

## Book Review

Marc Luycks Ghisi

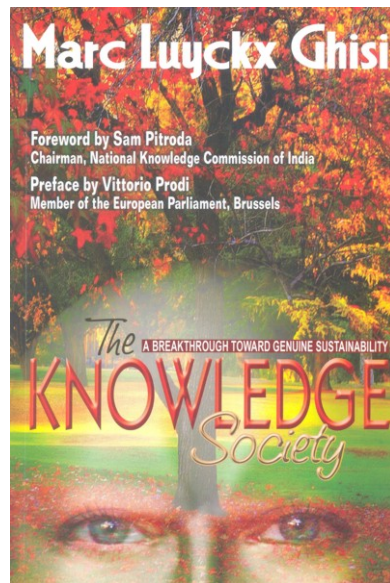
*The Knowledge Society:  
A Breakthrough Toward  
Genuine Sustainability*

With a Preface by  
Ilya Prigogine

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review.



Reviewed by U. J. Mohrhoff

Marc Luycks Ghisi has an MA in both mathematics and philosophy and a PhD in Russian and Greek Theology. For nearly 10 years, from 1990 until 1999, he worked directly for Jacques Delors and Jacques Santer, Presidents of the European Commission, as a member of the Commission's Forward Studies Unit. He was in charge of a research project on future trends in Europe and the world. He is now active in knowledge economy research and is the Dean of the New Cotrugli Business Academy (CBA) in Zagreb, Croatia, as well as the Vice-Chairman of the International Advisory Council of Auroville, India, and a Senior Advisor with Business Solutions, Brussels. He teaches regularly both at CBA and at the École Supérieure de Commerce de Rouen, a leading French business school.

*The Knowledge Society* “heralds the good news that we possess the economic and political tools to steer the world civilization toward *genuine sustainability* and that we can do so *now*.” By “genuine sustainability” Ghisi means “creating a political and economic environment in which our collective footprint on Earth\* is a positive one — an environment in which we put a stop to the current practices that do irremediable harm to Nature and we begin to heal and to clean our environment.”

Ghisi's premise is that our industrial-modern economy and our modern political system are incapable of moving us toward a positive footprint on Earth, even if human beings across the globe are doing their best to care for the environment at the local level. Business leaders across the world, with many of whom the author is well acquainted, tacitly if not openly agree with this premise: an industrial economic system based on *quantitative growth* and *tangible assets* is not capable of leading us toward a sustainable future.

“Whatever we do for the environment, we subtract from economic growth.” So one hears in and from political boardrooms across the globe; the environment

\* Today Europe is polluting so much that it would need 2.4 Earths to absorb its pollution. We say that its ecological footprint is -2.4. The ecological footprint of the U.S. is -4.5. Globally, humanity's footprint is around -2. A positive footprint would signify that humanity's net influence on earth is positive. This is the only possibility for the future. At the moment, we are only diminishing the harm we do to the environment *without reversing the global trend*.

*We have at our disposal the tools needed to shift our economies and our politics toward genuine sustainability and a positive footprint.*

*The world business community has already begun to shift into a new economic logic based on the idea of a "knowledge society."*

*Humanity is currently undergoing an unprecedented cultural mutation, which is taking place silently and behind the scenes.*

*"It is comparable, in fact, to the mutation and transformation that took place during the Renaissance in 1500, but it is probably much more fundamental, more rapid, and deeper."*

is a liability. This poses a huge dilemma. On the one hand, we "cannot ask our politicians to completely sacrifice economic growth for the sake of the environment, because doing so would undermine the whole economic and social equilibrium of [the European Union's] member states." On the other hand, with "this trade-off between economic growth and sustainability, the industrial-modern model almost guarantees that sustainability loses. And whatever might be done to save the environment will be done in a losing cause!"

Scary.

Ghisi nevertheless believes that, *right now*, we have at our disposal the tools needed to shift our economies and our politics toward genuine sustainability and a positive footprint. "Such a shift is possible for two reasons — one, because the world business community has already begun to shift into a new economic logic based on the idea of a 'knowledge society,' and two, because the Mind of the world is changing and ushering Humanity to a new level of consciousness."

In 1989, Ghisi was contracted by the European Commission's Science Department to write a report on the attitudes and positions of the major religions of Japan and the West concerning science and technology. The preparation of this report, along with his work for the Commission's Forward Studies Unit, convinced him that humanity is currently undergoing an unprecedented cultural mutation, which is taking place silently and behind the scenes. "It is comparable, in fact, to the mutation and transformation that took place during the Renaissance in 1500, but it is probably much more fundamental, more rapid, and deeper."

In the final appendix of this compelling book, Ghisi gives a moving account of his own re-enchantment, which took place during the preparation of this report.

My plan going in was simple — I would analyze each religion and synthesise its main teachings on science and technology. I would then establish some comparisons between the religions, underlying the similarities and differences. This was what the Science Department (called General Direction) of the Commission was interested in. Because of my background in theology and philosophy, the task seemed rather easy. For the next several months, I read and studied books from different religions to prepare for my written report.

