The World Is Round

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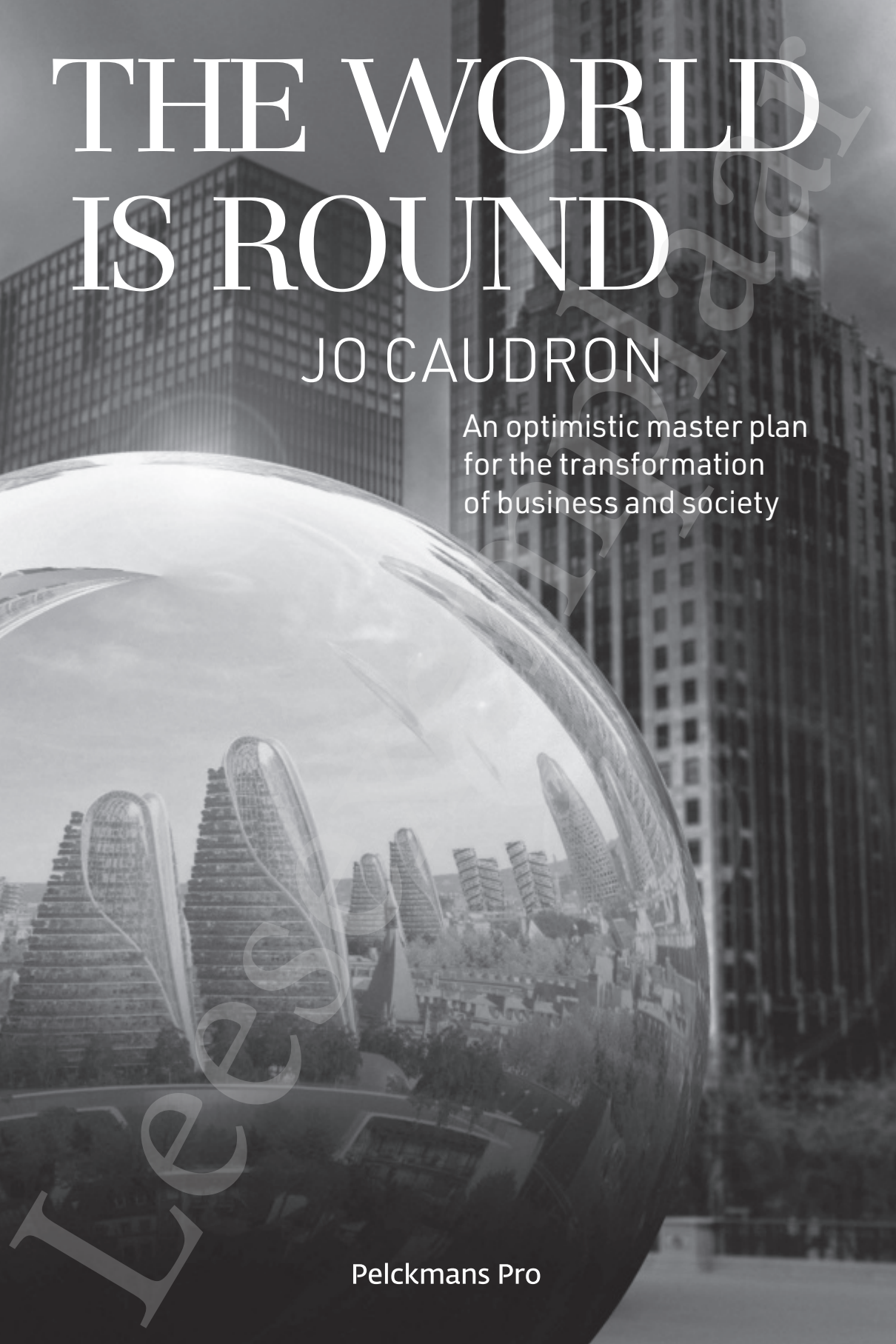

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JO CAUDRON

An optimistic master plan for the transformation of business and society

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The journey culminating in this book was longer than I remember from my four previous endeavours. I reread the acknowledgements in my last book in which I promised my friends and family that I would never be unavailable to them for so long again. Unfortunately, this proved to be an empty promise. So, without further ado: thank you Florence for giving me the space I needed to write this book; thanks to Marilou and César for not making too much noise while you were busy respectively on Instagram or Fortnite ;-)

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Thanks!

