

THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER TWELVE

The Standing Forest

Chapter Twelve of The Standing Forest

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Chapter Twelve 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

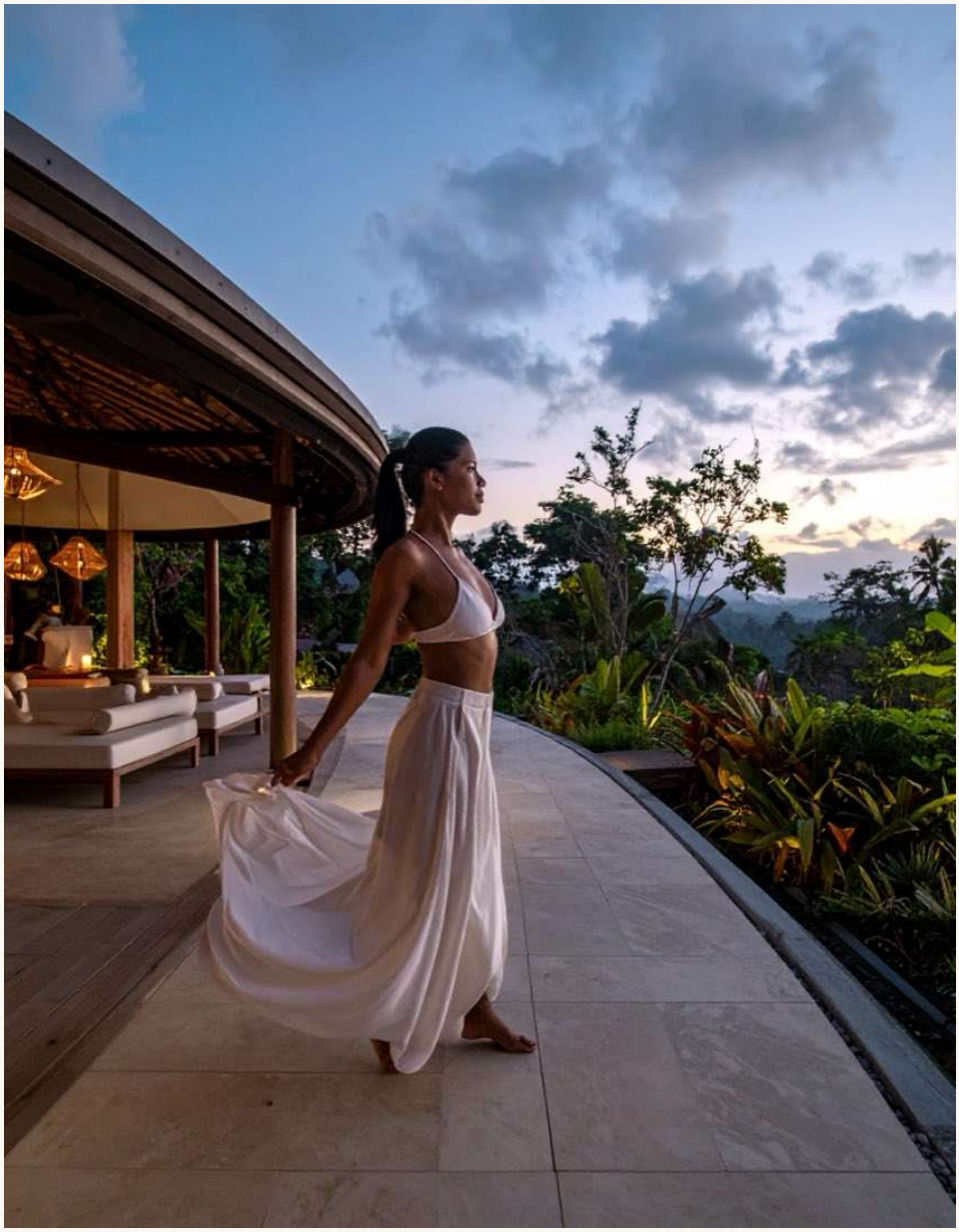
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ABSTRACT

A picture that explains everything explains too little. The doughnut has been so successful as an image that it is sometimes asked to carry more than any image can: to be a theory of value, a policy programme and a moral compass at once. Kate Raworth never claimed that much for it. She called it a compass, not a map, in the title of her 2017 comment in The Lancet Planetary Health , and a compass tells you which way is north without telling you how to cross the river in front of you. The chapters before this one took the doughnut on its own terms: its history, its critics, the house's living-systems reading, a city, two governments and a forest, and then the year of work, the measures, the conversations and the household. This last chapter sets the ring beside four neighbouring ideas, each the subject of its own book in this lineage. Each adds something the doughnut lacks. Each is corrected, in turn, by something the doughnut supplies. Then it returns to the forest.

