

THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER ONE

# The Line on the Map

*Chapter One of The Standing Forest*

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## THE LICENCE

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Chapter One of The Standing Forest. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-standing-forest (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989542).

## A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

## ABSTRACT

The five essays at the centre of this book first appeared as a series in the Ecstatic Economics lineage at hautelumiere.life. They traced the idea of an economy inside the biosphere from John Stuart Mill to Raworth, stated its critics at their strongest, read it through the house's own living-systems lens, followed one city through it and set it beside its neighbours. They are here, revised into chapters, with the magazine furniture taken out and the repetition between them removed. They were never the whole of what a leader needs. An essay can show that a firm is better seen as an organism in a habitat. It cannot hand a chief executive the twelve months of meetings that turn the seeing into a practice. An essay can say that measurement matters. It cannot sit with a board while the first honest number comes in worse than the one in last year's sustainability report. So seven chapters are new, and they are the reason this is a book.

CHAPTER ONE

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HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER ONE

## Why this book, when the articles exist

The five essays at the centre of this book first appeared as a series in the Ecstatic Economics lineage at hautelumiere.life. They traced the idea of an economy inside the biosphere from John Stuart Mill to Raworth, stated its critics at their strongest, read it through the house's own living-systems lens, followed one city through it and set it beside its neighbours. They are here, revised into chapters, with the magazine furniture taken out and the repetition between them removed.

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Two are case chapters, both from the public record. One follows Wales and New Zealand, two governments that wrote into law and into a budget the proposition that the size of an economy is not its purpose. The other follows Costa Rica, which built a national programme to pay landowners for keeping forest standing, and which has been studied closely enough that its results can be stated with their error bars. One chapter is about measurement: what to count, in which unit, and how to read it honestly when it disappoints. One is a field manual, a year of work set out week by week, with the roles and the decisions named. One is about the hard conversations: the board member who thinks this is a fashion, the union representative who suspects it is a pay freeze in green clothing, the partner at home who would rather not talk about the car. It carries scripts. One brings the whole idea down to a single household's money and work. And the last is a workbook, which gathers every tool in the book onto its own pages, with a ninety-day plan at the end.

## Who it is for

It is for a person who is responsible for something. A chief executive or a finance director, a head teacher, the chair of a housing association, the owner of a bakery, the treasurer of a congregation, a parent with a mortgage. The ideas in it were developed for nations and the planet, and they are at their most useful at the scale where one person can see the whole of the ledger.

It is not a book of investment advice and it offers none. It promises no return. It does not argue that growth is bad, or that every firm should stop growing, or that a household should give up its car. It argues something narrower and more useful: that any organisation can see the ground it stands on, with figures it already holds, and that seeing it changes what counts as a sensible decision on an ordinary Tuesday.

## Why now

There are three reasons, and none of them is a deadline.

The first is that the science has matured. When Johan Rockström and his colleagues proposed nine planetary boundaries in 2009, three were estimated to have been crossed and several could not yet be quantified.[1] In 2023 Katherine Richardson and colleagues quantified all nine for the first time and reported that six were transgressed.[2] A framework that has been revised in the open for fourteen years, and has published its own uncertainties at every step, is no longer a manifesto. It is an instrument with known tolerances, and an instrument with known tolerances can be used.

The second is that the evidence on the social side has caught up. In 2018 Daniel O'Neill, Andrew Fanning, William Lamb and Julia Steinberger compared more than one hundred and fifty countries and found that no country met basic needs for its citizens at a globally sustainable level of resource use.[3] In 2022 Fanning, O'Neill, Jason Hickel and Nicolas Roux followed more than one hundred and forty countries from 1992 to 2015 and found that countries tend to transgress biophysical boundaries faster than they achieve social thresholds.[4] Those are sobering sentences. They are also exactly the kind of sentence a leader can work with, because they say where the problem is: in the way needs are met, not only in how much is produced.