The whole thing was all very interesting until I became aware that there was a real problem with the way I had envisaged the work. A crisis came when I discovered, to my great astonishment, that some Catholics held exactly the same beliefs as some Protestants, Muslims, Jews and Humanists on topics such as the participation of women in science, or abortion (I was to discover later that those who held these views could be called the "pre-moderns") while other Protestants, Muslims, Catholics, Jews or Humanists were defending opposing positions on the same subjects (I later understood that they could be called the "moderns".) I also discovered in every religion another unusual cluster of people (many of them women) who held a really new vision on almost every subject, and it seemed impossible to classify them as the moderns or the pre-moderns. So what were they?

These discoveries laid my beautiful plan in ruins. It was meaningless to stick to my original strategy of comparing the underlying similarities and differences between the religions when there were so many differences in the beliefs among the

believers. How could I possibly present THE position of any religion?

The question Ghisi had been asked to answer did not fit with the reality he was observing. He couldn't sleep for several nights, feeling lost.

Reality was sending me information that was completely destroying my deductive approach.... I started having nightmares in which I relived childhood memories of my eldest brother breaking some of my favourite toys. Yes, my favourite intellectual toy had now been broken.... Then one morning, I opened book named *On Purpose* by an Australian professor named Charles Birch,\* and I read the following:

\* Charles Birch

*On purpose: A new way of thinking for a new millennium*  
New South Wales  
University Press  
Kensington, Australia  
1990  
(p. xvi)

*Postmodernism challenges modernism, which can be said to have begun with seventeenth-century mechanism, petrified with eighteenth-century rationalism, nineteenth-century positivism and twentieth-century nihilism. As contrasted with the modern worldview... which is sustained more by habit than conviction and which has promoted ecological despoliation, militarism, antifeminism, and disciplinary fragmentation, the postmodern view is postmechanistic and ecological in its view of nature, post reductionist in its view of science, postanthropocentric in its view of ethics and economics, postdiscipline in relation to knowledge, and postpatriarchal and postsexist in relation to society. Postmodernism is not a call back to the pre-modern but a creative synthesis of the best of the modern, pre-modern and new concepts in the forefront of holistic thinking.*

This passage felt like an electric shock in my mind. I was astounded and could not react immediately because Professor Birch's words were destroying the whole of my mental construction....

*Yes, there were differences between religions, but the main differences were between the paradigms or mental frames inside each religion.*

If all this was true, the solution was obvious. I had the key. I could write this report from a completely different mental frame. Yes, there were differences between religions, but the main differences were between the paradigms or mental frames inside each religion, precisely because of the rapid transition between paradigms that the world is experiencing at this time. Within each religious group there are subdivisions struggling with the same challenges. That was the key. The subgroups are the same in each religion — pre-moderns, moderns, and transmoderns. My research had shown that the Jewish "moderns" were very similar to the Reformed moderns and to their Muslim and Catholic or Humanist colleagues. The same thing was true for the pre-moderns and for the transmoderns.

*The main differences are not so much between the religions and between the cultures. No, the main conflicts are inside each religion and inside each civilization.*

Progressively, I arrived at the conclusion that the main differences are not so much between the religions and between the cultures, as Professor Samuel Huntington tried to show in his famous article announcing that the next war would be a clash of civilizations.\* No, the main conflicts are inside each religion and inside each civilization. This was the new vision, which was imposing itself on me....

I initiated the report in September 1989 fully in the modern paradigm and finished it in July 1990, in the planetary transmodern paradigm.

\* Samuel Huntington, "*The clash of civilizations*," Foreign Affairs; Summer 1993

Ghisi mentions two reasons for the unprecedented cultural mutation that humanity is presently undergoing. First, extinction is certain if the human race does not change its relationship to the environment and therefore, of necessity, its economy. Second, it is climbing to a new level of consciousness. Of this fact, which has been elaborated in more than one sense by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in the West and by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (Mirra Alfassa) in India, Ghisi is firmly convinced "based on many personal observations."

The transition won't be easy; initially it may even look cataclysmic: "Eras of major change involve transfers of power between those who maintained power in the old system and those who will have the power in the new. In all my

studies of history, I have never come across a transfer of power that occurred harmoniously and smoothly.”

The book (not counting the introductory chapters and the appendices) is divided into two parts. The first deals with the world that is dying, the second, longer part describes the transmodern knowledge society.

Ghisi illustrates the hierarchical dependences of the dying world by means of a five-level “iceberg” of which only the top level is plainly visible. The mid level represents modernity. The death of modernity entails the death of patriarchy — the level on which modernity rests. The death of patriarchy in turn entails the collapse of the bottom level, civilization in its entirety. Above the level of modernity sits the industrial society, which modernity has created, and on top of this sit the institutions controlling society and effectively killing it by corruption, by lack of transparency, and by lack of competency.

While the collapse of the top three levels is widely anticipated, foreseeing the demise of patriarchy requires an understanding of its origins. Here Ghisi’s thinking is indebted to women writers like Riane Eisler\* and Marija Gimbutas,\*\* who discovered “that patriarchy, which influenced the narratives and origins of most contemporary religions, presents itself as always having existed when, in fact, it is of relatively recent appearance after thousands of years of matrifocal civilizations.” (Eisler and Gimbutas have proposed the word “matrifocal” to indicate that in these more peaceful and egalitarian societies there was no domination of men by women.)