CHAPTER TWELVE

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One picture is not enough

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The chapters before this one took the doughnut on its own terms: its history, its critics, the house's living-systems reading, a city, two governments and a forest, and then the year of work, the measures, the conversations and the household. This last chapter sets the ring beside four neighbouring ideas, each the subject of its own book in this lineage. Each adds something the doughnut lacks. Each is corrected, in turn, by something the doughnut supplies. Then it returns to the forest.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* warns against the temptation this kind of chapter invites, what the book calls premature synthesis: blending every tradition into a single feel-good framework and erasing the differences between them. The book prefers "productive tensions", and asks for polyphony rather than unison.[83] What follows tries to keep the tensions audible.

Beside the commons: who keeps the ring

The doughnut tells you where the safe and just space lies. It does not tell you who keeps a community inside it. That question belongs to Elinor Ostrom, whose work on governing common-pool resources is the subject of a neighbouring book, which ends on [a commons on Monday]({{E:ee-commons-5}}).

Ostrom spent her career studying fisheries, forests, irrigation systems and grazing lands that communities had governed sustainably, sometimes for centuries, without either private ownership or central control. From hundreds of cases she drew a set of design principles that the long-lived institutions shared: clear boundaries, rules fitted to local conditions, collective choice by the people affected, monitoring by people accountable to the community, graduated sanctions, cheap ways to resolve conflict, and recognition of the community's right to organise. In 2009, the year she was awarded the Nobel memorial prize, she published in *Science* a general framework for analysing the sustainability of what she called social-ecological systems: resource systems, the resource units they produce, the users who draw on them and the governance that holds them together, all set within wider social and ecological settings.[84]

What Ostrom adds. A ring with no keeper is a wish. Her principles describe how real communities have stayed inside limits without being forced. The ceiling of the doughnut is, for any particular watershed or fishery, a commons problem, and her research is the best evidence anyone has on how such problems are solved in practice.

What the doughnut adds back. Ostrom's cases are mostly local and mostly about one resource. The doughnut insists on the global lenses: a well-governed local fishery can still sit inside a city whose consumption overshoots the planet. Chapter 5's four-lens portrait is, in effect, a way of asking an Ostrom question at every scale at once.

Beside complexity: an economy that evolves

The doughnut is a static picture: a ring, drawn at a moment. Real economies move. The neighbouring book on complexity economics, which closes on [the path across the lawn]({{E:ee-complexity-5}}), follows the work of Brian Arthur and others who treat the economy as an evolving system, in which small early advantages can lock in, increasing returns make some technologies dominant for reasons that have little to do with their merit, and the future is shaped by the path taken to reach it.

What complexity adds. It explains why an economy that knows it is overshooting does not simply turn back. Coal plants, road networks and suburban housing are not only physical stock; they are commitments around which jobs, skills, tax bases and habits have grown. Lock-in is the reason the fifth objection in Chapter 3, that economies are built to need growth, is so stubborn. It also suggests the way out: lock-in works in both directions. A city that builds a good tram network, or a firm that trains its people in repair, creates its own increasing returns.

What the doughnut adds back. Complexity economics is often silent about where the system should evolve to. A theory of how economies change is not the same as a view of which changes are good. The doughnut supplies a direction: towards the ring, from whichever side a given economy is on.