The third reason is practical. The tools have come down to a usable size. Amsterdam drew a portrait of itself inside the ring in 2020, and the method it used is short enough to be run by a leadership team in two half-days. More than fifty local governments, by the account of the organisation that promotes the approach, have since taken it up. A method that has been run by cities can be run by a firm.



*The house's reading*

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## The house's reading

This book belongs to a lineage whose root is Ammanuel Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics*, and it takes from that book a reading of the subject that ecological economists have mostly left to one side. The ecologists were right that an economy is a physical process. Santa Anna states the physics more bluntly than most of them:

> *Every economy exists within a biosphere. When the economy degrades the biosphere, it degrades the foundation of its own possibility. This is not a matter of opinion. It's thermodynamics.*[5]

What the book adds is a claim about people. It argues that knowing the figures has never been the difficulty:

> *The information hasn't been the bottleneck.*[6]

and that the difficulty sits somewhere less comfortable, in the body of a person who is frightened of not having enough. A frightened finance director at two in the morning does not open the second spreadsheet. A frightened board does not look at the gas bill beside the revenue line. The method in this book is designed with that in mind. It begins with what an organisation already does well, it uses figures already held, it sets no target in its first quarter, and it treats every objection as a line in a register rather than a threat to be managed. None of that is softness. It is the condition under which the second set of figures can be read at all.

The reading also adds a third ring to Raworth's two. Her floor and ceiling can be measured from outside. Santa Anna argues that an economy can meet the floor and respect the ceiling and still leave the people inside it exhausted, and that their aliveness is part of what an economy is for. That claim is harder to measure than carbon, and Chapter 4 and Chapter 8 are careful about how far it can be pushed. It is still the right question, and a book that left it out would be shorter and less true.

## What the book will not do

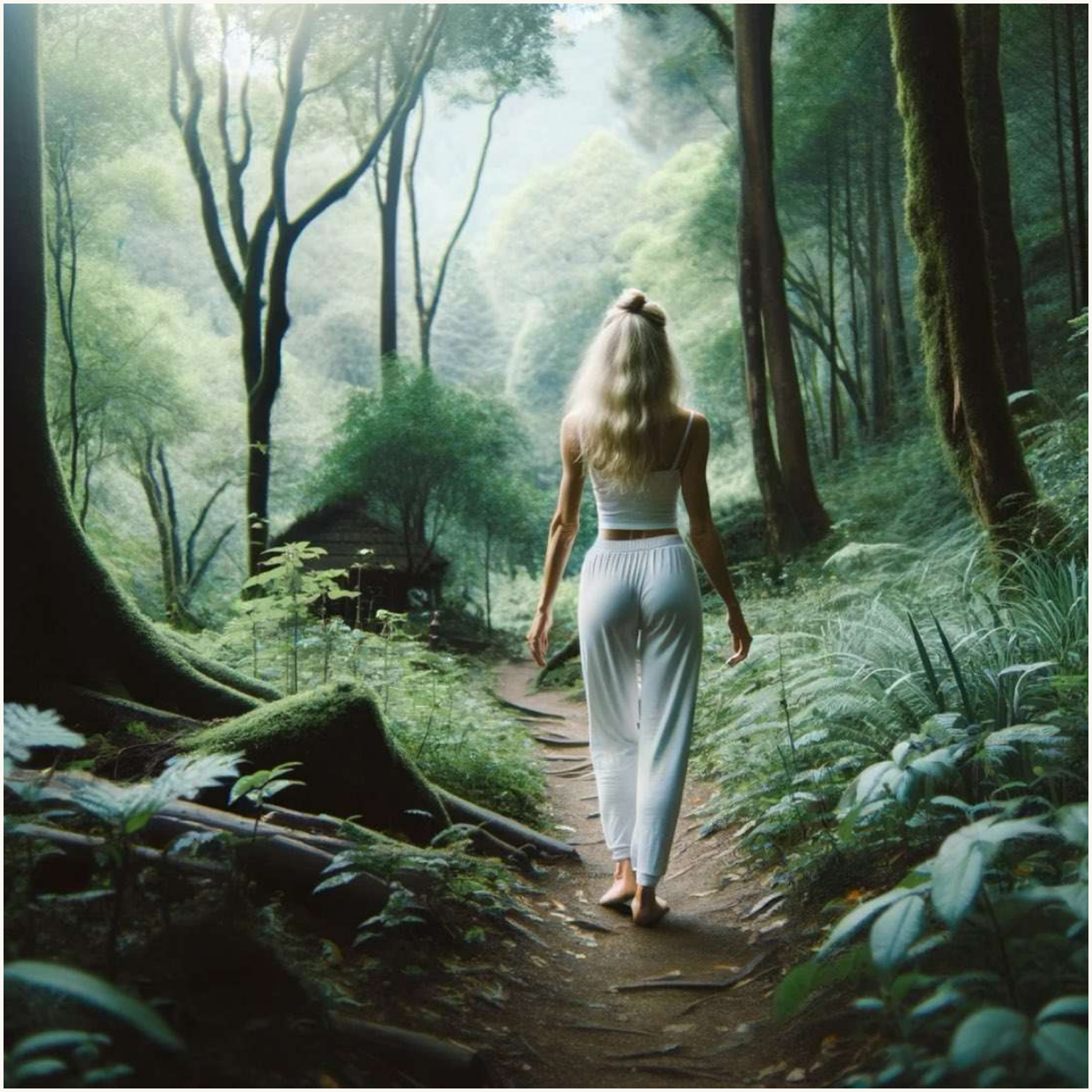
Three things are left out on purpose, and a reader is owed the reasons.