These discoveries are based on recent archaeological research by Gimbutas, who demonstrated that civilizations far less violent than those presented in the Bible existed in Europe, India, and China before 3500 BCE. Their principal creed revolved around a Mother Goddess. Power was viewed as the ability to give life, whereas today it is essentially the power to bring death, destroy life, subdue others, and control and be obeyed at all cost.

The cultural transition from matrifocal to patriarchal occurred by a gradual subversion of the sacred symbols and myths. The Goddess Mother progressively became the Goddess Mother with a Spouse, then the spouse of God the Father, and finally the mother of God Almighty. This subversion is by no means unique to the Christian tradition. As Françoise Gange† has shown, it is found in almost all the great myths around 3500 BCE.

The new myths of origin — including the Christian story of original sin — served one purpose: they determined the state and meanings of things at the origin. All that might have come “before” is perfectly erased. The matrifocal civilizations can be treated as if they never existed. A perfect crime.

The discovery of the earlier, matrifocal civilizations suggests that, one day, patriarchy will be seen for what it is (or was): a transitional period in the history of humankind. No, the violence that has infested our societies is not part of the original human nature. It is *not* in our genes. Unfortunately, unlike the dinosaurs, whose extinction was caused by a sudden event that they could not sense or prevent,

\* Riane Eisler  
*Sacred Pleasure, Sex Myth, and  
the Politics of the Body. New  
paths to power and love.*  
Shaftsbury, Dorset, UK  
1995

\*\* Marija Gimbutas  
*The Goddess and Gods  
of Old Europe*  
University of California  
Press, 1982;  
*The Language of the Goddess*  
Harper and Row, 1989;  
*The Civilization of the Goddess*  
Harper and Row, 1991

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appearance after thousands of  
years of matrifocal  
civilizations.*

† Françoise Gange  
*Les Dieux Menteurs*  
Indigo and Coté Femmes  
Paris, 1998

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*The idea of a world that values non-pyramidal, matrifocal values threatens those who currently are responsible for the management of most religious, political, economic and other institutions and structures.*

*The major difficulty is that most people are unaware that they wear these eyeglasses – including most modern intellectuals, who are convinced of their objectivity and are certain that their views are not shaded or skewed by any such lenses.*

*The employment situation can only be truly confronted if one realises that the industrial society is dead. But the subject is taboo, and nobody dares approaching the true cause.*

*People no longer trust the vertical structures.*

those who adhere to the patriarchal model can sense their impending extinction and attempt to prevent it. The idea of a world that values non-pyramidal, matrifocal values threatens those who currently are responsible for the management of most religious, political, economic and other institutions and structures. This sometimes renders them aggressive and even dangerous. They strike out in anger and desperation, resulting in the excesses that we presently observe.

This is what I call the “dinosaur syndrome.” They are dinosaurs that become more and more aggressive because they feel trapped and condemned to death and they have thus nothing more to lose. Indeed, one witnesses the return of the most barbarian obscurantism.

The death of modernity will be similarly resisted, not least because it concerns the way we currently look at reality.

It addresses the very eyeglasses through which we perceive reality.... The major difficulty is that most people are unaware that they wear these eyeglasses – including most modern intellectuals, who are convinced of their objectivity and are certain that their views are not shaded or skewed by any such lenses....

But, the major difficulty in talking about the death of modernity comes from the political and institutional side, because it is difficult, even dangerous, to challenge the existing structures. They are sure to fight back in order to ensure their survival.

In 1900, 87% of the European population worked in agriculture. Today, farmers comprise only 4% of the European population, while their production is seven times greater than that of the 87% who then worked in agriculture. The yield has increased geometrically, and agricultural employment has almost disappeared. This increase in productivity and loss of agricultural employment resulted in the end of the agricultural society. Now we see similar trends in the field of industrial production. As industrial employment diminishes, productivity increases, not least because robots can work day and night without lunch hours, vacations, or coffee breaks. Ghisi projects for the coming years the following job situation in the EU:

- Employment of 6% in a more “bio-natural” agriculture (if the current trend for the subsidies of the “common agricultural policy” of the EU is changed). A few new positions (perhaps 2%) could be created for the bio farmers.
- Employment of 10% in industrial production.
- Employment of 30% in services.

As for the rest, nobody knows.

Nothing is said of these things because there is nothing to say except for hollow promises to “create employment positions.” The employment situation can only be truly confronted if one realises that the industrial society is dead.... But the subject is taboo, and nobody dares approaching the true cause – that our industrial society has been killed by the progress in the form of robotic technology.

At the heart of the problem, according to Ghisi, is the vertical organization of power. People no longer trust the vertical structures, which created the dangerous situation that the world finds itself in now. Pyramidal systems with their patriarchal logic of death and conquest are suddenly losing their legitimacy. “Solutions” adopted by such systems have become parts of the problem.

“Converging technologies for improving human performance,” National Science Foundation, Arlington 2002, National Board of Commerce.

