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## Introduction

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Life as we know it is changing rapidly and dramatically. We have entered what scientists now call the Anthropocene—a new geological epoch underscored by large-scale social and ecological changes. The truth is humanity has become a geophysical force—one whose actions profoundly shape Earth systems and increasingly determine the conditions of life for its many inhabitants. By 2050, for example, the UNDP and the International Organization for Migration say there will be an exodus of about 250 million people due to drought (Brown, 2007; Pinto-Dobernic, 2008). It is high time we asked how we will meet the great challenges of the twenty-first century, including climate change, technological unemployment, and widening social inequalities.

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V.M.B. Giorgino, Z. Walsh (eds.), *Co-Designing Economies in Transition*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66592-4\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66592-4_1)

Some have suggested that we can make a Great Transition to a socially just and sustainable future. But fundamentally, this would require a cultural transition aligned with a new economic system. All of us can easily recognize that the continuous changes we deal with exert an enormous pressure on us, our relationships, and our existing institutions. Few of these changes do not affect our economic interactions. By overcoming the presumed independence and a-historicity of economics, we may more accurately understand economic interactions in relation to society and as part of a broader set of human interactions. Most scholars agree that we are embedded in various systems of economic relationships, some of which are market-based, state-based, voluntary or non-profit-based, and household-based. What needs to be better understood, however, is the quality of these relationships—the texture of the different binds that they create. This is why sociologist Viviana Zelizer (2012) prefers to define the economy as *relational work*.

It is difficult to understand the immense challenges of our everyday lives in such exciting and complicated times, since the changes we experience often appear new, confusing, and incapable of being easily encapsulated in established conceptual frameworks. The anxiety to classify our experiences under a known umbrella is quite strong, motivated especially by academics' never-ending battles for theoretical dominance, rather than their desire to transcend paradigms. As a result, there is a clear cultural need to develop tools and methods able to reduce our strong tendency toward divided thinking. When we attempt to go beyond the principles and values of our field and observe processes as they appear, then new interactional patterns will likely emerge. This, however, requires a return to the basics—a return to the elementary condition of our humanity, considering all our relationships, so that no one and nothing is left out for lack of attention or empathy.

Contemplative social sciences place these processes at the core of their inquiry. Their specific contribution is to help us become aware of our pre-judgments and find a way to a more open-minded approach to understanding very different phenomena within a participatory, but not pre-classificatory, scheme. They establish wise and pragmatic methodologies to develop and nurture fresh approaches to social interactions. At the core, they are based on systematic efforts to integrate the wisdom traditions

with the social sciences. This implies that the understanding of contemplative knowledge transcends the religious contexts in which they are typically born and cultivated. It also means that we are taking the first steps in uncharted territory, in which wisdom traditions and social sciences are invited to dismiss their respective dogmas and be open to unexpected solutions. Approximately 50 years ago, Michael Polanyi (2015) wrote that the production of knowledge is a personal enterprise that is neither subjective nor objective; rather, it is a personal commitment characterized by *dwelling in*.

John Dewey said rationality and reflective thought does not ground us (D’Agnese, 2016). Rather, we are all groundless, situated knowers. Our personhood and our capacity for knowledge are both processes. We are all events. With this understanding, we may use embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (4E) approaches to cognition to provide us new ways of understanding how minds and bodies are co-produced in interaction with environments (Hutchins, 2010; Thompson, 2007). These innovative approaches help researchers better understand the role of cognition in social and ecological systems, affording them new ways to more consciously and sustainably design structures and systems to support ethical values. This can help us not only become aware of people’s subjective (cognitive and affective) processes, but also become aware of the social and ecological conditions underlying our existence and the possibilities for transforming perception and behavior “intra-actively” with material transformations (Barad, 2007).