Jo Caudron

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THE PRESENT DIFFERS TOO MUCH FROM THE PAST TO BE ABLE TO MAKE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE!

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Introduction

You write an introduction once a book is finished, when you know what it is about. This book was quite an undertaking. Not only because I had more to say than in my previous books, but also mainly because this time I dared to stray far from my comfort zone. All my life I have been a self-made entrepreneur exploring unfamiliar topics. That was the case 25 years ago with my first Internet company, and is still the case today in my reflections on the transformation of society. It's not something I studied for, and even if I had wanted to, there are no study programmes to prepare you for this job.

I believe this represents the strength and the weakness of this book. Over the years I have learned to identify patterns across different domains, which reveal how everything looks similar and is mutually dependent. Not only do you observe how a problem on this side creates a problem elsewhere, you also see that a solution only works if different domains are connected. This insight was already relevant when producing a simple website, and is even more so in the case of digital transformation. For social transformation it appears crucial. Once you obtain this insight you notice the underlying patterns, a bit like Keanu Reeves in the film The Matrix.

The consequence of this approach is that you should read this book as a personal vision. While I use verifiable figures and facts as the basis, where they lead me is entirely speculative. Therefore, this book is not scientific. It is not based on in-depth research, methodological, accurately performed studies or any other academic or formal legitimacy. It is my personal vision of change in the world as it currently unfolds. It is also an attempt to seek possible solutions.

This book starts with the Metastorm, an impending phenomenon that I afford almost mythical proportions. It is the metaphor for the many changes as a cause of the transformation facing our society today. This transformation will demand

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resilience and energy from all of us. Therefore, it is important to be aware of our current state of readiness in which we can invest. In the first part of this book I take a look at the world to establish that there is a trend of growing pessimism. The systems that have been developed are being questioned and there is increasing polarisation. Not only do I attempt to identify it, but also to explain it, which makes it possible to respond to this trend.

In the second part I go in search of an optimistic perspective. I reflect on tricky themes such as economic growth, inequality, prosperity and happiness, and offer an alternative economic model, to reconcile growth with the major challenges of tomorrow.

The third part examines in detail the perfect storms on the horizon in the different domains of work, housing and mobility. I dissect the challenges we face today and how the three perfect storms catch up with each other to converge and form the Metastorm. I use these insights to seek an optimistic, speculative vision of the world that I set in the year 2030. I describe the different dimensions of our society based on the assumption that we could use the Metastorm as a positive force to create a better world.

The final part describes an approach for taking action tomorrow. After discussing the main critical factors for success, I go on to provide the reader with a method for compiling an optimistic transformation plan using the SUPERchange model.

I realise this is a rather lengthy book. I thoroughly enjoyed writing it and hope you will derive the same pleasure from reading it.

Jo

(Contact me at jocaudron.com)

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01

The Metastorm

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The Metastorm

The times in which we live are interesting but alarming. When I embarked on my digital career 25 years ago, I could never have imagined I would have a front row seat on so much change. I have actively worked on the emergence of the digital society. Every month a new opportunity, a new concept, or a new hype sprung up. I was at the forefront of the emergence of the first websites, e-commerce, intranets, online video, online advertising, mobile sites, apps, and social media, as well as the first fatal disruptions, which resulted in bankruptcies...

My mother was a nurse, and on Sunday she made a habit of nonchalantly talking about bedsores, stomas, amputations and other fascinating medical facts while we ate our chicken, salad and fries. On one of these unique occasions – I must have been around twelve years old – the topic of conversation was the grief module, the five stages terminally ill patients go through: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. How often have I seen this happen to businesses and their CEOs in the past 25 years? Blockbuster, Kodak, Nokia and others were the first to go through these stages and succumb. This is what lies in store for a large number of companies and sectors under pressure from the digital mastodons of today, such as Uber, Amazon and Netflix. I have seen the general vision of the digital world evolve from a hype that would soon blow over, to the force it harnesses today: ruthless in terms of its speed and impact, sparing nothing and nobody, yet totally captivating. In the past ten years my calling has involved helping traditional organisations cope with it: preventing them becoming terminally ill and ensuring that, once they emerge from a phase of denial, they focus their energy on something other than anger and resistance. My aim is to heal them and get them in shape for the digital world.

