables expression and communication skills, and by attending the workshops the participants gain time management skills that they can use when they get a job." A recent photography exhibition exemplifies the type of skills that are fostered. Choosing a shortlist of photographs and picking just one to display, the exhibitors experienced talking with a professional photographer and having to compromise when necessary.

"The process was great for personal development," says Marice. A £10,000 RSA Catalyst grant will enable Accumulate to invest in its sales branch and generate a more self-sustaining financial model, allowing the individuals it supports to see a return on their artistic creations and the project to rely less on grant funding.
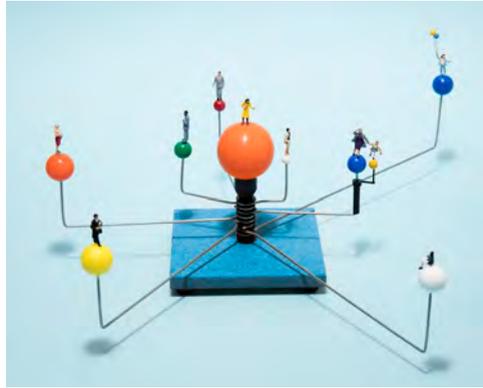
SUSTAINABLE THINKING

RSA Fellows around the world are confronting the harmful effects of consumption

by Adanna Shallowe

As the world wrestles with the inherent conflict between our current model of consumption and its devastating effect on the planet, there are many Fellows who are actively looking for new ways to address this global challenge. Within the policy realm, RSA Fellows from all over the world are involved in various advisory capacities to steer policy at the local and national level towards finding a new sustainable economic model.

Thersus Sustainability LLC, based in Rio de Janeiro and Texas, and headed by Dr Nikhil Chandavarkar FRSA, works with both government and corporate clients to promote lower environmental impacts, better livelihoods, healthier lives and more peaceful societies. Thersus works within the framework of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and through powerful tools such as big data, machine learning and artificial intelligence to help create positive value for people, businesses and societies today while treading lightly on the planet to preserve it for the people of tomorrow. Among its initiatives in 2016 and 2017, Thersus delivered a sustainability seminar for policymakers and civil society executives in Korea, evaluated six clusters of public-private partnerships aimed at more sustainable production and consumption, and assessed the sustainability policies in several industrial and developing countries.

Other RSA Fellows use our research content to inform the way they advise businesses. Paula Fontell, co-founder of Ethica – a Finland-based consultancy specialising in the circular economy – used the RSA report *Investigating the role of design in the circular economy* to guide her work. The report inspired Ethica to get involved with the Relooping Fashion Initiative, which

ADANNA SHALLOWE IS THE MANAGER OF RSA GLOBAL

aims to create a closed circular ecosystem for textiles in Finland whereby old clothes are dissolved and the solution spun into new cloth. The project was recognised as a leading international innovative sustainability initiative at the World Economic Forum in 2016. Ethica was the co-project lead alongside VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland.

Fellows are developing new technologies that confront our most intractable problems, such as our dependency on environmentally harmful fossil fuels to power our economic activities. The technology created by New York-based FRSA Eden Full Goh confronts this issue head on. Eden invented SunSaluter, a low-cost mechanism that optimises solar panels while providing clean water for rural, remote communities. Eden's device turns solar panels so that they follow the sun, boosting their output by 20%. This initiative started as a childhood science project and has led to the creation of a non-profit organisation, which has deployed the solar technology to 18 countries across the world, immeasurably impacting the lives of over 10,000 individuals. SunSaluter has been able to make this impact because its device is cheap to make. Similar devices relied on electronics, whereas Eden's solution uses water to control panels' rotation and, at the same time, purify water for consumption.

Although the global issues facing this generation appear entrenched and unmalleable, in a stunning tribute to RSA founder William Shipley, these Fellows are firmly challenging our current model of consumption with new, innovative ways of thinking and doing things. They are confronting old paradigms and leading us to a more sustainable future.