This book creates dialogue between radical knowledge-practices and contemplative social science to create these connections more clearly. It seeks to transgress disciplinary boundaries, imagine, and implement new visions of reality—in short, to co-design economies in transition. What that specifically entails varies dramatically depending on a variety of factors, including one’s scope of interests, expertise, and social and geographical location. The chapters in this volume thus do not all agree with one another, nor should they. Showcasing their differences is productive of grasping the interconnections between fields and disciplines, and including such difference is part of the task of mapping the Great Transition. In this sense, this book is more akin to a proposition, than a statement. Its chapters are intended to have an un-disciplining effect,

decentering our habitual ways of thinking about challenges exclusively in terms of technical problems with technical solutions. They are intended instead to provoke thought and conceive possibilities, which exist but remain largely unseen. This is clearly tangible, for instance, if we pay attention to the newly distributed technologies and the efforts underway to implement a collaborative commons at the urban level. These changes are intended to forever modify our landscapes, and we can play a fundamental role in directing them toward collective well-being.

At the same time, despite such differences between its individual authors, this book presents a transdisciplinary vision pragmatically oriented toward social transformation, able to create islands of change chiefly concerned with disintermediate and dehierarchized social and economic ties. The languages and competencies of each author remain separate, but in our opinion, there is a thread that connects each of the following chapters. That thread is the awareness that we are entering an era characterized by new social and economic forms beyond our understanding.

## Part I

In Part I, we examine the “Transdisciplinary Foundations for Contemporary Social and Economic Transformation.” Vincenzo M. B. Giorgino leads off the discussion in the first part of Chap. 2 by specifically addressing the disruptive potential of distributed ledger technologies toward our social and economic relationships. Some of these technologies’ possible architectures can enhance our lives, while others may cause many challenges and enact certain prejudices in their support of collective well-being. Along these lines, the tokenization of non-material values is the most intriguing area for its unexplored potentialities. In the second part of his chapter, Giorgino maintains that it is important to pay attention to the forms of divisive thinking with which we interpret social relations and orient our social action so as to allow that kind of urban co-design that favors the joy of living and purposive action. He concludes, in the third part, by emphasizing the centrality of an enactive approach to ground our efforts.

Then in Chap. 3, Zack Walsh continues the discussion by mapping the conditions under which a socially just and sustainable global future could emerge from large-scale structural transformations to contemporary society. First, he considers how the global political economy is undergoing world-historical changes, in response to the pressures of mounting inequality, climate crisis, and the growing illegitimacy of neoliberal capitalism. Then, he examines how current political, economic, social, and technological changes could positively and negatively shape the construction of a new world system beyond capitalism. And, finally, he outlines possible avenues for exploring these world-historical changes by developing new fields of inquiry in the emerging transdisciplinary field of contemplative social sciences.

After the editor's introductory chapters, Ugo Mattei and Michel Bauwens propose values frameworks for commons-based economics. In Chap. 4, Ugo Mattei approaches the positivistic distinction between subjects and objects as derived from Cartesianism and as historically developed and currently applied in private law. From early modern times, the institution of property has been constructed as the relationship between a free subject and a legal "object." Progressively abstracting from primitive relationships of material possession, private law has served as the main pillar in the foundations of capitalist extraction within current financial forms. Rethinking property as "being in common," thus, constitutes the foundation of building a "generative" legal system.

In Chap. 5, Michel Bauwens offers an ethical evaluation of the emerging mode of commons-based peer production, and its associated governance and property regimes, in order to see how it stacks up as an implicit or explicit expression of a number of ethical values. In particular, he examines whether the peer to peer logic represents an opportunity for a more complete realization of the aims of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, which shares the vision of the centrality of civil society, with the market and the state function having a service orientation toward civil society. He concludes that there is a correspondence between the two value systems.

Chapters 6 and 7 present two different perspectives on Buddhist economics. In Chap. 6, Laszlo Zsolnai argues that wisdom traditions of humankind require self-transcendence of the person to achieve a

meaningful and ethical life. His chapter uses the example of Buddhism to show how “going beyond the self” can be realized in economic and social contexts. It is argued that Buddhist economics represents a strategy which helps Buddhist and non-Buddhist people alike to reduce the suffering of human and non-human beings by practicing non-violence, caring, and generosity.

