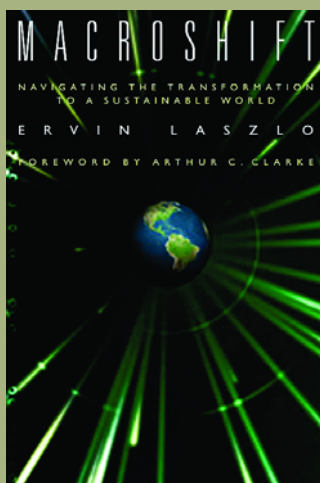


Book Review

Macroshift: Navigating the Transformation to a Sustainable World

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Macroshift: Navigating the Transformation to a Sustainable World

by Ervin Laszlo, PhD

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Why bother reviewing a book that is 6 years old? What is a *macroshift* anyway? Reading *Macroshift: Navigating the Transformation to a Sustainable World* reminds us that some cultural changes occur more slowly than cell phone technology or the latest in renewable energy. And author Ervin Laszlo is one of the most qualified and articulate individuals to teach us about a shift in social consciousness—one that will decide the future of our children and grandchildren—that is happening at this very moment. An expert in systems theory and evolutionary theory and author of 69 books, Laszlo is also the editor of *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution*. His book *Macroshift* offers a compelling analysis of the process of social evolution of the human species on planet Earth.

Laszlo begins by describing what a macroshift is, outlining macroshifts that have occurred in the past, and examining the macroshift that is happening now. The author explains, “A Macroshift is a process of societal evolution in which encounters with the system’s limits of stability initiates a bifurcation—a process of rapid and fundamental change in complex systems.”^(p9) Macroshifts have 4 phases: the trigger phase, the transformation phase, the critical or chaos phase, and the breakdown/breakthrough phase (see Sidebar on page 50). The decisive factors in our current macroshift echo the familiar call of progressive political, environmental, and social justice communities for ecological and social sustainability.

Beyond analyzing our current macroshift, Laszlo offers compelling solutions to current beliefs and practices that lead to an unsustainable future. He urges us to eliminate obsolete beliefs—e.g., nature is inexhaustible, nature is a giant mechanism, life is purely a struggle for survival, the market distributes benefits, the more you consume the better you are. Other fundamental solutions include learning to live with diversity, embracing a planetary ethic, and meeting our responsibilities. Laszlo sees the current macroshift as an evolution from Logos consciousness to Holos consciousness: “Logos-inspired evolution was materialistic and conquest- and consumption-oriented. The



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Four Phases of Current Macroshift

1. Trigger Phase (1860-1960)

Innovations in hard technologies (tools, machines, operations systems) result in greater efficiency in manipulating nature for human ends

2. Transformation Phase (1960 to present)

Hard technology innovations irreversibly change social/environmental relations, resulting in:

- higher level of resource production
- faster growth of population
- greater societal complexity
- growing impact on social and natural environments

3. Critical or Chaotic Phase (The Decisive Epoch 2001-2010)

Changes in social and environmental relations result in:

- pressure on established culture
- questioning of time-honored values and worldviews
- challenge to “given” ethics and ambitions
- society that is extremely sensitive to fluctuations—“chaotic” in the chaos theory sense
- changes in dominant culture/mode of consciousness determine new developmental trajectory

4. Breakdown/Breakthrough Phase (2010 and beyond)

[evidence of both breakdown and breakthrough exist concurrently]

Elements of breakdown:

- values, worldviews, and ethics of a critical mass resists change
- established, rigidified institutions resist timely transformation
- social complexity and degenerating environment create unmanageable stresses
- social order undergoes series of crises that degenerate into conflict and violence

co-exist with

Breakdown events:

- consciousness of a critical mass evolves in time
- culture shifts towards more sustainable worldviews, practices, ethics
- improved social order establishes itself
- social system stabilizes in changed conditions—the human species chooses a positive future!



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alternative to it is evolution centered on human development and development of human communities.”(p110) Holos is globally whole but locally diverse. People live more simply, striving for a healthy lifestyle rich in contact with others and with nature, rather than living an ostentatious lifestyle. Laszlo declares, “At the levels of the vast and complex system in which people participate, self-reliance is the goal and voluntary cooperation the means to achieve it. People recognize their unity within their social and cultural diversity and become conscious architects of their destiny.”(p119)

Laszlo continues with details about what you and I can do to make a difference. The simplest principle and my favorite is “Live in a way that allows others to live as well.” If this seems too lofty and abstract, Laszlo offers simply ways of doing this: eat less meat, don’t smoke, and drive less. *Macroshift* begins with lofty theory that fulfills our need for a theoretical intellectual construct, continuing with an excellent summary of the inadequacies and damaging effects of modern American and European lifestyles. Laszlo goes on to articulate actions we can take to reach a genuinely higher quality of life—in our personal lives, business, art, science, and government.

Read the “Ten Benchmarks of Holos Consciousness” (See list below)—you may discover you are already playing a significant role in the current macroshift towards the next level of human social evolution. And perhaps you will be inspired to find additional ways to contribute to a more sustainable world!

Ten Benchmarks of Holos Consciousness

You have Whole-brain Holos Consciousness when you:

1. Live simply, satisfying your own needs while taking into account others’ needs.
2. Live in a way that respects the lives and socio-economic development of all peoples.
3. Safeguard the intrinsic right to life and life-supportive environment for all living things.
4. Pursue happiness, freedom, and personal fulfillment in harmony with the integrity of nature other people.
5. Require government to relate to other nations peacefully and cooperatively; recognize that all peoples have the right to strive for a better life and healthy environment.
6. Require businesses to adopt sustainable practices that do not detract from local enterprises and developing economies.
7. Require media to provide reliable information that enables citizens and consumers to reach informed decisions.
8. Help those less privileged than yourself to move out of poverty and live with dignity.
9. Work with like-minded people to preserve/restore environmental balance.
10. Encourage others to empower themselves to make ethical decisions on issues that will decide their own and their children’s future.