The Luminous 100's reading of systems thinking puts the two together in a single question, which Chapter 4 quoted and which bears repeating here, because it is the question an evolving system most needs to be asked: "Where are the virtuous cycles already alive in this system?"[85]



Beside regeneration: more than less harm

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Beside regeneration: more than less harm

The doughnut defines a space between overshoot and shortfall. It is possible to read it as a list of things not to do: do not exceed this boundary, do not fall below that floor. The neighbouring book on regenerative and circular economics, as far as [life at the edges]({{E:ee-regenerative-5}}), takes up a more ambitious question, associated with John Fullerton's regenerative capitalism and with the circular economy: not only how a business can do less harm, but how it can leave the systems it touches healthier than it found them.

What regeneration adds. Raworth herself made "create to regenerate" one of her seven ways, and the regenerative literature gives it working detail: designing products to be repaired and remade, farming to rebuild soil, sourcing to restore the forests timber comes from. In the language of Chapter 4, it asks a firm not only to manage its metabolism but to strengthen its habitat.

What the doughnut adds back. Regeneration is easy to claim and hard to measure. A firm that calls itself regenerative because one product line uses recycled material, while its total throughput rises, has mistaken a gesture for a direction. The doughnut's ceiling is the check: regeneration that does not show up as falling absolute flows or recovering stocks has not yet happened.

Santa Anna's book frames the same check in its own terms, as reciprocity: "Every taking must be balanced by a giving. Every extraction must be matched by a restoration."[86] A regenerative claim can be tested against that sentence, flow by flow.

Beside enough: the question under all of them

The last neighbour is the deepest. The neighbouring book on scarcity as a design choice, which ends on [the art of life itself]({{E:ee-abundance-5}}), begins with John Maynard Keynes's 1930 essay "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren", in which he predicted that within a century the economic problem, the struggle for subsistence, might be solved in the progressive countries, and that people would then face the harder problem of how to live wisely and well with what they had. It continues through Amartya Sen's argument that development should be measured by what people are able to do and be, not by what they own.

What the question of enough adds. Every framework in this book assumes that, past a point, more is not better. None of them says where that point is for a particular person or household. That is not a question an economist can answer from outside. Santa Anna's book asks it from inside, in a reflective question at the end of one of its chapters:

> *When was the last time you experienced genuine sufficiency — the bodily sense of having what you need, wanting nothing more?*[87]

The book is careful about whom this question is for. It states plainly that people in real material deprivation need material resources, not a change of mind, and that its inner work is for those who already have enough security to examine their relationship with scarcity.[88] With that boundary drawn, the question becomes practical. A household that can name what enough feels like has a ceiling of its own, chosen rather than imposed, and a good deal more room inside it than it thought.

What the doughnut adds back. Enough, without the floor, can become a comfortable person's reason to ignore someone else's shortfall. The doughnut's inner ring keeps the question honest: one person's sufficiency is good news only if the people they depend on have theirs.

The book offers a second reflection, from an earlier chapter, that sits exactly on this boundary:

> *Now try: There is enough for everyone.*[89]

It is an invitation to notice what happens in the body when the sentence is read, and the book does not claim that noticing it changes the world. It does suggest that a person who can say it without flinching makes different decisions at work on Monday.

Where the neighbours disagree

Set side by side, the five ideas do not agree on everything, and the disagreements are useful. Three are worth naming.

Scale. Ostrom's evidence is strongest for resources a community can see and walk: a fishery, a pasture, an irrigation canal. The doughnut's ceiling is drawn for the whole planet. Between the two lies a gap that neither fills by itself. A village can govern its forest; nobody governs the atmosphere in Ostrom's sense, and her own later work on what she called polycentric governance was an attempt to describe how many overlapping centres of decision might do together what no single one can. For a leader, the practical lesson is that the global boundaries will not be kept by any one actor, and that the actors who keep them will be many and partial. A firm's portrait is one of those centres.

Direction. Complexity economics is wary of any picture that tells an evolving system where to go. Arthur's work shows how outcomes depend on paths, accidents and timing, and a complexity economist may regard a fixed ring as too tidy for a world that keeps changing its own rules. The doughnut's defenders answer that the ceiling is set by physics, not by preference, and that a system free to evolve is still not free to evolve beyond its biosphere. Both are right about something. The ring is a constraint on the space; the path through the space is still open, and still shaped by small decisions taken early.