If you have a project you would like to share with us, please contact us at global@rsa.org.uk ∎

CHARLOTTE STEEL

"There's something I like about a patch of land that people can use to come together as a community," says Charlotte Steel, general manager of Sutton Community Farm. Charlotte left her career in environmental finance after three years and took some time out before volunteering at the farm in 2012. She then became the social enterprise's first apprentice. "It was something completely different, having my hands in the earth. I like being outdoors, so it was perfect for me," she explains.

Sutton Community Farm funds most of its operations through selling the vegetables it grows. Charlotte has always had an interest in, and passion for, sustainability, but sustainable food in particular. "It's special because we are all connected by food; everyone has to eat every day," she says.

Charlotte became a Fellow through the sustainability leadership programme. She is looking forward to making the most of her Fellowship and the access to progressive thought leadership on her subject it will give her. "I'm also looking forward to being part of a bigger tribe of like-minded individuals working on similar enterprises, especially those working in sustainability," she says. "A Fellowship with the RSA is a fantastic way to meet new people and share experiences that will better us all."

LUDO VAN OYEN

Based in Brussels, Ludo van Oyen is keen to find out what his contribution to the RSA can be now that he is a Fellow. He is interested in the destructive neoliberal approach to enterprise and how this affects society, ecosystems and the way businesses are run. He is also deeply interested in educating young people about the successful alternatives that have emerged.

He is, among other things, a guest lecturer at Leiden University's Institute of Environmental Sciences. The course he teaches is entitled 'Redefining Progress: about the transition to a different economy'. "The course is very confrontational in regard to the challenges we face, including environmental challenges, inequality and resource depletion, combined with an increase in population and the dangers that our financial system still poses," he explains.

The course teaches a vision for what a business can be, using inspiring examples from both transnational corporations and small- and medium-sized enterprises, mostly in western Europe. He says: "We are looking now at how a business is an organism and can be used to support sustainable development."

Ludo is looking at ways to set up programmes outside of universities for young people in order to spread the idea that businesses can successfully operate in this way. He hopes his Fellowship with the RSA will help him continue this work.

IN BRIEF

Here are a few more Fellows who are working to drive social progress:

Frankie Graham is the founder and CEO of Betknowmore UK, which provides treatment and education services addressing gambling-related harm. His enterprise includes the first UK gambling support hub, accredited outreach support programmes and dedicated projects for specific groups. He provides consultancy to stakeholders in different sectors to develop innovative solutions to gambling-related harm.

Professor Sarah Skerratt is the director of the Rural Policy Centre at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). She hopes to establish a community of interest around policy issues in order to exchange thoughts and perspectives on persistent rural challenges.

Cat Drew is a director at service design and innovation agency Uscreates, co-presents BBC Radio 4's *The Fix* with RSA's Matthew Taylor, and previously was a founding member of the UK Government's Policy Lab. She has worked at No10, the Cabinet Office and at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Barbara Van Dahlen PhD is the founder and president of Give an Hour, which offers free mental health care to those serving their families and communities. In 2012 Barbara was named by *TIME* magazine in its list of 100 most influential people in the world.

YOUR FELLOWSHIP: ENGAGE WITH THE RSA IN FOUR MAIN WAYS

1 **Connect online:** Search for Fellows online at our new website. Visit www.thersa.org/new-website for details of how to log in. You can also follow us on Twitter @theRSAorg, join the Fellows' LinkedIn group and follow our blog at www.thersa.org/blogs.

2 **Meet other Fellows:** Fellowship events and network meetings take place across the UK and are an excellent way to meet other Fellows. Visit our website to find an event in your area.

3 **Share your skills:** Log in to the website to update your Fellowship profile and let other Fellows know about your skills, interests, expertise and availability.

4 **Grow your idea:** RSA Catalyst offers grants and crowdfunding support for Fellow-led new and early-stage projects that aim to tackle a social challenge. Visit the Project Support page on our website.

