

5. *History of the Future*

Dateline: Mandela City, 2068

A century ago, the Apollo 8 mission first transmitted the image of our Blue Planet, a beautiful and delicate pearl floating amidst the dark cosmos. This icon from space gave vivid witness to the fragility and preciousness of our common home, and was forever riveted on the human imagination. But it could not reveal the great changes that were quietly building, changes that were destined to transform human history and the Earth itself.

Prologue

From the current vantage point, with the planetary transition unfolding before our eyes, it would be premature and vain to attempt a definitive account of this extraordinary era. Our history remains the subject of energetic debate among twenty-first century scholars, complexity specialists and a public whose fascination with the past knows no bounds. But the past remains ambiguous, while the future defies prediction—who can say what new surprises await us? The task of analyzing the causes and significance of our tumultuous century must be left to future historians, who can tell the story with greater objectivity, subtlety and wisdom. In this brief treatise, we can offer only a thumbnail sketch of the broad historical contours of what we have come to call the *Great Transition*, and our admittedly subjective observations on the momentous events that shaped it.

With a long view, our century of transition is but a moment in a long process of human evolution. We think of earlier great transitions—Stone Age culture, Early Civilization and the Modern Era—as fulcrums in time when the very basis of society was transformed. To this august list of celebrated milestones along the path of human history, we may now add, in our judgment, a new one. The planetary

transition has ushered in a new stage of social complexity, culture and novelty. For the first time, the dynamics of human development must be understood as a phenomenon occurring at the global scale. Where earlier transitions evolved slowly over many millennia or centuries, this one occurred in a heartbeat of historic time. Where change once radiated from local innovation, this was a transformation of the global system as a whole, involving all the world's peoples and, indeed, the whole community of life on the planet.

The immediate antecedent for the *Great Transition* was the industrial revolution. Centuries of institutional, cultural and technological change during the Modern Era prepared the groundwork. Then, the industrial explosion launched an exponential spiral of innovation, economic expansion and population growth, the Big Bang that propelled humanity toward its Planetary Phase. As industrial society inexorably grew, it absorbed traditional societies on its periphery into the market nexus and pushed against the boundaries of the planet's environmental capacity.

Wherever it went, industrial capitalism left a contradictory legacy. In part, its story is an emancipatory tale of wealth generation, modernization and democracy. But it's also a heartless saga of social disruption, crushing poverty and economic imperialism. Not surprisingly, oppositional movements arose to challenge its human injustices and environmental devastation. Socialists the world over struggled for an egalitarian society where wealth was generated for people instead of profits and where a collectivist ethos replaced the greed of the profit motive. But that dream was dashed by real-world socialist experiments. Challenged militarily and isolated economically, they degenerated into bureaucratic tyrannies that eventually were re-absorbed by the global market system.

In 1948, the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights crystallized the soaring aspirations of a generation. World peace could rise from the agony of world war, the family of man could temper the wounds of hatred, and the bells of freedom could ring in every land. The vision was to be postponed through the long years of human suffering. But it remained a beacon of hope to illuminate the path ahead.

The planetary transition accelerated after 1990 when the fall of the Soviet Union released the world from the stasis of the Cold War. With this major impediment removed, the march of capitalism toward an integrated world system accelerated. Developments in the prior decades set the stage—the birth of the technological underpinnings of the information and communications revolution; the proliferation of international institutions following World War II; the rise of civil society as a “third force” in world affairs; the widespread spiritual revivals and environmental movements that foreshadowed the values-led movements of our own century; the mounting human impacts on the environment that began to trigger planetary-scale processes; and the integration of the global economy catalyzed by increasing international flows of trade, finance and information.

We track the story of transition as it evolved through several phases. The first phase began with the euphoria of market-driven globalization, was punctuated by terror, and ended in despair. The Crisis that followed fundamentally changed the course of global development. Global Reform was a time of renewed attempts at global governance through official channels. Then the *Great Transition* phase ushered in the values-led, bottom-up resurgence of our own time.