\* Jeremy Rifkin  
*The European Dream: How Europe’s vision of the future is quietly eclipsing the American Dream*  
Tarcher Penguin 2004

*This near-infallible vision of science permits to totally short-change the ethical debate.*

† Martin Rees  
*Our final century*  
Random House, UK, 2003,  
*Our final hour*  
Basic Books, US, 2003

In September 2005, Ghisi was invited to a conference on converging technologies at the European Commission in Brussels, organized by the Commission’s Scientific and Technology Foresight Unit. At the beginning of the conference, the European Commission mentioned a report presented to President George W. Bush in 2002 and pointed out that the vision of the U.S. presented in this report “raises questions.” Here is the summary of the report:

Science must offer society new visions of what is possible to achieve. The society depends upon scientists for authoritative knowledge and professional judgment to maintain and gradually improve the well being of citizens, but scientists must also become visionaries who can imagine possibilities beyond anything currently experienced in the world. In science the intrinsic human need for intellectual advancement finds its most powerful expression. At times, scientists should take great intellectual risks, exploring unusual and even unreasonable ideas, because the scientific method for testing theories empirically can ultimately distinguish the good ideas from the bad ones. Across all of the sciences, individual scientists and teams should be supported in their quest for knowledge. Then interdisciplinary efforts can harvest discoveries across the boundaries of many fields, and engineers will harness them to accomplish technological progress.

The scientific approach is presented as the altar of objectivity and truth. Its method distinguishes the true from the false (the “good” from the “bad”) and leads humankind toward the truth. This rapturous homage to science reflects the “modern” vision of Europe in the 1800s. According to Jeremy Rifkin,\* the reason why it has not changed in the U.S. is that it was enshrined in the American dream, which no one dares to touch or decry. This near-infallible vision of science permits to totally short-change the ethical debate. As a result, the political and scientific leadership of the U.S. do not hesitate to contemplate calmly the manipulation of the human brain to increase its potential.

The first to sound the alarm was Bill Joy, the creator of Java at Sun Microsystems. His famous *Wired* article “Why the future doesn’t need us” [abridged in this issue of *AntiMatters*] is worth re-reading ♣. In its reply to the threads outlined by Joy, the National Science Foundation wrote:

Bill Joy has raised such issues with the public, presenting scenarios that imply that nanoscale science and engineering may bring a new form of life, and that their confluence with biotechnology and the information revolution could even place in danger the human species.... So far, we all agree that while all possible risks should be considered, the need for economic and technological progress must be counted in the balance.

All the importance is given to economic and technological progress. The modern/1800 paradigm based on quantitative scientific, economic, and technological progress remained unchallenged.

The next to sound the alarm was Sir Martin Rees,† one of the world’s leading astronomers. Rees worried about threats posed by genetic engineering and computer technology and warned against the construction of nanorobots that replicate like viruses and race out of control, devouring matter and turning the Earth’ surface to a “gray goo.” Andrew Kimbrell, founder of the International Center for Technology Assessment ♣ put it bluntly:

*Current technology is not compatible with life.*

Corporations, academics, and researchers came to realize, albeit slowly, that current technology is not compatible with life.... To deal with this historic dilemma, the techno-utopians and their corporate sponsors outline a breathtaking initiative. This initiative was not to change technology so that it better fits the needs of the living things, as we were so eagerly advocating. No, they had and have a very different and stunningly self-serving approach. *They decided to engineer life, indeed reality itself, so that it better fit the technological system.*

*The divergence in views on science and technology between Americans and Europeans is threatening a schism as significant as the divide over our different sense of how best to pursue foreign policy and domestic security.*

According to Rifkin, “[t]he divergence in views on science and technology between Americans and Europeans is growing and is now coming to the fore in a myriad of public policy debates, threatening a schism as significant as the divide over our different sense of how best to pursue foreign policy and domestic security.”

Ghisi then takes a leap to the position represented by the European Commission, a leap from 1800 to 2004, when the EC published a report on convergent technologies. The expert group that provided the report warns that “humans may end up surrendering more and more of their freedom and responsibility to a mechanical world that acts for them.” Whereas “[s]ome proponents of Converging Technologies advocate engineering of the mind and of the body,” this group “proposes that Converging Technology research should focus on engineering for the mind and for the body.”

Within the modern, patriarchal, top-down paradigm, preparations are made and decisions taken before the public is consulted and politely asked to accept a well-prepared package. This report instead says that the public must decide *with* the scientists, and *from the beginning* what the new technologies will be used for. In this “new contract between society and science,” ethics will be at the heart of the agenda creation. This vision of science and society is clearly transmodern.

*The old paradigm is powerful and alive. Indeed, there are huge political, economic, and financial forces which have firmly decided to activate it, for instance, the National Science Foundation of the U.S. and all the important forces gravitating around it.*

But Ghisi harbors no illusions about the strength of the old paradigm:

It is powerful and alive. Indeed, there are huge political, economic, and financial forces which have firmly decided to activate it, for instance, the National Science Foundation of the U.S. and all the important forces gravitating around it....

The danger exists that human freedom may be lost. This danger is *not* linked to such or such a person or group of persons that might be bad or ill-disposed.... The danger is *not* linked to a particular technology.... The danger lies in the *vision*, the way of seeing and unconsciously acting, which I call the modern-rational vision of science. The danger is to keep the obsolete paradigm with the new tools.... The danger lies in this obsolete vision or paradigm that pretends to solve the problems of tomorrow with the mentality of yesterday.