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Two years ago I was struck by doubt. What if my approach is lacking? What if there's a lot more to it than 'simply' formulating a response to the digital challengers? What if being aware of, and surviving digital disruptions proves insufficient because something much bigger is happening: a social transformation that is all-pervading?

I gave it a name, because I wanted to make this feeling tangible, and because it produces an effective, dramatic reaction during a presentation: I call it the Metastorm. It is a concept I devised to illustrate the scope of the challenges we face.

In order to explain the Metastorm, I start with something with which we are all familiar: the perfect storm. It is a climatic phenomenon in which a rare combination of conditions increases the impact of the storm to such an extent that the consequences are far worse than we would typically expect. Most people know the term from the Hollywood blockbuster with the same name, featuring George Clooney from 2000, but unfortunately also from the harsh reality of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the most devastating meteorological disaster to ever hit the US. With the arrival of the digital transformation we began using the term in a business context, to demonstrate that an entire industry could be annihilated if a number of factors were to converge. By analogy with what happened in, for example, the video store market, the music industry or the photographic sector, many business leaders are holding their breath in anticipation of the moment when a perfect storm strikes their particular industry.

I believe that perfect storms are currently gathering force in a number of fields. Sectors are under pressure from technological innovation and economic change. The expected upheavals will not be limited to the industries themselves; we appear to be gradually reaching a tipping point with regard to social issues too, which could give rise to major changes. We are approaching a point at which several perfect storms are simultaneously building, and exerting a major impact on each other: a perfect storm made up of several perfect storms, or a Metastorm, which has the ability to precipitate social upheaval the like of which has so far been unthinkable.

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The Domains Of The Metastorm: Work, Housing And Mobility

Which domains will be ravaged by these perfect storms? With regard to the digital transformation, we now see that there are no sectors that can evade the effects of digital disruption. After the first waves of change in media, entertainment and photography, we currently find ourselves in the midst of the transformation of the retail and banking sectors, and we are heading for even greater upheaval in healthcare, education, production, food and so on. In short, each sector has the potential to survive a perfect storm, although the outcome is inherently unpredictable. What's more, there are social themes that run through all industries and systems: climate change, globalisation, changes in manufacturing, an ageing population, migration, etc. They involve some of our most problematic challenges.

I have selected three major perfect storms that are strongly interrelated, and therefore will almost certainly result in a Metastorm: the future of work, the future of housing and the future of mobility. I deliberately selected these three domains because I am convinced that these three perfect storms collectively form a fabric of society. They constitute the basis on which many of the other domains of industry are built, and are consequently an important part of the fabric, of the substructure of the society to which we all belong. Another reason for this choice is that the three are relatively easy to change. It is not utopian to reflect on other forms of work, a different way of organising how we live, or new mobility solutions. On the contrary: when we take a closer look, we see that these changes are already under way.

What is lacking is a holistic approach to the perfect storms, a more effective identification of the connections and an attempt to allow the effect of one positive to act on the other. Thinking about these three perfect storms again in the right way could transform the Metastorm's energy into a positive force: a force for change that will also have a positive impact on other important social domains, and a force for change that will help businesses and sectors write a new and optimistic plan for their future.

Therefore, the three perfect storms form the basis of our Metastorm model, but depending on your type of organisation, you will naturally attach more impor-

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tance to one force or the other. Like everything in life, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to complex problems. By simplifying the issue, I also hope I can convey the logic, after which everyone can start to implement their own approach in accordance with the reality of their particular situation.