Whereas Laszlo compares the major tenets of Buddhist and Western economics as two opposing frameworks, Julie Nelson argues in Chap. 7 that capitalism has no essential nature and that we should take a more pragmatic, less ideological approach to economics grounded in our own experience. Her agnostic view invites us to consider the adage “If you meet the Buddha kill him.” Nelson challenges the reader to consider the question “What is a market?” as a koan—an invitation for investigation. Many advocates for social justice, including many followers of wisdom traditions, call for an economy that is defined in opposition to what is assumed to be the essence of our current economic system. Believing that current economies are based on competition and globalization, for example, critics claim that the alternative must be defined by cooperation and local initiatives. But are these beliefs correct? Opening up to a recognition of the interdependent co-arising of economic relations reveals new avenues for advocating social justice.

Chapters 8 and 9 both give overviews of feminist economics. Feminist economics broadly refers to the application of a feminist lens to both the discipline and subject of economics. It is explicitly interdisciplinary and encompasses debates about the narrow range of mainstream economic methods and researched areas, including questions on how economics values the reproductive sector and examinations of economic epistemology and methodology. In Chap. 8, Zofia Łapniewska provides a brief overview of how feminist economics critiques established theory, methodology, and policy approaches and how it aims to produce gender aware theory, especially in defining economic activity. She argues for a reality check on how people actually live their lives as relational, vulnerable, and interdependent beings and emphasizes the urgency of rethinking mainstream economic approaches.

Then, in Chap. 9, Margunn Bjørnholt delves deeper into the development of feminist economics. She offers a reflection on 25 years of feminist

economics providing illustrative examples of how feminist academic critique, within and outside of academia, in combination with civil engagement, has evolved, promoting change toward better economics, better policies, and well-being for all. Mirroring the widening scope over time of feminist economics, Bjørnholt discusses the following: the exclusion of care and other life-sustaining, unpaid work from systems of national accounts and efforts to make them count; efforts to achieve gender justice through gender responsive budgeting; the effort to bring society's attention to the extent of domestic violence and its consequences; and understanding economics as social provisioning, which considers the responsibility to care for everything, including human rights and our shared living space (Earth), when assessing the consequences of macro-economic policy.

Finally, Xabier Renteria-Uriarte concludes part I by outlining the foundations of contemplative economics. He examines the economy and economics from the perspective of contemplative knowledge. He argues that the economy is a manifestation of deep consciousness, and economic agents choose between alternatives by connecting or disconnecting their consciousness from it—that is, acting ignorantly as *homo economicus*, with more awareness as *homo socioeconomicus* and *eticoeconomicus*, or with full realization as *homo deepeconomicus*. Contemplation helps agents act according to *wu-wei*, *karmayogi*, and *appamada* actions, and in “flow” or “optimal experience”—states which cultivate absorption in tasks and remove the ego and its related rational cost–benefit analysis. This allows them to know the economy as it really is: a space of abundance without the illusion of scarcity, where self-realization, rewarding work, and constructive human relationships arise, accompanied by simplified consumption, equitable incomes, and stable prices.

## Part II

In Part II, we examine “Collective Awareness, the Self, and Digital Technologies.” The first three chapters focus on how the application of technology in cities and communities affects social and economic transformation. In Chap. 11, Igor Calzada illustrates that the same technical

innovations developed in smart systems can be used to enhance democracy or technocracy. He examines the ways in which the hegemonic approach to the “smart city” is evolving into a new intervention category, called the “experimental city.” While this evolution presents some innovations, mainly regarding how smart citizens will be increasingly considered more as decision makers than data providers, likewise, some underlying issues arise, concerning the hidden side and ethical implications of the techno-politics of data and the urban commons. These issues engage with multi-stakeholders, particularly with the specific Penta Helix framework that brings together private sector, public sector, academia, civic society, and entrepreneurs. These innovations in urban life and its governance will inevitably bring us into debate about new potential models of business and society, concerning, for instance, the particular urban co-operative scheme employed.