Market Euphoria, Interruption and Revival

1990–2015

In the 1990s, an economic growth surge was fueled by the maturing of information and communication technologies into the first flowering of a network economy. The global media were abuzz with a giddy enthusiasm that was difficult to escape. Business gurus, technological forecasters and cultural critics alike pontificated on the new era of “frictionless capitalism.” A surging bull-market banished memories of the business cycle. An endless stream of digital gadgetry renewed an orgy of consumption. A globalizing economy was constructing a planetary emporium, bringing Western modernism and dollars to the underdeveloped. A richer world would apply the magic of the market to saving the global environment.

It was never thus. The start-up companies of the dot-com billionaires were dripping with red ink. The then-popular thesis of the “end-of-history” was a comforting ideology for celebrants of capitalist hegemony, rather than serious scholarship. The quest for material excess could not long provide a satisfactory basis for people’s lives. Globalization fed new forms of anger and resistance, rather than ameliorating polarization. The market’s magic had its powers, but they did not include the foresight and coordination required for environmental sustainability.

In fact, the market euphoria was confined to a small but vocal minority with great access to media, great power to shape public perceptions and great influence on political agendas. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, a loose coalition of environmental, labor and social justice groups held demonstrations against the international economic organizations of that time. The increasingly militant protests challenged a “corporate globalization” that they saw as socially unfair and environmentally insensitive, and threatening to sacrifice hard-won safeguards on the altar of global competition. This early protest movement was fragmented and lacked a clear positive vision of a humane and sustainable alternative. But it was a portent of what was to come. The long struggle over the meaning and character of globalization had begun.

By 2002, the irrational exuberance of the 1990s had vanished as quickly as it arrived. In the first years of the new century, economic retrenchment, bear markets and global terrorism sobered the intoxicated. It had been a “false boom” that was largely confined to the United States, its allies and a few of its supplier countries in Southeast Asia. The economic base was small—less than 5 percent of the world’s population had access to digital networks—and the predictable market excesses led to a downturn. The benefits of economic integration were confined to a global elite. At the same time, growing concerns with the environment, persistent global poverty and the culture of consumerism were expanding the popular challenge to the market consensus, especially among youth.

The denouement of naïve market euphoria came in 2001 with the horrific “9/11” terrorist attacks on the citadels of global financial

and military might—the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States. This traumatic rip in the culture of complacency awoke the world to the depths of anger fermenting among those exposed to globalization but excluded from it. The desperation of billions was revealed as a fertile seedbed for indoctrination and fanaticism by cynical self-styled Islamic fundamentalists. Where an arrogant West seemed to offer little more than indignity, transnational Islamist organizations could offer the salvation of martyrdom in the armies of global Jihad. Terrorism, too, had gone global.

At the time, it was widely feared that the terrorists would succeed in sparking a spiral of violence as the United States, joined at least passively by virtually all the nations of the world, hit back hard with its War on Terrorism. But instead—and this is the central irony of this period—the international mobilization brought a more mature and realistic form of market-driven globalization. At first, two polar theories on the root cause of terrorism were proffered—too much modernism and not enough. On the one hand, militant fundamentalism, with its violent rejection of tolerance and pluralism, was understood as the dying gasp of traditionalism as it resisted assimilation into the modernist project. As such, it could be exterminated but not palliated. On the other hand, terrorism revealed a great anger on the streets of third-world cities that indicted the failure of modern development, not its success. A globalization that tantalized a global underclass with images of prosperity, but failed to provide opportunity, was surely a recipe for anger and violence.

Correspondingly, the nations of the world, acting in coalition and through the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies international, adopted a two-prong “carrot and stick” strategy. The “carrot” took the form of major new initiatives to modernize poor countries and bring the moderating influence of market institutions to the masses. The “stick” was the elimination of hard-core fanatics and their organizations through coordinated covert action and, as needed, military assault. Both elements were partially successful. The War on Terrorism gradually destroyed the capacity of global terrorism to mount sustained large-scale attacks. However, sporadic violence, a sense of peril and heightened security became a

way of life as the romance of martyrdom drew an endless trickle of alienated youth.