*The danger lies in this obsolete vision or paradigm that pretends to solve the problems of tomorrow with the mentality of yesterday.*

According to this obsolete vision or paradigm,

- science is objective and capable of reaching the TRUTH;
- it is unnecessary to consult public opinion, which is an obstacle to be bypassed or “educated”;
- anything that science and technology produce is excellent and must be put on the market. Public opinion will have to be “convinced” to buy all that they produce.

It should by now be clear to everyone that this deified vision of science is

*Since science sees itself as divine, inspired, and objective, it is really in danger of becoming demonic.*

*The serious danger on the horizon is that science and technology are indefinitely allowed to blindly progress and dehumanise our civilization.*

*Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself – its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world.*

suicidal. Ghisi's friend Ilya Prigogine (winner of the 1977 Nobel prize for physics) remarked that since science sees itself as divine, inspired, and objective, it is really in danger of becoming demonic. I am reminded of Polanyi's observation that while theology was the greatest single source of fallacies in the days when any idea could be silenced by showing that it was contrary to religion, at a time when any thought can be discredited by branding it as unscientific the greatest single source of error is science.

The serious danger on the horizon is that science and technology are indefinitely allowed to blindly progress and dehumanise our civilization, without even realizing it. In the end, we are in a logic of death, unable to be stopped. Indeed, in the "modern" context dominated by the almighty reason, there are no possible protective railings. The impression is that an unavoidable development is heading us toward a catastrophe that we prefer not to see.

But more and more eyes get more and more forcefully opened. The famous book *Post-Capitalist Society* by legendary management guru Peter Drucker begins with these words:

Every few hundred years in Western History, there occurs a sharp transformation ... Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself – its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their parents were born. We are currently living through such a transformation. It is creating the post-capitalist society....

Ghisi illustrates the transformation management structures are undergoing with the following example. Recently a company called ASKO was created with very little initial money.

It was performing very well in the construction and management of Internet websites for large businesses and institutions when, a few years ago, it obtained a managing contract from the European Commission. When it received the contract, the value of its stock shot up 75%.

The contract specified that each day all translations of all texts produced by the European Commission must be placed on the Web every day in all official languages of the Union and that the placement must be performed within 48 hours of production of the text and with an impeccable presentation.

The "factory" in this case is a set of computers and intellectuals who have one or two university diplomas and speak three or four languages fluently. The role of financial capital and technology is 20% at the most. The remainder is human and intellectual capital, which produces knowledge from knowledge.

The director of the company was aware that his function is not one of "conquest, command, and control." It was simply not possible to control the translators of Greek, Finnish, Slovenian, Hungarian, etc. Instead, the director has six basic functions:

*Care for the production tool:* The director must take care of the intellectuals who do the work and who are more competent than he is in their respective spheres – namely, the languages that they are translating. They must enjoy their work environment and want to keep working for the firm. In brief, he must motivate them to return the next morning with their production tool, their intelligence.

*Control the work quality:* He must control work quality. But how? He is incapable of



knowing all languages. To accomplish the task, he put his team members in touch with a *network of people outside his organization* who have written speeches, are responsible for official translating systems, and/or are ambassadors or associated with political parties, trade unions, media etc. By doing so for each translator (and each language), he created a new system of quality control that manages itself by means of linguistic networks. All of the Greeks inside the Greek network, for example, want the Greek text to be perfect — because it is dangerous for a political debate to be based on inaccurate text.

*Make sure that good communication exists within the business and with the outside* — that is, with the other translators of other languages. If there is a problem with one language, it is very possible that some, and perhaps all other languages, have the same problem. It is absolutely indispensable, therefore, that the politic of translation be harmonious and that each translator be in good standing with the corresponding Commission cabinet members and with those producing the documents.

*Watch over the human capital.* He must provide them with possibilities for continued education — meetings, trips, contacts, etc.

*Watch over the non-material value of the business.* The quality of the surroundings, the staff relations, the social environment of the business must be good.

*Attend to the career plan of each person.* His work in the business is part of a personal career plan within the business itself — and not somewhere else.

This type of management represents a complete departure from the norm — but the story is not finished. The director of ASKO was offered millions of euros to sell his business. He accepted. The next day, the new director arrived and began functioning along the classic model of industrial management of “command and control” — barking orders. Two days later, part of the staff resigned. One week later, the Commission contract was suspended and the stock crashed. Under pressure to fix the problem, the new director rehired the previous director who accepted to come back, but only with higher pay! The contract with the Commission was resumed, and the stock price rose again.

This is an excellent example of the transition from the industrial society management to the knowledge society one. It illustrates that one cannot act like an “industrial” business executive in a knowledge business. Those who ignore such advice and do not understand the change must beware. This seems to me the clearest example of management change in the knowledge society.

*What makes our society post-capitalist is that knowledge has become the resource rather than a resource.*

What makes our society post-capitalist is, according to Drucker, that “knowledge has become *the* resource rather than *a* resource... This fact changes — fundamentally — the structure of society. It creates new social and economic dynamics. It creates new politics.”

*The businesses that collapsed when the “dot-com bubble” burst where those that had kept their pyramidal structure and their traditional approach. Those that survived were those that had adopted a non-pyramidal structure.*

Interestingly, the businesses that collapsed when the “dot-com bubble” burst where those that had kept their industrial vision, their pyramidal structure, and their traditional approach to profit, to customers, and to society, even as their products were becoming more and more non-material. Those that survived — a small number — were those that had adopted a non-pyramidal structure encompassing in their intangible network their customers, their suppliers, the public, and the environment.

