

## Transition (Part 3)

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

**R**eferring to his legendary Qatsi trilogy, world-renowned filmmaker Godfrey Reggio argues that the real problem with our world is not the people, but the technology we bring to life, as ubiquitous as the air we breathe. As early as the 1970s – the time Godfrey Reggio and composer Philip Glass collaborated on *Koyaanisqatsi (Life Out of Balance)*, he described that language can no longer describe the world we live and work in: “Language and place gives way to numerical code and virtual reality”. In the two sequels - *Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation* and *Naqoyqatsi: Life as War* - he further argues that competition, winning, fame and love of money are elevated to core values of life: life as a game. Instead of describing our world by ordinary language, numerical code and virtual reality are being developed at an explosive pace. Technology plays a crucial role in this as civilized violence: technology is war!

The stages in our world – on which we display and honour the arts and our connections – are globalized, as are the language (visual language, English, code) and the technologies in our world. Just as a fish could not imagine a life without water, it is practically impossible for us to imagine a life where technology is not our ubiquitous *raison d'être*. Technology is all around us: The clothes we wear; the carpeting, tiles or asphalt we walk on; shoes or rolling wheels; the electricity we use to light the world and power appliances; cement, concrete, plastic or steel structures with which we materialize our living environment; the gas and other fossil fuels that we use to heat, move or clean ourselves. Our automatic (brain dead) response is to address the issues we face with – again – innovation, without realizing that yesterday's (and last year's) innovation plays a huge role in today's threats. Labour – our zeal – is our connection to our *raison d'être*, both material (technical) and ideal (meaning). Precisely for this reason, labour could play a key role in turning the future.

### Technology is always the problem

A condition is that we realize that technology is always the problem, even though it is still mainly seen as a possible solution. Reggio: "The miracle of technology is literally eating the planet for profit, it has a life of its own". Capitalism on steroids; as real as the arms race is the technology race, and things are indeed moving at lightning speed. In fact, in Reggio's terms, technology race is arms race and thus civilized violence. To complicate matters further, because technology is the problem, it still has to become the solution. So in a way it's true that we've pinned our hopes on technology.

The biggest problem with technology is nature, including our (psychological) nature: addiction, obesity, depression, etc. To turn the tide, we will have to let nature back into our world, uncontrolled and wild, partly at the expense of technology. Nature must increase, technology must decrease. We must be extremely critical of any innovation, and not let it be determined solely by big companies or other economic powers. Knowledge institutions try to lead the way, but certainly do not automatically contribute to turning the tide.

Work can contribute to building and maintaining solidarity in local communities and to giving meaning to one's life. Virtual connectedness (and social media) can contribute to this. In practice, however, the opposite will often be achieved, as people come to see themselves as objects and are taken out of their here and now, from connection and inspiration to the superficiality of generalities. Building our living environment together, locally – decent work – could bring about a transition towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and thereby achieve climate, diversity, forest and demographic transition! It can build a balance in diversity rather than uniformity, to be able to be multi-coloured human, both weak and vulnerable, connected by language rather than data. With labour – diverse, connected, local and small-scale – we can start to leave the war!