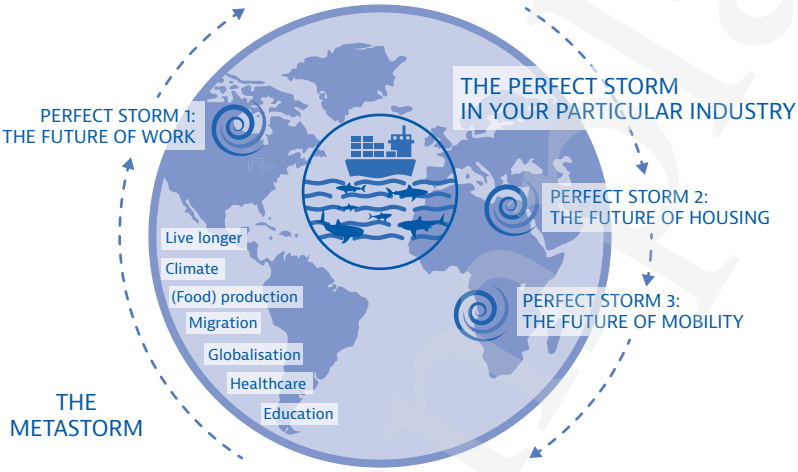

Figure 1. The Metastorm

Let's Ditch The Silo Mentality

Silos have been a constant throughout my career. It was around 25 years ago when I started building websites. A site was ordered either by IT, Marketing, HR or Sales.

By definition these were all bad websites: they were built from the reality of a single department, a company silo, which was not linked in any way to the other entities. In those rare cases in which multiple departments sat around the table together, it was surreal to witness how everyone seemingly spoke the same language but nobody appeared to want to understand anyone else. IT considered marketeers to be systematic dreamers that apparently tripped on too many mind-expanding substances and asked for impossible applications. Marketing viewed IT as an autistic bunch that had a single standard response: 'Computer says no'. Nobody saw the holistic whole outside the company from their own silo: the customer and the rest of the world. Fortunately these times are behind us and we realise that collaborating is the only way to build digital solutions that genuinely serve the interests of the business as well as the customer.

Initially we also observed a similar silo mentality in relation to the digital transformation: CMOs (Chief Marketing Officer) and CIOs (Chief Information Officer) jostling to take the lead in this new discipline. Fortunately, many CEOs and boards of directors soon grasped the fact that transformation extends to all parts of a business.

Yet a silo mentality is the reason why we don't see a Metastorm coming. In the best-case scenario we are aware of our own perfect storm, or we see one social transformation occurring, but we do not have a view of the bigger picture. Now that we are on the verge of major revolutions, once again we lack a holistic, transversal framework that offers a panoramic view of the different silos and plans. This is effectively reflected in how cities and municipalities are organised nowadays: with strictly delineated competences for aldermen from different policy areas: mobility, urban development, economy, civil society, urban planning, and so on, all in separate portfolios, often of services that refuse to work together.

If we want to have an idea of what the future holds for us, it is important that we adopt a holistic view of all the individual perfect storms currently building. The various upheavals in society are converging. If we are unable to form an all-encompassing picture of them, it is highly likely that we will be overwhelmed by the seemingly chaotic changes, which will paralyse us, and we will be doomed to experience the challenges fatalistically. In order to cope, we must look for patterns that transcend the silo mentality, in disruptions as well as solutions. This will enable us to start thinking about an overall plan. It might seem utopian to believe that we could produce a master plan to manage our diverse challenges. I can already hear people say: how can we draft a master plan if we still have no idea of the sub-aspects? Nonetheless, in my opinion this is the only way. Metastorm thinking can help us break through the silos and see the bigger picture. If we continue to fixate on the destructive forces of all these seemingly isolated perfect storms, we will no longer be able to see the forest for the trees. If we make an effort to identify patterns in the chaos of the perfect storms, we will discover the connections necessary to work towards an optimistic plan for the future.

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IF WE MAKE AN EFFORT TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS IN THE CHAOS OF THE PERFECT STORMS, WE WILL DISCOVER THE CONNECTIONS NECESSARY TO WORK TOWARDS AN OPTIMISTIC PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.

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What Preceded The Metastorm?

Until the digital revolution, most companies were large, stable battleships. They were not particularly manoeuvrable and sailed in calm waters. They knew their customers, partners and competitors through and through. The game and the rules of play were clear and subject to very little change. Evolution and innovation progressed at a steady pace without any major shock waves. Of course, some did sink, but this took a very long time and the cause was more often to be found in bad management than in the failure to correctly assess abrupt changes.