In the industrial society, trade is purely monetary. One gives goods in exchange for money. In the knowledge society, on the other hand, if I give information to someone else, I do not lose it. My reward for doing so does not necessarily take

*My reward for giving information to someone else takes the form of information that comes back to me enriched with the creativity of the person to whom I gave it. Value is added to knowledge when it circulates. The more one shares it, the more valuable it becomes.*

*In the knowledge society, the added value being knowledge, it is not possible to alienate workers from the fruit of their work.*

*It is estimated that at least 45% of the European economy is already non-materialized (made intangible).*

the form of money, but of information that comes back to me enriched with the creativity of the person to whom I gave it. Thus value is added to knowledge when it circulates. The more one shares it, the more valuable it becomes.

With its recent decision to give to the public more than 500 software patents, in order to opt for “*collaborative innovation*,” IBM has opened itself to this logic. (Unsurprisingly, Microsoft prefers to keep the industrial logic of patenting, controlling, and not sharing.) Some Silicon Valley firms have made it a rule to circulate information in order to share it. If a staff member keeps for herself some important piece of information more than 24 hours, she is fired. For some Silicon Valley observers, the American economy could already be immersed more than 70% in the knowledge society.

The great political debates of the 20th century were about the ownership of added value. The left held that it belonged to the worker who otherwise “would become estranged of the fruit of his work,” whereas the right asserted that it should belong to the entrepreneur. In the knowledge society, the added value being knowledge, it is not possible to alienate workers from the fruit of their work. Knowledge remains in the minds of its creators even as it is shared. Nor, when knowledge has become *the* resource, does the entrepreneur need to procure the raw materials to which value is added.

Earlier, stock brokers took into account the so-called *tangible* assets of a business — their bank holdings, their debts, their stock value, their real estate interests. Businesses were measured on their present financial vested interests, and this gave them a *past-oriented* value. For the last few years, Ghisi reports, stock brokers have started to scrutinize the *intangible* assets of a business. It is estimated that at least 45% of the European economy is already non-materialized (made intangible).

So what are these intangible assets? Ghisi provides an extensive list, of which, in his estimation, the following five “are becoming increasingly important year after year. They could become dominant in a few years.”

- Relationship with consumers
- Relationship with the civil society
- Relationship with the environment
- Relationship with our collective future
- Quality of the “network values” in which the business participates

A recent series of minor crises for the Coca-Cola Company helps illustrate the importance of these points.

The crises occurred most notably in Belgium, where a few children became sick after drinking cans of Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola managed this crisis as if it were a crisis of a product. They did not realise that Coca-cola is only 10% of brown water with sugar and 90% intangible assets. So they recalled millions of cans from the Belgian market only to turn around and *send them to the African market*, where they produced no harm.

From a purely material point of view, this might be considered good “management” because it saved much money and did not appear to have done any harm. What the CEO did not understand that an intangible brand image cannot

be managed like a material product. For many, the Coca-Cola brand represents a way to participate for a few moments in the “American dream.” But those who buy the American dream cannot accept a cynical behavior that appears to scoff at the dignity of another race on earth. The consequence was that Coca-Cola stock lost 40% of its value on the world market and forced its CEO to resign. When a new CEO was chosen, the stock bounced back.

Another case in point is the story of a men’s suit factory in the U.S.

The philosophy of this factory is rather exceptional and ahead of its time. It values human resources, creativity, and staff responsibility at the maximum, and gives maximum employment stability, which results in a lowering of capital revenues to a stable level of 3%. After all, this is an intelligent choice because the reason for me to choose between two men stores will be how I am greeted and helped in my selection of clothes.

The New York Stock Exchange initially was cool toward the stock as if it were without value. Its yield (3%) was considered unacceptable. But after a few years, it became obvious that it was one of the very few viable businesses in the sector that produced a stable income, whereas most other stores were going through a serious crisis or going bankrupt, at great loss to the shareholders. The retirement funds were the first to discover the stock, and heavily invested in it. The stock speculators followed them. Within a few years, this new “social” concept of business was accepted at the New York Stock Exchange. This new vision was not only profitable, but one of the very few exits out of the full-blown credibility and identity crises that wreak havoc among American businesses.

Yet another case in point: One day Ray C. Anderson, Chairman and CEO of Interface, a carpet manufacturer in the U.S., was blamed for being a polluter and accelerating climatic change. (Industrial carpet manufacturing uses a great deal of acids and other chemicals to treat tropical fibers, their raw material.) Anderson decided to change the entire production method in all factories run by his company.

It represented a huge investment and the business went into debt.... Within a few years, even though the financial situation of the group was still fragile, it became number one in its industry, and its stock rose to an historical high. Why? How? Because it was the first carpet on the market the production of which was designed to both respect the environment and sell at a competitive price. The analysis of Anderson’s situation, according to the knowledge economy, is simple. Interface’s tangible assets were still very weak because of its debt. But, suddenly, the value of its *intangible assets* increased so much that its shares became the star in the New York Stock Exchange.... The “intangible assets” made the whole difference.

Ghisi observes that the modern vision adopted the pyramidal structure of the premodern one but replaced God with Reason and adopted a new clergy — the economists.