Explore these and further ways to get involved at **www.thersa.org**

*We may yearn for something more wholesome, but
we can't step off the hamster wheel of consumption*

by Peter York
🐦 *@PeterPeteryork*

Do you realise that your grandmother was *an enemy of the people*? No matter what British class or region she was from she'll have said "Waste not want not", "It'll see me out", or "Make do and mend". She would have used language that is fundamentally anti-capitalist and worse, specifically anti-growth. What if these grannies had been into dialectical materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat; then where would we all have been?

Even if we may still be a bit uncomfortable about spelling it out, everyone knows now that our future depends on us *consuming like mad*. And never stopping. The engine of our economy is residential property prices and footfall in Next and M&S (or ASOS or Net-a-Porter if you want to be more 2018). Just stop consuming for one minute and the engine comes to a shuddering halt. So the granny-talk has to stop.

You can't compromise on this, my mushy thinking, liberal, organic friends; you can't adopt a holding pattern, a steady-as-she-goes. Stopping growth means falling into a positive ravine of poverty and despair. We're lashed to a perpetual hamster wheel and we must learn to love it. No matter that Europe, now the subject of universal derision for its seriously sub-Chinese growth rates, is really quite nice, with wealth distribution and state provision mostly rather good (compared with America or Singapore, the role model for post-Brexit Britain).

You can't muddle your way round it, talking about your own adorable 20-somethings who've renounced the law or management consultancy in favour of something preposterously artisanal underneath the railway arches. Look closer at the rhetoric of hipster businesses and you'll find a confusion of organic community-ish-70s natterings and the language of airport business-schooly books about entrepreneurialism (or bourgeois individualism, as my granny would've called it). The latest iterations

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of these books are chock-full of case studies of faintly rebellious counter-cultural artisanal types who've built up 'disruptive' biggish businesses fast and sold them to megacorps, Ben & Jerry style. And megacorp owners immediately do two things. First they install 'creative directors' (design types) to project the *unchanging values of the brand* (all communications with a hand-lettered chalkboard look) and then they fit the business into their own procurement departments so they can buy components, ingredients and so on far cheaper in other bits of the world and, along the way, de-specify some of the things that people don't appear to notice. That way, the adorable artisanal company can achieve rapid growth and shareholder value. You know it makes sense.

It's harder for designers now. There's much more to think about. So many intangibles, new responsibilities and so much new language. It was easier when it was a matter of styling in the old American Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes sense of making clunky machinery – cars, white goods, trains – look compellingly modern and attractive by devising streamlined casings for them (and redoing them constantly). Or when it was design in the European sense of inventing design solutions; things that worked differently and looked lovely for ever so they could be revived 50 years later and sold as iconic.

But now, if not exactly a Hippocratic oath, there's social responsibility and commitments to greenness. Smart creative director designer types have become experts at greenwash. They have to express how you can double turnover in a year without hurting the planet. Eventually, being complicit in greenwash – or any other kind of wash where design masks the reality of the situation – will come back to hit designers' collective reputation. Designers often feel conflicted; they have to do right, otherwise they're going to be a great embarrassment to *their* grandchildren. In attempting both to do the right thing *and* keep the hampster wheel of growth turning forever, they're illustrating the great contradiction at the heart of our economy. ▪

Do you know someone who would make a great Fellow?

Your nominations are a great way to add the expertise and enthusiasm of friends and colleagues to the Fellowship community. You can nominate them online at www.theRSA.org/nominate. We will send a personalised invitation on your behalf and notify you if your nominee becomes a Fellow.

Fellows have access to the brightest new ideas, innovative projects, a diverse network of like-minded people and a platform for social change.

RSA

Creating a 21st century enlightenment coffeehouse

Founded in an Enlightenment coffeehouse by a group of people with a vision for a better tomorrow, the RSA is now a global Fellowship dedicated to enriching society through ideas and action. In 2018 we will be undertaking an ambitious project to redevelop levels -1 and -2 of RSA House into a 21st century enlightenment coffeehouse.

Since 1774 Fellows have supported the development of RSA House. Will you invest in a 21st century enlightenment coffeehouse? Find out more at www.thersa.org/coffeehouse.

RSA
21st century enlightenment