Chapter 12 is coauthored by Alessia Calafiore, Alessio Antonini, Guido Boella, and Vincenzo M.B. Giorgino. It shows how social network and Web-sharing sites represent a novel and ever-growing source of information that usually contains geographical information. They first present FirstLife, which is a specific social platform that has been recently awarded a prize from the national-level competition in the “Smart Cities and Social Communities” context. FirstLife aims to foster co-production (in the sense articulated by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom) and Do It Yourself initiatives, providing a virtual place connected via maps to concrete reality. Thus, the platform by itself is intended to involve different actors in developing new services, from institutions to associations, from citizens to enterprises. In conclusion, the authors propose a set of methodologies to face such complexity in terms of data management, integration, and smart functionalities, as well as social innovations that develop soft skills and life skills in workshops designed to ground smart Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) on a wiser approach to human interactions with living beings and things.

Then, in Chap. 13, Panayotis Antoniadis describes the dual potential for corporate versus autonomous control in new ICT infrastructure. Popular Internet platforms that currently mediate our everyday communications become more and more efficient in managing vast amounts of information, rendering their users more and more addicted and dependent



on them. Alternative, more organic options like community networks do exist and they can empower citizens to build their own local networks from the bottom-up. This chapter explores such technological options together with the adoption of a healthier Internet diet in the context of a wider vision of sustainable living in an energy-limited world.

The final two chapters articulate ethical and philosophical issues in the development of technology and digital devices in a post-human era. In Chap. 14, Philip Butler explores potential realities of technocratic automation at the intersection of criminal sentencing, artificial intelligence, and race. The chapter begins with a synopsis of the role automation plays in technocratic electronic governance. It then moves to demonstrate how the implementation of automation has adversely affected Black communities. Butler then illustrates how artificial intelligence is currently outpacing human performance, implying that soon, in the realm of criminal sentencing, artificially intelligent judges will emerge, outperforming and eventually replacing human judges. Next, he applies the lens of race to outline how current concepts of artificial cognitive architectures merely reiterate oppressive racial biases. The chapter concludes by imagining how contemplative overlays might be applied to artificial cognitive architectures to allow for more mindful and just sentencing.

Finally, in Chap. 15, David Casacuberta discusses the potential outcomes of designing technologies with respect to the mind–body relation. He argues that key functions of digital apps are based on the disembodied nature of our selves, which is not compatible with our human nature. The solution is not just to redesign those digital apps—a proposal that blindly accepts the premises of technological determinism—but to reconsider the whole concept of what it means to be human. He concludes by giving a brief sketch of the practical philosophy and metaphysics of the thirteenth-century Japanese philosopher Eihei Dōgen to present another view of what it means to be human, in order to conceptualize a reembodied self in the World Wide Web.

Taken as a whole, this book is a call for repurposing structures, technologies, and fragments, not of the past, but of possible futures—futures characterized by resiliency, hope, and flourishing. We think that the time is ripe for a systematic dialogue between the radical perspectives, which this book provides. Furthermore, we expect that this book will be a step

forward in our understanding of social suffering and in our pursuit of individual and collective well-being. Alfred North Whitehead (1968) said the job of philosophy is “to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system” (p. 174), and it is our hope that this book provides new ideas for envisioning a socially just and ecologically sustainable system. We hope you agree that the dialogue between a contemplative approach to social sciences and radical knowledge-practices has great potential, and we sincerely hope that the ideas we sketch may inspire a broader community of researchers to develop this field in a richer, more substantive way. Toward this end, we have created an online community as a home for continuing this work together, and we invite you to join us:

<https://www.loomio.org/g/oVUOrcTq/contemplative-commons>  
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