The first generation of digital developments was simply a tool that served the objectives of these companies. Digitisation was an 'enabler' of further optimisation, with cost-reductions as the underlying objective. Communication, marketing, transactions and the entire underlying process flow of businesses became digitised. Banks, for example, first made their marketing, communication, account management and payments available on online platforms, followed by product purchases such as loans. For 25 years, companies have been digitising their entire business operations, layer by layer, including the potential errors that had historically crept into them. Operational processes were faster, more customer-friendly and more efficient. Digital technology had no direct impact on the essential value proposition. In essence, a company remained unchanged and primarily created a digital version of itself, with the main goal being to save costs.

Around ten years ago, digitisation acquired another dimension. New players introduced disruptive forces in the market, which use the possibilities of digitisation to cast doubt on the essence of traditional business models and value propositions. Suddenly, the music industry no longer operated by pressing and selling records. New players such as Spotify stream music and offer a new business model based on access to music instead of ownership of a physical product. The status quo of the business model, which revolved around selling records, was disrupted. Digital disruption that results in digital transformation is a phenomenon that we now observe in all sectors: from media and entertainment to retail, the banking sector and even mobility. New challengers have a much better understanding of how they can use digital technology to find better solutions to an old problem.

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It is clear that the impact of the second digital wave is disruptive. Most organisations in diverse sectors still don't have a convincing plan to address the digital transformation and reinvent their particular business model. New players have opportunities because traditional companies, which have operated in their sector for years, do not change, for fear of putting their existing model at risk.

Fortunately, we see that an increasing number of traditional companies do understand they have to make the transition. They detect the perfect storm in their industry and compile a plan for their transformation, which often consists of finding a new balance between the traditional business (the mother ship) and radical innovation (the speedboat). Banks get answers to market-disruptive innovation from small fintech players as well as major initiatives by big tech like Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook. Retailers develop plans to arm themselves against Amazon or Alibaba. Of course, there is still a fundamental difference between producing a digital transformation plan and effectively implementing it. I am convinced that at the time I am writing this book there is a growing number of organisations with a sound transformation plan, but hardly any that are actually implementing it.

But, what if even the successful implementation of the digital transformation plan proves insufficient? What if this is just the first step? What if managing our specific perfect storm is just a small piece of the puzzle? Is your company ready to handle the social perfect storms that are building? Do you have a strategic plan for the Metastorm, of which your sectoral perfect storm is just a single component? We are arriving at a point at which not only traditional business models are faltering as a result of digital disruption, but social transformations will also have a fundamental impact on business strategy. The way in which we will work, live and move in the future, the way in which we strive for sustainability and tackle other major challenges, will have at least as significant an impact on our long-term strategy as the pressure Amazon and co. exert on our businesses.

The good news is that we can examine and address all these challenges in one and the same Metastorm plan. Each company must ask what stage of digitisation and transformation it is in. Does it predominantly concern the classic digitisation of processes and customer relations, or is there already a plan of action in case the business models are at risk of changing? Or does the company

actually look further ahead into how the world is evolving in terms of sustainability, climate, working, living and mobility? In the run-up to, and preparation of this book I spoke to hundreds of people from dozens of organisations, including companies and authorities. Although this is not a scientifically recognised sample, there is an obvious trend. Most have to admit that they are still predominantly stuck in pure digitisation: the process-based translation of services and business relations. Just a handful of companies believe they have a plan for digital transformation and changing business models, although the implementation is still in its infancy. In all these months, I never came across anyone that is entirely confident they have a plan for the Metastorm.

I encounter many people that are very concerned about the future and sense where the challenges lie, but do not have a real master plan. This provided me with additional motivation to write this book, in which I aim to explain the forces at play and how they are interrelated. I want to demonstrate that it is possible to formulate an answer to the question of how you can understand them and integrate them in a timetable for the future. I want to prove that the forces of the Metastorm do not necessarily need to be viewed as negative, because they can help us create an optimistic vision of the future for the next 75 years. However, I also want to point out the risks of the social climate in which we currently find ourselves, how we are gradually creating a world in which a pessimism is growing that will deprive us of the strength to cope with major challenges in a constructive manner.

Later on in the book I explore the three major perfect storms as the basis of the Metastorm in more detail, but before that I first want to zoom in on the state of our world today, the stage on which all transformations play out.

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02

The Awakening

Lesson Planet