The affirmative program for expanding modern market institutions has been dubbed the Era of Inclusive Growth. Between 2002 and the Crisis of 2015, a redoubled international effort to promote trade liberalization, modernization and extension of market institutions launched a new wave of globalization. Chastened and more modest in ambition, the second wave brought economic growth almost everywhere and gradually installed a new generation of modernizing technocrats in most countries of the world. The set of policy strategies was not new—the International Monetary Fund had been promoting structural adjustment for years, and the WTO had advanced open markets. But the sense of urgency and level of resources was unprecedented. Before 2002, the United States and some of its allies had been drifting toward an unstable mix of economic globalization and political isolationism. After 2002, they had re-engaged in a vast project to build an interconnected and law-governed global market system.

Debt was forgiven on a strategic basis, new flows of foreign assistance supported modernizing forces in the most underdeveloped countries, nation-building initiatives created more stable regimes and peacekeeping forces maintained stability. By the time of the Crisis, networks were spreading far and wide, and user-friendly technologies like voice recognition and touch screens with universal graphic interfaces had extended at least some access to nearly half of the earth's then seven billion inhabitants. The wiring of the world is a justly celebrated achievement—ironically the “wires” were optical fiber and wireless links. Although the network did not become truly universal until later, the economic upsurge of the period was dependent in part on the global extension of the digital infrastructure.

It was a time of powerful corporate giants whose reach spanned the globe and who could increasingly out-manuever and influence national governments. The digital giants that built the infrastructure and wrote the software, the consumer product companies that used those links as distribution channels to reach ever-larger markets, the energy behemoths that fueled and powered the

boom and transported its products, the global banking and securities firms that financed the expansion—all generated enormous wealth and reached a size and power unprecedented before or since.

A number of important global governance initiatives paved the way. The WTO provided the legal basis for the global trading system. A multilateral agreement liberalized investment regimes, first in the rich countries and then throughout the world. Barriers to trade and capital movements gradually vanished as a host of international instruments promoted market openness and global competition. Almost all national governments were able to overcome internal resistance to aligning their institutions with the imperatives of globalization. They steadily advanced a policy package of modernization of financial systems, public education reform for the new global economy and privatization.

But beyond promoting economic globalization and keeping the peace, global governance became increasingly irrelevant. Of course, international negotiation continued on critical environmental and social problems. But they were either vastly insufficient like the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gasses, or nothing more than rhetorical appeals for “sustainable development” and poverty reduction, with little programmatic and financial follow-through. The ideology of “inclusive growth” was compatible with efforts to build the enabling institutions for market progress, but not with proactive pursuit of such non-market goals as environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. Faith in market solutions and trickle-down economics—backed by security and military apparatus—prevailed among powerful world institutions and leaders.

The world became increasingly more integrated culturally as well as economically. The values of consumerism, materialism and possessive individualism spread rapidly, reinforced by communications media. In some countries, fears of being engulfed by Western culture (“McWorld” was the pejorative of choice) continued to stimulate strong traditionalist reactions. But, except for notable fundamentalist strongholds, the lure of the God of Mammon and the Almighty dollar proved too strong, especially while the boom continued and prosperity spread. The protest movement against

corporate-driven globalization continued and even grew. But failing to put forth a credible positive vision and strategy for development, it could not galvanize the mainstream in rich or developing countries, and lost political traction.

Although huge inequities persisted throughout this era, economic and digital globalization brought benefits to many, often in unforeseen ways. For example, virtual banking originated in the rich world as a convenience to customers, but in the developing world made a whole suite of financial services available in poor communities where there were no banks or other sources of credit. With the proliferation of digital networks, on-line micro-finance organizations grew rapidly. With credit and connectivity—and decreased corruption due to more transparent virtual banking—came an explosion of small-scale enterprise and increases in productivity. Digitally-connected farmers learned about improved techniques, got loans to buy more productive seeds, used weather information to guide planting and harvesting, and checked market prices for their crops before deciding when and where to sell. Artisan cooperatives could sell traditional handicrafts or made-to-order clothing to major retailers and customers a country or a continent away. Small manufacturers, merchants and service providers expanded to become regional competitors.