The book does not try to settle the argument between ecological economics and the mainstream. That argument is fifty years old and conducted by serious people on both sides. Chapter 3 states the strongest objections to the doughnut and the steady state, says what the evidence supports, and turns each one into a question a household or firm can answer with its own figures. That is a smaller aim than settling the argument, and a more useful one for a reader with a business to run.

It does not offer a single score. There are indices that try to combine an economy's social and ecological performance into one number, and Chapter 8 discusses the most careful of them. Each hides its judgements inside its arithmetic. This book asks a reader to count each flow and each need in its own unit and to look at them side by side. It is less elegant, and it is harder to argue with.

And it does not tell anyone what to give up. The ring has a floor as well as a ceiling. For a firm whose people are paid below a living benchmark, the first move is upward. For a household that is short of something it needs, the first line of the ledger is that need. The book is agnostic about growth in the way Ra-

worth asks: where growth fills the floor, it is the point, and where it presses on the ceiling, development without further throughput is the point. Which of those a given organisation faces is something its own figures will show, and nobody else's.



*How to read it*

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## How to read it

The chapters run in an order, and each stands alone. A reader who wants the history and the argument can read Chapters 2 to 5 as a short course. A leader who has already been persuaded and wants to begin can go

straight to Chapter 9, the field manual, and use the workbook beside it. A board member preparing for a difficult meeting can go to Chapter 10. A reader who wants to start at home can begin with Chapter 11.

Every chapter that teaches ends with a tool, written out in full and named at its foot. They are gathered again, with a ninety-day plan, in the workbook at the back. Every figure has a source, every source is in the notes, and every note says what its source cannot show. Where a case is a composite, built for teaching, it says so in the same paragraph. The book quotes Santa Anna's own writing where it says a thing better than a summary could, and every such quotation has been checked word for word against his manuscript.

Four neighbouring books in this lineage take up ideas this one only touches. Elinor Ostrom's work on governing a commons is the subject of *The Pasture Was Never Empty*. The economy as an evolving system, with its increasing returns and lock-in, is the subject of *The Economy That Keeps Becoming*. Regenerative and circular enterprise is the subject of regenerative economies. And the oldest question of all, whether scarcity is a fact of nature or a choice of design, is the subject of *Enough by Design*. The closing chapter of this book sets the ring beside each of them.

## One image to carry in

Hold the finance director at two in the morning. Nothing in this book asks her to stop closing the year. It asks her to open the second spreadsheet beside the first, and to notice, before anyone tells her what to do about it, that the two have been describing the same building all along.

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