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The case for change

The message.

Why it is necessary to
change the way you design.

The case for change

The world is in limbo:

between one world-view in decay

and an emerging world-view not yet established.

This moment of transition is full of promise.

But also riddled with uncertainty.

As those with vested interests cling on hysterically, we see:

– the perpetuation of consumerist debt-based boom and bust policies

– continued subsidy of fossil-fuels

– resistance to renewable energy

– ineffective wealth distribution policies

– antiquated and ineffective laws

The effects of these policies are familiar:

– reduced social mobility

– increased social inequality

– public health systems collapsing under the strain

– refugees from a diminishing cultural / biological diversity

– irreversible climate change closing in.

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This delay, the resistance against transition, is socially and ecologically damaging.

We see outdated hierarchies perpetuated

***modernity* stumbling on, as defined by. . .**

the passive receipt and consumption of media and services.

Business as usual.

However. . .

the momentum in support of transition is building

there are reasons to be cheerful

and even without that support

there are 'accelerationists' who predict that the current system

will ultimately collapse by consuming itself.

According to the American economic, social and political theorist Jeremy Rifkin,

(adviser to the world's largest corporations, economies and governments),

a radical new economic system is in the process of emerging and will be with us sooner than we think.

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Jo Confino, in his Guardian article of 7 Nov 2014 says:
“Rifkin argues that the current economic system has become so successful at lowering the costs of production that at the very moment of its ultimate triumph, (presumably at the pinnacle of its efficiency). . .

capitalism will experience the most exquisite of deaths.”

Any day now!

“We are seeing the final triumph of capitalism

followed by its exit off the world stage

and the entrance of the collaborative commons.”

“Its going to transform our way of life fundamentally”

“It already is; we just haven’t framed it.”

“The momentum will only gather pace as the price of renewable technology plummets.”

“The economic revolution is likely to be unstoppable

but it depends on network neutrality.”

(a battle against ‘winner-takes-all’ – that the internet spawns right now)

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“Rifkin believes the gap left by the disappearance of major corporations

will be filled by the nonprofit sector.

He points to the hundreds of millions of people already involved

in a vast network of co-operatives around the world:”

“There’s an institution in our life that we all rely on every day

that provides all sorts of goods and services that have nothing to do with profit or government entitlement

and without it we couldn’t live

and that’s the social commons. . .

. . . millions of organisations that provide healthcare, education, ministering to the poor, culture, arts, sports, recreation, and it goes on and on.”

“The collaborative commons offers the only viable way forward to deal with

the sustainability challenges faced by humanity.”

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So, risking to oversimplify. . .

what can we do, as creative practitioners,

to anticipate this radical new economic system that Rifkin says is upon us?

A barrier:

In its present form in industry, design is a loyal supporter of the old world-view.

Design remains addicted to 20th century modernism,

it dominates our thinking and is still determining our education.

Even if we can think differently,

there are other barriers preventing us

from contributing successfully to the collaborative commons

and having a positive effect on people's lives and the world:

the established processes, the way we design, is now way too remote from those we ultimately serve.

Actually, we need to stop serving

and work with as much as for.

As John Thackara says. . .

Being a service means you are doing it for somebody else and you're not really involved.

Whatever the relationship is, you kind of do it and then wash your hands of it.

That is one of the structural problems of the design world

and the project model of all our businesses and practices

– that has kind of got to go.

John Thackara
Writer on design and sustainability

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It seems to us. . .

Our work starts too late in the process.

After all the important decisions have already been made.

The process



The process



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Our position in the process near the end prevents us from developing relations

with those we would like to design with.

We are seen as finishers, polishers,

good at making decisions made by others more appetising.

I recommend we temper the highly developed (but highly remote) back end skills we are known for

with a thorough grounding in **social strategies** active at the front-end

– at the very start of things.

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We propose that this is best achieved through direct engagement

with people and communities

– where life's challenges are most keenly felt.

And through an embedded, situated and humble kind of sensing practice

aimed at unlocking human capacities.

Designers, despite not spending much time at the very start of things

are ideally suited to working there

because they bring a collaborative, human and ecologically-centred, open-to-change, dialogic philosophy

that is invigorating for policy development.

Besides, being at the back end of the process is becoming so much more precarious.

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There are many positive signs of encouragement

that repositioning to the front-end

is not so much a risk as an urgent necessity!

There is increased use of design and designerly ways of thinking outside of profit driven sectors.

Governments worldwide now appreciate that design is a vital ingredient in tackling the big issues.

On Twitter its called #design4policy

Design has already moved to the start of things

and is becoming associated and connected with the big, complex, social and ecological challenges.

*We need to completely rethink our
relationship*

*so that we are through time in these
situations*

*rather than, so to speak, in and out of
helicopters.*

*Its the time in places that is invested to
become respectful and trusted*

is the kind of value that we are talking about.

John Thackara
Writer on design and sustainability

*Doing nothing is a very valuable part of being
in a complex situation*

*because doing nothing but being there you
are learning*

*you are beginning to get the trust and the
connectivity with the people*

which is so important.

John Thackara
Writer on design and sustainability

**So don't be tempted to go solving
problems because that won't achieve you
the connection you need. . .**

And the problem, if you like,

with the word problem

is that it conveys the impression

*that everyone thinks of the situation as a
problem*

*(when some actors, typically those holding
minority positions, might not).*

Zaid Hassan
Co-founder of Reos,
author of *The Social Labs Revolution*

*Breathing the same air beats anything that is
mediatised, represented, pictures made of it
or whatever.*

John Thackara
Writer on design and sustainability