Real incomes, even in some poor communities, rose rapidly, radiating out from those countries, such as India, China, Brazil and South Africa, that early on had embraced universal digital access and open commerce. The gradual convergence of the developing world toward the standards of rich countries—the Holy Grail of conventional development thinking—seemed a plausible though distant possibility. But the laser-beam focus on economic growth had dark sides, as well. The market jubilation emanating from the media and the public relations machines of multinational corporations drowned out the voices of concern. All the while, the signals of ecological instability, biological destruction and human health risks became stronger and more frequent. Mounting environmental changes—a warmer and more variable climate, collapsing ecosystems, failing fisheries—hurt poor communities most. Scientists

warned with increasing urgency that stresses on the global environment could be approaching thresholds beyond which catastrophic events could ensue.

Billions of the global poor left behind by the boom were growing restive. As the rich got richer and new social strata achieved affluence, deep poverty still chained billions to meager existences. Income distribution became more unequal. Nearly a billion people still went hungry, a figure that put the lie to the homily of market ideologues that the “tide of economic growth would lift all boats.” With greater connectivity, the growing disparity between rich and poor was increasingly visible to both. As migration pressure, anger and political dissent mounted, wider social unrest and conflict seemed to loom. Infused with new support, anti-globalization groups increased their agitation for a new direction of social and environmental renewal.

The Crisis

2015

Eventually, as all booms do, the period of market-driven growth came to an end. With the benefit of hindsight, the Crisis of 2015 might seem like a predictable consequence of the tensions and contradictions that had been brewing in the preceding decades. But life is lived forward, not backward, and what seems inevitable in retrospect, in fact, took the world by surprise. The reforms of the Era of Inclusive Growth had their successes—modern institutions and economic expansion were extended to most countries and terrorism was managed at tolerable levels. But they failed to address deep crises that were maturing in proportion to the success of the global market program. Environmental degradation, social polarization and economic distortions were on a collision course, but in the midst of market frenzy, few were able to see it coming.

The Crisis had multiple causes. The bite-back from resource degradation and ecological disruption imposed growing costs on people, ecosystems and the global economy. The collapse of major fisheries contributed to food shortages and stressed international food programs; water shortages grew acute in many places, requiring

costly efforts to maintain minimum standards; and resource costs, such as forest products for paper and packaging, rose sharply. While elites emerged even in the poorest countries, persistent poverty and social polarization were eroding the very basis for rule-governed market-driven development. As disparities became more extreme and more visible, social protest and even violent riots became widespread, the march of a million displaced fishermen on New Delhi and the water riots in Iraq being notable examples. Aggravated by environmental and social crises, and with little global governance capacity to respond beyond traditional and ineffective monetary and fiscal measures, the expected contraction after the long global boom triggered a general economic crisis.

The Crisis unleashed a widespread social revolt against the dominance of global corporations, against a quarter century of appalling environmental degradation, and against the persistence of poverty and social squalor amidst great wealth. The Crisis released all the discontent and apprehension about the drift of global development that had been building beneath the surface since the 1990s. The consensus underpinning the era of Market Euphoria was rapidly unraveling. Especially for the world's youth, it was a revolt against what they saw as the soulless materialism and inequity of the established global order. It was at this time that the Yin-Yang Movement was formed out of separate cultural and political youth movements (see box below). Although it was derisively referred to as the Children's Crusade at the time, the unified youth movement was a critical partner in the coalition for a new global deal that led to the Global Reform process.

Under the category "what could have been," it is worth mentioning here the abortive movement known as the Alliance for Global Salvation that arose at this time. The Alliance included a motley group of global actors from the corporate world, the security community and right-wing political elements. Concerned that the crisis could spiral out of control, they came to the conclusion, many reluctantly, that the vacuum of international control must be filled, and that they were the ones for the job. Ironically, this authoritarian threat served to further galvanize the reform movement that warned

against the danger of a *Fortress World* “solution.” A century before, a previous experiment in globalization had collapsed into the tragedy of the Great War. The forces for a democratic renewal were determined to thwart another return to barbarism.

