**Preface**

*“I went to the crossroad,*

*fell down on my knees*

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*fell down on my knees*

*Asked the Lord above*

*have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please”*

*Cross Roads Blues,* Robert Johnson, 1936

We find ourselves at one of the great intersections of our short but eventful history. One road, the path of incessant greed and selfishness, meets the other, the path of our increasingly ailing planet. It is a collision course, and we are unlikely to survive the impact intact. Our highway of consumption has laid waste to much of the Earth as we have accelerated like there was no tomorrow, using new technologies to optimize conditions for ourselves, while maximizing profit from draining the resources of our world.

We have cut ourselves off from nature, and have ignored the warnings of a silent spring, lured by the songs of the Sirens of pleasure, luxury and apathy. The decision facing us is whether we ignore the devastation and plough steadily onwards and downwards, or whether we turn away from this ruinous path. Sustainable thinking is no longer a sweet folk song, replete with Appalachian dulcimers and autoharps, a sing-a-long chorus and less familiar verse, interchanging on a theme of the beautiful landscapes of our youth, infused with a Gaian spirit. Sustainable thinking is essential thinking, if we are to avoid the calamitous crash that lies ahead. Our current path is unsustainable, and the threats are multiple.

In this book we directly address the thorny issue of whether all technology is fundamentally bad for the planet, or if, in fact, technology could be the life raft in a tumultuous sea of environmental crisis. Throughout our journey, technology has undoubtedly helped deliver the cataclysmic collapse of the Earth system on which we depend, helping us to enslave the very soul of our world for our own wasteful gratification. We have used this technology to damage, almost beyond repair, the exquisite but delicate synchrony of the Earth system. Yet it is not the technology that instigated this devastation, but ourselves. This book is a call to arms, challenging us to take responsibility

for our predicament and recognizing that the Earth system is the only ark in town. Do we join it or do we exclude ourselves from a future within it?

At the forefront of technology today lies artificial intelligence. The field is over sixty years old, but recent progress has transformed it into something we all need to know about. We are now living in the infosphere, that parallel digital universe that is becoming more and more a part of the real world. Here, information is king. We are surrounded by seven billion devices that, together, make up the internet of things. These appliances are silently gathering data on us continuously and feeding it into huge data repositories. Everything from smart electricity meters to satellites orbiting the Earth convert our activities into binary code, shepherding this vast unruly herd of data into arrays, ready for analysis.

The infosphere feeds off this cornucopian feast of big data and is dominated by a few powerful companies worldwide. It has the potential to do immeasurable good, and to fundamentally restructure our very evolution on the planet. There is also increasing concern that it could deliver a modern-day apocalypse, posing an existential threat.

The thing about technology is that it does what we tell it to do, and within the limits that we set it. Or at least it does at present. But what of the future? What if artificial intelligence really did become autonomous, sentient and creative? By making its own decisions it could terraform our planet into a wholly different reality. Some fear that this brave new world might not have a place for us in it at all. We could be viewed as liabilities. What if the infosphere was no longer a mirror world, a parallel representation in silicon and binary, but rather that it became as flesh and dwelt among us, or displaced us?

This book asks some difficult questions. The questions don’t really focus on artificial intelligence, but on ourselves. If we base this potentially transformative technology on the intelligence of humans, then how can we expect it to deliver a sustainable transition that is so urgently needed, given the flawed nature of our own thinking? The planet is shrouded in inequality at every level, be it power, wealth, opportunity or health. Not only are we destroying the environment, but also society. Are we really the best model for such a potentially potent technology?

Could there be a different model of intelligence on which to construct our futures? How about an intelligence that has been around for over three billion years, honed from the toughest of life experiences, an intelligence that has recovered from ice ages and mass extinctions. An intelligence that has directed the recovery from almost complete wipe outs, such as the snowball Earth and that catastrophic comet that finished off the dinosaurs?

This intelligence is composed of multiple different intelligences, gathered together in an interactive whole, operating as one, and continuously learning, evolving, diversifying and sharing. It is a superintelligence that is resilient and resistant, and that holds within it the ultimate wisdom of physics, with knowledge as old as the Universe itself. Not a religion, nor a cult or sect, but the lifeforce that flows through the biosphere: ecosystem intelligence.

What if we rebooted AI to resonate and flow with the intelligence of the Earth? This book sets out this vision, wherein a properly grounded AI can be the catalyst to re-connect us to our planet, rather than further ostracise us from it. The Earth already has a perfectly good intelligence network, tried and tested over eons. It works, it’s free and it’s brilliant. There’s no need to re-think things. All we need to do is to understand it and plug back into it. Re-integration, not re-invention, is the way ahead.

There are reasons why we haven’t recognized this, and we will deal with these in order to identify the real barriers to transition. As Shakespeare once wrote, “*The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars, but in ourselves”.* So, we’ll search deep within ourselves to find how to break free of our constraints.

AI can be the perfect technology to deliver a new age of sustainability, but not as it stands at present. By rebooting AI, basing it on ecosystem intelligence and plugging it into the biosphere physically and metaphysically, this book argues that we can move into a new era, where re-integration can deliver a sustainable future. We find ourselves at the crossroads. This is the time and the place for change in our journey, a point of no return. Continued failure is not an option. We need to make the right call, or like the great bluesman, Robert Johnson, we may have to sing the final refrain:

*“That I got the crossroad blues this mornin’,*

*Lord, babe, I’m sinkin’ down.”*

**Keith R Skene**

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