And this clergy has its cardinals and the Holy Inquisition, which calls to order the economists or the chiefs of state who deviate from the orthodoxy of the “free market.” Indeed, the free-market economy functions as a rational and scientific religion.... Without *this* faith, it is impossible to reach important positions, for instance in central banks and national governments....

Here is an interesting question: Modernity integrated violence and war between States as something entirely natural. So why are we shocked by Bush’s

*The modern vision adopted the pyramidal structure of the premodern one but replaced God with Reason and adopted a new clergy — the economists.*

*Bush helps us to become aware that we are not in his vision anymore. He is like a revelatory catalyst of our transformation.*

*In order to go further we need a new narrative, a new story, a new vision. That is my intent in writing this book — to begin where postmodernity finishes.*

*The knowledge society needs a metaphysics according to which the foundation of the whole universe is consciousness.*

*The birth of a new world is always difficult and dangerous.*

policies, which are totally “modern”?

Because *our* horizon has changed and we, the global public opinion, are no longer in the modern paradigm, even if we are not always aware of it. Bush helps us, the citizens of the world, to become aware that we are not in his vision anymore. He is like a revelatory catalyst of our transformation. He helps us to become conscious that we are changing everywhere in the world.

Ghisi emphasizes the difference between postmodernity, which he considers the last avatar of modernity, and the transmodern vision. He thanks post-modern thinkers like Derrida,

who had the courage and the tenacity to disassemble the intellectual fortress of modernity. Because, indeed, this fortress is very solid. However, one should also obviously note that this disassembling is provisional. Nevertheless, the position of this book is precisely to capitalise on this useful deconstruction... In order to go further we need a new narrative, a new story, a new vision. That is my intent in writing this book — to begin where postmodernity finishes.

As we are leaving modernity, we have a choice to make: through which door? There is a back door to past obscurantism, to religious wars, and to fundamentalisms of all sorts. But there also is a front door, only it is less evident because we still have to create it.

What is this new door?

Ghisi seems to think that it is enough to take the best of modernity, and the best of premodernity, and to go farther, inventing a new orientation, a new vision, and a new “politic of life” for humankind. We will recuperate “the good things of the scientific method,” we will capitalize on “the wonderful achievements of technology,” we will rediscover the harmony with nature and the cosmos and the spiritual depth of the premoderns. And all of these will be tools, directed toward the realization of a completely sustainable and socially inclusive civilization.

As it stands, this is far too comforting. It gives no idea either of the true grandeur of the transformation that is possible or of the magnitude of the individual and collective cost of allowing it to happen. But Ghisi goes further, stating that the knowledge society needs a metaphysics according to which “the foundation of the whole universe is consciousness.” This metaphysics could threaten “to change completely the very nature of intellectual reasoning” and “the way we will work in our universities and in the approach to science and technology. It could change also the way humans relate to reality.”

Changing a global paradigm is a delicate, painful, and laborious endeavour. After all, one does not change culture — the way to see and judge other beings and things — as easily as one changes ones shirt. The birth of a new world is always difficult and dangerous.

In addition to (or as part of) a new metaphysics, a new epistemology is needed. The image Ghisi suggests for it is that of a “hollow-centred table” (think of a CD including the hole at the center). The center, “full of life and light,” represents Truth.

*Every culture of the world is equal in value to the others, every culture contains part of the truth, and no one culture contains it all. Every culture is invited to contribute to the solution of the world problems of survival from its own creativity and richness, on an equal footing.*

*Ghisi compares the modern leaders to the captain of the Titanic: "They have to go down with the ship. It is their duty."*

*Modernity erred importantly and dangerously by separating the human from its inner dimension.*

Everybody is invited to proceed toward the centre, but no one is able to own or possess the ultimate truth (the divine)... The more one proceeds toward the centre, the more one lives out powerful experiences that are beyond words, and the less one is able to speak and to "know," the less one wants to formulate the truth in theological terms, and the less one remains attached to his own theological formulation... and the less [one] tries to impose it on others. This is the concept of truth that one finds again with the mystics of all world religions. They all witness the same vision of truth in their deepest inner experience. It seems also that the new generation finds itself much at ease with this new vision of truth, because they are much more transmodern than us.

Thinking of the table's sectors (the slices of the tart) as representing different cultures, the image suggests that "every culture of the world is equal in value to the others, every culture contains part of the truth, and no one culture contains it all." Also, "every culture is invited to contribute to the solution of the world problems of survival from its own creativity and richness, on an equal footing."

It is evident that we are far beyond the postmodern conception which, by decomposing the truths, ends up dissolving the possibility of truth and leads us toward relativism... Truth exists, but nobody controls it. The current political leaders have not gotten used to the idea. The European Union is getting closer to the idea but does not explain it well to its citizens.

In order to reflect on our future, we must look at our problems in the most global way possible, and this is where the modern analytical methods have proved themselves "insufficient and ineffective."

[M]odernity tends to follow the advice of Descartes, which is to cut a difficult problem into pieces that are easier to analyze and to resolve. So that, at the end, one only has pieces of solution or partial solutions — never a global solution...

[W]e must rethink in depth our economic and political systems to orient them toward life and future generations, and not toward collective death. But the modern mentality considers itself as perfectly objective and thus above any reflection on paradigms.