Global Reform

2015–2025

One of the indirect impacts of the global boom was the expansion and consolidation of democratic governance at national and local levels. Information and communications technologies gradually improved the efficiency of government, allowing people to vote; pay taxes; register land, vehicles, births and deaths; and file complaints more readily and in more transparent ways. Pressure from a more informed and prosperous citizenry—and often from global companies—became harder to resist. Both demanded more responsive governance and more reliable enforcement of laws. Those with holdout dictators or repressive regimes became increasingly isolated.

By 2015, governments were ready to assert themselves on behalf of their citizens. As political leaders everywhere sought to cope with the Crisis, the result was an eruption of governmental leadership at national and local levels. The response took many forms, as governments found ways to re-establish order, to rein in the giant corporations, to clean up the environment, to improve equity, and address persistent poverty and a host of other concerns. This burst of governmental leadership was echoed on the international level.

Before the Crisis, global governance was effective primarily in one area—setting the terms for liberalized trade, de-regulation and privatization. But the renaissance that occurred during the Global Reform era went far beyond anything known before. The World Court, the reconstituted World Union (formerly the United Nations) and the World Regulatory Authority (descended from the last century’s Bretton Woods institutions)—all date from this period.

As the world struggled to regain its economic footing, while altering the rules for economic activity, these strengthened institutions offered a new basis for regulating the global market. Chastened

by the crisis and buoyed by the popular outcry for leadership, world leaders acted decisively. Sustainable development, the half-forgotten battle cry of the late twentieth century, was resurrected. But instead of rhetoric, a comprehensive set of environmental and social goals were set and the policy muscle was enacted to enforce them.

Treaties were negotiated on global caps and trading regimes for climate-altering emissions, strict limits on ocean fisheries, and outright bans on international trade in wood and other products from endangered ecosystems. Small taxes were imposed on trade and international currency flows, and the revenues used by the world's governments to fund international health, education and environmental restoration. Innovative and generous programs to reduce poverty and provide sustainable livelihoods to all were launched. In a landmark ruling, the World Court asserted jurisdiction over an antitrust case against the world's largest energy company, and subsequently ordered it broken up into half a dozen separate companies, setting a precedent that was applied in many areas of commerce.

By 2020, global economic growth had resumed, not in spite of the imposition of sustainability goals, but because of it. Orchestrated by the new governance institutions, the massive projects to complete the unfinished business of *Wiring the World*, investing in the poor and saving the environment proved to be a stimulant to an unprecedented period of economic expansion and technological innovation. But this new boom was different from its predecessor. Instead of disparities between North and South increasing, the gap was closing through global programs targeted at raising the standard of living of the poor. Instead of national income distributions becoming more unequal, the gap between rich and poor within countries was either maintained or gradually decreased. Instead of environmental heedlessness, under activist governments the pressure on natural resources and ecological systems began to abate.

The age of sustainable development had arrived, but not for long. Although it created institutions and reforms that have continued to play an important role, the era of Global Reform was relatively brief. Its golden years were from 2015–2020, when the need for post-Crisis recovery led to the strong political unity needed to

maintain the reform process. Multinational corporations, seeing their markets stagnate, got on board. But once the boom resumed, many business leaders advocated a return to free markets and a weakening of reforms. By contrast, environmentalists, pleased at first with the accomplishments of the reform agenda, eventually came to see the imposition of restraint on the global growth machine as inadequate—like going down the up escalator. The inherent political and environmental tensions of the forced marriage between sustainability and market growth deepened.