Ambition. The regenerative literature asks more of a business than the doughnut does: not only to stay within the ring but to enlarge the living capacity inside it. The question of enough asks less in material terms and more in inner ones. A regenerative firm may want to grow, if its growth restores; a household that has found its enough may want to shrink its flows, whatever they restore. The doughnut sits between them and is agnostic, which is its strength and, for some readers, its frustration.

Santa Anna's book would not resolve these tensions, and on its own account should not. Its phrase for the alternative is "premature synthesis", and the cost of it is a framework that sounds complete and helps nobody decide anything. The useful practice is to carry all five ideas into a decision and ask each one its own question: who keeps this, which path does it lock in, does it restore, is it enough, and does it stay inside the ring. A decision that passes all five has been examined from five directions. A decision that fails one has at least been seen clearly.

There is one further point on which all five agree, and it is the reason they belong in one lineage. Each treats the economy as something that sits inside a larger living world and answers to it. Each refuses the textbook picture of a loop with no coastline. Santa Anna's book states the shared premise in its most compressed form, and it is the sentence this book has returned to most often: "the economy is a subset of ecology, not the other way around."[91]



Two further neighbours

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Two further neighbours

Two more books in this lineage sit just beyond the edge of this one, and a reader who has come this far will meet both.

The first is on gift, reciprocity and trust. This book has leaned throughout on the principle Santa Anna's book takes from the Honorable Harvest, that every taking is balanced by a giving. The neighbouring book follows that principle into the experimental evidence on how people actually reciprocate, and why a pay-

ment that arrives on time buys more than a larger one that arrives late. The Stewardship Contract in Chapter 7 is, in that book's terms, a gift relationship given a written form.

The second is on purpose and patient capital. Chapter 3's fifth objection, that economies are built to need growth, is at its sharpest in the expectations of the people who provide capital. The neighbouring book takes up what ownership and governance look like when they are designed for the long term, which is the condition under which a firm can afford to read its ring honestly in a year when the reading is poor.

What the book asks

Everything in this book comes down, finally, to what one leader or one household does next, and the answer is smaller than the subject. Santa Anna's book asks for "a seed — something small enough to start this week."[90] For a leader, the seed is a single observation: one flow across the coastline, measured for one month in its own unit, beside revenue, with nothing else done with it yet. For a household, it is the same in miniature, one flow on a sheet by the kettle. The field manual in Chapter 9 and the workbook that follows this chapter turn those seeds into a year.

The book has tried to keep its claims to the size of its evidence. The decoupling evidence is strong on the past and silent on what has not been tried. The cross-country studies are correlational. Amsterdam, Wales, New Zealand and Costa Rica each changed what they counted, and each shows a gap between saying and doing that closes slowly. What the book does claim is that any organisation or household can draw its own ring with figures it already holds, and that the drawing changes what it notices. The rest is a decision, and it belongs to the person who has drawn the ring.

Some readers will want to work through what the ring means for a particular organisation with someone who has done it before. Ammanuel Santa Anna works with a small number of leaders one to one, and that work is described at hautelumiere.life. The lineage this book belongs to, with its sibling books and the essays they grew from, is kept at hautelumiere.life.

The forest

The first chapters of this book began with a map that had no coastline and quoted a sentence from Santa Anna's book about a forest that has value only when it is cut down. It is right to end with the same forest, standing.

Picture it as an ecologist would: one particular stand of beech on a slope above a town. In the national accounts it contributes nothing until it is felled. In the doughnut it is part of the ceiling: carbon held, water slowed, soil kept. In Ostrom's terms it is a commons, kept by the people who agree how much wood each household may take. In the language of complexity it is a path that can still be chosen. In the language of

regeneration it is a stock that a good business could thicken. In the language of enough, it is the thing a household notices on a Sunday walk and realises it would not trade for anything the felling would buy.

Nothing in that picture requires the forest to be priced. It requires only that someone, in a firm or at a kitchen table, has learned to see it standing.

A note on method

Keynes's essay is Keynes, J. M. (1930), "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren", first published in *The Nation and Athenaeum* and reprinted in *Essays in Persuasion* (1931); it was not re-read in this pass and is described here only in outline.

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