Ghisi compares the modern leaders to the captain of the Titanic:

They do what they can to limit damages. But the most lucid ones feel deeply powerless. For one needs to learn to think differently. And it is not easy and almost impossible in their context. They have to go down with the ship. It is their duty.

Quoting Proverbs 29:18 ("When there is no vision, people are unrestrained"), Ghisi links the increase of terrorism to the present lack, for the great majority of humankind, of "any rapturous vision" or "ultimate goal." By re-discovering that "spiritual yearning, whatever its form, is deeply part of human nature," the transmodern and planetary knowledge society "represents a great movement toward a non-violent society."

Modernity "erred importantly and dangerously by separating the human from its inner dimension. In this, modernity was a regression at the level of wisdom and universal consciousness." Where are we going? "Probably toward a new acceptance by the political structures of the existence of this inner dimension. We probably shall conclude that a total separation is not possible because one cannot cut off one of the dimensions of man." At the same time it "is obvious that the religious leaders of a country should never be also the political leaders,

*The level of humankind's consciousness is rising. Nobody will stop this phenomenon.*

*The second stage of the change to the knowledge society will manifest as important political and economic crises.*

*This family of citizens is neither right, nor left, but ahead.*

*The American media are incapable of considering positive information as news. Those who would like to come out of the beaten tracks keep believing that they are solitary marginals. Nobody tells them about the fifty million U.S. citizens who can be considered "cultural creatives."*

*To make a frontal attack on someone's paradigm leads nowhere or even may worsen the situation since any transformation will be rendered more difficult.*

and vice versa." All the same, it "is not possible to completely exclude the religious component from politics. We drove it away through the door but it comes back to us through the window and the cellar."

[T]he new generations will rediscover (and this is already silently occurring) that which the world's wise men and women have always said — that life continues after death and that everyone's road extends toward light in a more or less circuitous way. That which was considered obvious for thousands of years will come back. The level of humankind's consciousness is rising. Nobody will stop this phenomenon.

Ghisi expects the change to the knowledge society to take place in two stages. The first stage (which we see now) is the change deep inside millions of citizens. The second will manifest as important political and economic crises. According to his contacts throughout the world, the mutation is ongoing with an unsuspected strength and depth on all continents.

By extending to the whole of American society his methods of market and customer analysis, Paul H. Ray was surprised to discover, next to the Republicans and the Democrats... a new family of citizens — the "cultural creatives." These are women and men who create new values and who, without knowing it, are activating the 21st century paradigm. They are fifty million American citizens who are "invisible" in the system because, most of the time, they do not vote and do not read the traditional newspaper. They are "invisible" also for the media, which do not talk about them since they do not know that they exist. This family of citizens is "neither right, nor left, but ahead." It wants something else. It mainly wants to integrate and combine the best elements, actual or bequeathed by both traditional political families. In brief, it wants to reconcile that which was analytically fragmented by modernity.

Why do the media not report on this important and steadily growing section of the population? According to Ray, the American media are incapable of considering positive information as news. "Good news is no news." Exacerbating the situation is that "those who would like to come out of the beaten tracks, particularly the young, keep believing that they are solitary marginals." Nobody tells them about the fifty million U.S. citizens who can be considered "cultural creatives."

Ghisi sees himself as "an intellectual at the service of people trying to help them to explicitly articulate what they already implicitly feel and think". "After doing hundreds of interventions on this subject for ten years now" he understood that trying to convince anyone to change paradigm is useless if not counterproductive.

[W]hen you feel that somebody, even with the best intentions, wants to undermine your basic values, your reflex is to strongly react in self-defence. Thus, to make a frontal attack on someone's paradigm leads nowhere or even may worsen the situation since any transformation will be rendered more difficult.

During his many travels across the globe, in various capacities, Ghisi has met an impressive array of cultural creatives. For obvious reasons those he found in the Islamic world are of special interest. Ziauddin Sardar, university professor, advisor to numerous Muslim governments in Asia, and chief editor of *Futures* magazine, wrote:

*Islam is a dynamic, open system with a very large common ground with the West. To appreciate this, Islam has to be seen from the perspective of transmodernism and understood with its own concepts and categories.*

The West has always seen Islam through the lens of modernity and concluded that it is a negative, closed system. Nothing could be further from the truth. Islam is a dynamic, open system with a very large common ground with the West. But to appreciate this, Islam has to be seen from the perspective of transmodernism and understood with its own concepts and categories.

There is at least one point that keeps me wondering. As mentioned before, Ghisi projects a job situation for the EU where at most 8% are employed in agriculture, 10% in industrial production, 30% in services — as for the rest (52%), nobody knows. But here is a possibility:

In the present society, culture is, unfortunately, often considered by political groups like the “cherry on the cake,” a luxury rather than a central value. In the future, this central place might be offered to culture in a society dedicated to favour creativity at all costs... [W]e are also possibly on the verge of a repositioning of culture as it comes back to the heart of the knowledge society. In this new vision, culture becomes one of the main ingredients of the production tool.

Putting two and two together, and keeping in mind that we know next to nothing of reality as it will be seen by the new consciousness, we may anticipate a future in which half of the work force is employed in culture-related jobs. Not a bad prospect.

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