Governments could not keep up with the complex and rapidly shifting concerns of their populations. The public confidence in top-heavy government management mechanisms eroded as the limits of government-led Global Reform institutions to effectively address the complex task of global sustainability became clear. A new cause would appear out of one on-line discussion forum or another, sweep across cyberspace and the media, dominate political discussion with demands for immediate action—and then, just as suddenly, disappear while government was still struggling to act. And global governance through the formal international institutions proved inadequate to monitor and influence rapidly changing social and industrial practices across the kaleidoscope of two hundred nations. More fundamentally, as mathematicians have since established, deterministic management of an often chaotic, non-deterministic, multiplayer system is simply impossible. Policy reform made a difference, as did strong and competent governments, but neither proved adequate to make the changes increasingly demanded by the world's peoples.

At a global scale, building the consensus for new treaties, or even for allocating global funds generated from existing mechanisms, became ever more difficult and contentious. The bureaucracies that evolved to implement the global regulatory regimes became ever larger and more ponderous. A number of countries simply opted out of some treaties, creating loopholes in enforcement that weakened the new international regimes. Global companies proved very agile in adapting to internationally imposed bans or restrictions, while not fundamentally changing their practices.

The clear lesson of the Market Euphoria era was that footloose market-driven globalization was simply not viable. The government-led post-crisis reorganization restarted economic growth and tamed environmental impacts, while bringing up the bottom of the social pyramid. But by the mid-2020s, Global Reform was losing momentum as the will of political leadership waned, governance became enfeebled and the dream of sustainable development was threatened. Another crisis loomed on the horizon.

A growing global coalition of individuals and organizations came to the conviction that reform was not enough. Fundamental notions were challenged—that endless economic growth could be harmonized with ecology, that consumerism could coexist with a sustainability ethic, and that the pursuit of wealth was the path to the good life. The coalition mushroomed into a planetary mass movement for basic change. Sometimes called the Coalition for a Great Transition, it was more popularly known by the name we use today, “The Bouquet,” which of course referred to its icon and its slogan (“let a thousand flowers bloom”).

The coalition included civil society in all its stunning diversity—spiritual communities, Yin-Yang, networks of special-interest organizations. All parts of the world community were represented—communities, nations, regions, river basins—in a kind of spontaneous global assembly from below. The basis of their unity was a common set of values—the rights of all people to a decent life, responsibility for the well-being of the wider community of life and the obligations to future generations. The project for more just, more ecological and more fulfilling ways of life was not to be denied.

The Yin-Yang Movement

The youth of the world played a critical role throughout the long transition. Young people have always been the first to take to new ways and to dream new dreams. And so it was with communications technology and the exploration of the possibilities for a new global culture. The main manifestation in the first blush of market euphoria was, of course, the promotion of a consumerist youth culture. But other consequences of the digital information revolution were equally important. The pedagogic impacts of accelerated learning and information access had a great democratizing effect that empowered younger generations to participate fully in the economy and all aspects of society. By 2020, the vast majority of the world's secondary and university students used the Internet as a matter of course, and websites and wireless portals in more than 200 languages catered to them.

The huge surge in Internet-ready young people graduating from schools in the developing world had some unexpected effects. To ease its chronic shortage of skilled workers and take advantage of lower salaries, the burgeoning digital industry increasingly moved its programming, web design, e-learning courseware and other software tasks to India, China and other centers of talent. Leadership of the industry began to follow. And this new leadership played a major role in providing digital services designed for poor communities.

Even more unexpected were the cultural and political changes that universal access set in motion. Internet-powered awareness of a wider world and access to unlimited information accounted for part of the change. Equally important were the proliferation of ways to communicate across cultures and even—with automatic translation—across language barriers through e-mail, mobile phones and messaging networks, and through swapping music, videos, underground political tracts and calls for protest demonstrations in huge informal networks.

The gradual coalescence of a discernable global youth culture is difficult to date. But certainly by 2010, two broad streams had emerged to challenge the prevailing market paradigm. The YIN (Youth International Network) was a cultural movement that advanced alternative lifestyles, liberatory values and non-materialistic paths to fulfillment. The YANG (Youth Action for a New Globalization) was a loose political coalition of activist NGOs that eventually were forged into a more cohesive network through a long series of global protests and actions.

Before 2015, there was some tension between the two strands. To many YANGs, the YINs seemed hedonistic, apolitical and complacent, the heirs to the legacy of 1960s hippies and Timothy Leary. For their part, the YINs saw the YANGs as humorless politicians, who were playing the power game. But the rhetoric of the spokespeople for the two tendencies was more polarized than the participants. In fact, the YIN global celebrations and festivals increasingly had a political tonality. At the same time, the huge YANG demonstrations and protests were as much cultural as political events.

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The Yin-Yang Movement (continued)

During the Crisis of 2015, these distinctions evaporated entirely. The aspirations that each expressed—the search for more fulfilling lifestyles and the quest for a sustainable and just world—became understood as two aspects of a unitary project for a better future. The Yin-Yang Movement was born.

Many activists saw their movement as a global echo of the youth revolution of the 1960s, an explosion of youth culture, idealism and protest. But in truth, it was far more. The Movement was vastly larger and more diverse than its predecessor, and far more globally connected, organizationally adaptive and politically sophisticated. Without it, what would have emerged from the post-2015 world? Perhaps a descent into chaos; perhaps the authoritarian forces for world order, which were waiting anxiously in the wings, would have triumphed.

While counterfactuals are always speculative, it is certainly clear that in the absence of the Yin-Yang history would have taken a different turn. The Movement was critical at two key moments in the transition. First it provided a base for the new political leadership that was able to fashion the Global Reform response to the Crisis. Later, throughout the 2020s, it carried forward the spirit of 2015, expressing the new values and activism of civil society, culminating in the landmark changes of 2025, and the consolidation of the *Great Transition*.

Great Transition

2025–

The values-driven movements of our time have their antecedents in the human rights and environmental movements that go back to the twentieth century and the spiritual revivals of this century. The search for meaningful and fulfilling lives and alternatives to materialistic lifestyles has deep historical roots. But only in our era, when the dream of a post-scarcity society that could provide enough for all became a practical possibility, could a post-materialist ethos gain a popular basis.

In the cultural revolution of the mid-2020s, lifestyles and even tastes began to change. For one example, traditional families, now shrunken in size as populations stabilized, and extended in time as populations aged, evolved as values of caring and support extended to more of humankind and even to other species. Or for another, the modern “sustainable diet” movement, which resurrected last century’s slogan “you are what you eat,” reflected the new vegetarianism. This was reinforced by environmental and health concerns that had given rise to organic agriculture and the animal rights movement.

Increasingly, people took pride in living lives that were rich in time, and sufficient in things. The cultivation of the art of living displaced consumerism as the pathway to happiness and status. The anachronisms of the past, such as immense private vehicles with a thousand gadgets, found a home in museums of cultural history, not in people's lives. The sense that individuals are responsible for what they consume was pervasive.

The values movements touched sympathetic chords throughout the world and were amplified by the discussion forums and rapid global communications on digital networks. The "equal participation" movement that has contributed so much to the openness and accountability of political and institutional processes today drew its inspiration both from anti-poverty activists and from earlier civil rights movements. But sympathy alone does not always translate into action. It was the globalization of civil society—the proliferation of global networks and alliances of Value-Based Organizations (VBOs) dedicated to action—that provided the staying power for permanent change. This was a simple but fundamental transformation in world history—the willingness of people, individually and in groups, to take responsibility for solving problems themselves. This phenomenon has become a defining characteristic of the current era.

Information has always been a source of power, and by 2025 power was shifting rapidly. Global networks of VBOs, armed with digital cameras and other sensors, proved to be the ideal counterforce to predatory global corporations and incompetent governments. They organized vast networks to monitor corporate behavior—how and where they logged forests, the quality of their working conditions and wages, and their contributions to local communities. The information was posted on the Internet, often with video footage. They pressured retailers to shun offending companies and consumers to boycott their products. The VBO networks brought powerful market pressures on global companies. Governments who failed to provide basic services to the poor, to protect environmentally sensitive resources or to uphold universal rights, were the objects of equally powerful political pressures.

By enforcing transparency and demanding accountability, these bottom-up networks of activist citizens provided a rapid and

powerful social feedback mechanism, far more potent than formal regulatory efforts of governments and intergovernmental bodies. One global banking firm that denied services to a particular Moslem sect in Indonesia, found thousands of its offices around the world shut down by protestors and its brand name badly damaged. A repressive African regime, targeted by a global ad hoc alliance of VBOs, found itself trying to combat hundreds of web sites with damaging video linked to names, photos, and unflattering bios of the president and senior military officers, as well as the names of global companies who were the primary buyers of the country's products (and who hastened to cancel their contracts).

The accountability movement accelerated a leadership transition already underway in corporations and governments alike. More and more, business leaders not only accepted the legitimacy of many social and environmental demands, but found creative business approaches to meet them. Hundreds of global manufacturing firms adopted "zero impact" goals and met them—producing no waste and releasing no pollution in their worldwide operations, and accepting responsibility for post-consumer recovery and recycling of their products. A number of large firms found ways to cut costs dramatically in order to provide affordable basic goods and services, and often jobs, in poor communities—in the process creating large new markets for themselves. Others employed new nano-technologies to produce better products with far less raw materials and energy; "reindustrialization," as it came to be called, aimed at more sustainable ways to provide the material support to human civilization.

For governments and other official institutions, the accountability movement meant not only far more transparency, but expanded participation in decision-making processes of all kinds. Proposed new regulations or laws were now routinely posted on electronic networks for widespread comment and debate before adoption; so were terms of logging or mining leases on public land or plans to develop natural resources. Elections themselves were mostly electronic, making election fraud far scarcer.

The personal and philosophical dimensions of the *Great Transition* complemented and reinforced these changes. Since the Yin-Yang Movement, the disenchantment of youth with consumerism as an organizing principle for their lives and communities had been spreading. Increasingly, people explored more fulfilling and ethical ways of life that offered a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. In the wealthier areas, the values of simplicity, tranquility and community began to displace those of consumerism, competition and individualism. Many reduced work hours in favor of increased time to pursue study, artistic endeavors, interpersonal relations and craft production. Throughout the world, a cultural renaissance, rooted in pride in, and respect for, tradition, and an appreciation of local human and natural resources, unleashed a new sense of possibility and optimism.

The accountability movement, the widespread sense of individual responsibility, the newfound corporate stewardship on environmental and social issues, the readiness (especially among young people) to protest injustice, the search for culturally rich and materially sufficient lifestyles—all of these marked the emergence of what we now think of as the planetary ethic. While history has not ended, a new foundation for the future has been laid. Poverty still survives in small pockets around the globe, but its eradication is in sight. Conflict and intolerance still flare, but effective tools for negotiation and resolution are in place. Our ailing planet has not yet healed from its environmental wounds, but the world is mobilized to restore it to health. The lure of economic greed and political domination has not vanished, but powerful feedback mechanisms are in place to protect the core commitments that continue to shape our era—the right of all to pursue a high quality of life, cultural pluralism within global unity and humanity as part of a vibrant community of life on planet Earth.

Epilogue

We who live in yesterday's tomorrow can know what those who once speculated on the planetary future could not. Turn-of-the-century

prophecies of global calamity have been refuted by choices people made both politically and personally. The exuberance of market optimists, who once wielded such influence, has long ago been revealed as a dangerous absurdity. The utopian dreams of a post-capitalist paradise have also, as they must, been defied. The old reformers, who gathered at Earth Summits and a thousand conferences to design management strategies for a sustainable and humane future, could take us only part of the way. But we are forever grateful for their foresight and commitment, for they gave us, their descendents, the gift of choice.

The timeless drama of life continues, with all the contradictions of the human condition; the hopes and heartbreaks, the triumphs and failures, the beginnings and endings. But the drama unfolds in a theater of historical possibility that few would trade. It is little wonder that we so abundantly honor the struggles and achievements of our parents and grandparents. Now our own generation grows perplexed and troubled by the youth of today, with their cultural rebelliousness, political restlessness and search for new challenges. Are they the harbingers of a new transition struggling to be born? Time will tell.