

THE PATH TO COLLISION

Why the World We Built Can't Survive the World We're Entering -
And How a Better One Can

Adam Tugwell | 6 May 2026



There are moments in history when societies change because they choose to, and moments when they change because the foundations they rest on begin to give way.

Today, we are living through the second kind. The signs are everywhere - in the economy, in politics, in energy, in trust, and now in the technologies we are creating faster than we can understand them.

Something is shifting beneath our feet, and the world built on old assumptions is struggling to keep its balance.

This isn't a story about predicting collapse. It's a story about recognising that the world we built is running into pressures it was never designed to withstand. And one of the clearest signs of this is the growing misalignment between a system built on scarcity and technologies that operate on abundance.

That misalignment is not a theory. It is a lived reality, and it is pushing the world toward a split.

1. The World Built on Scarcity

For more than two centuries, the modern economy has been built on the idea that scarcity creates value.

Scarcity of energy, scarcity of labour, scarcity of resources, scarcity of opportunity.

Scarcity is what gives money meaning. Scarcity is what gives institutions authority. Scarcity is what keeps the machinery of the economy turning.

Oil sits at the centre of this logic. Not because it is magical, but because it is measurable, meterable, and monetisable. Oil became the anchor of the global system because it was the perfect commodity for a world organised around scarcity.

Once oil took that central role, everything else followed. The financial system grew around it. The political system grew around it. The military system grew around it. Even the cultural assumptions about growth, progress, and value grew around it.

Oil didn't just power the modern world. It shaped the rules of the game.

And because oil is something you can meter, price, tax, and control, the entire system evolved to treat *everything* as something that could be metered, priced, taxed, and controlled.

That is how we ended up with the financialisation of everyday life - not because people wanted subscriptions for ad-free features or paywalls on basic information and software tools, but because the system's logic demands that anything which can be monetised must be monetised.

You can see this logic most clearly in the car industry. A car used to be a machine you bought, owned, and maintained. Today, it is increasingly a platform for recurring revenue. Heated seats, acceleration modes, battery capacity, navigation systems - features that physically exist in the vehicle are locked behind monthly payments. Even if you own the car, you do not own the functions.

The machine is no longer the product. **You are.**

This isn't happening because it makes engineering sense. It's happening because the financial system has reached the point where it must extract from everything simply to stay alive.

The same logic destroyed sustainable industries like wool, spinning, weaving, and local textiles. These weren't inefficient relics. They were resilient, circular, human-scale systems. But synthetic fibres made from oil were cheaper in financial terms, because the system was designed to make oil-derived products appear cheap, even when the real costs were enormous.

Entire industries have collapsed not because they failed, but because they were incompatible with the financial logic of a world built on oil.

This is the world AI is being built into. And this is where the contradiction becomes impossible to ignore.

2. The Money System Thinks AI Will Serve It

The people building AI talk about “abundance,” but their definition is still shaped by the world they grew up in.

When they use the word, they are usually talking about growth - more markets, more investment, more compute, more data, more dominance.

They are still thinking in terms of accumulation, not sufficiency.

They talk about “benefiting humanity,” but they are funded by investors who expect exponential returns. They talk about “new jobs,” but they are building systems that reduce the need for human labour. They talk about “safety,” but their business models depend on centralisation and control.

They are trying to build abundance using the logic of scarcity.

It doesn't work.

And they can feel the contradiction, even if they don't yet have the language for it.

The money-centric system believes AI will extend its lifespan - that automation will increase profits, that data will create new markets, that efficiency will keep the old world running a little longer.

But AI doesn't operate on scarcity. It doesn't need wages, rest, or resources in the way humans do. And at scale, it doesn't just consume energy - it demands energy on a level the current system cannot provide.

This is the pressure point.

AI accelerates the system's need for abundant energy.

Abundant energy breaks the logic of scarcity.

Breaking scarcity breaks the financial model.

Breaking the financial model breaks the system.

This is why the idea of free or abundant energy is so disruptive. Not because it is utopian or mystical, but because it undermines the very foundation of the money-centric world.

3. Tesla and the First Collision With Abundance

To understand why abundant energy is so threatening to a scarcity-based system, it helps to look at the story of Nikola Tesla.

Tesla wasn't just an inventor. He was one of the most gifted engineers of his time - a man who saw possibilities that others couldn't. He understood that energy could be transmitted wirelessly. He understood that the Earth itself could be used as a conductor. He understood that energy could be made abundant, not scarce.

But Tesla lived in a world where energy companies made their money by selling electricity by the unit. A world where the business model depended on scarcity. A world where abundant energy wasn't a breakthrough - **it was a threat**.

So when Tesla proposed systems that would make energy widely available and difficult to meter, he wasn't dismissed because he was wrong. He was dismissed because what he stood for was incompatible with the economic logic of his time.

The lesson is simple:

When abundance threatens the foundations of a scarcity-based system, the system pushes back.

But here is the difference today: the technologies emerging now cannot be suppressed the way Tesla was.

The AI industry is global, decentralised, and embedded in every sector. Energy research is no longer confined to a handful of laboratories. Knowledge cannot be buried in filing cabinets.

The internet makes suppression impossible. And the incentives of the AI ecosystem require abundant energy to survive.

The system cannot bury what it cannot control.

4. The New Risk: AI Agents as Instruments of Monetisation and Control

Most people still think of AI as something you open when you need it - a tool you summon. But the next phase of AI is not a tool. It is an **agent**.

An agent is persistent.

It remembers.

It acts.

It takes initiative.

It manages parts of your life without waiting for you to type a command.

Right now, AI is a conversation.

An agent is a participant in your life.

And in the hands of a money-centric system, an agent becomes the perfect mechanism for monetising the nth detail of your existence.

Not the big things.

The tiny things.

The temperature of your seat.

The brightness of your lights.

The speed of your car's acceleration.

The quality of your video call.

The priority of your delivery.

The tone of your notifications.

A device-level agent can watch your behaviour, anticipate your needs, and frame upsells as care. It can nudge you toward profitable outcomes while appearing to help. It can turn every moment into a potential transaction.

This is not speculation.

It is already happening.

Cars ship with features physically installed but digitally locked.

Phones come with capabilities that require monthly fees to unlock.

Home devices nudge you toward paid upgrades.

Software quietly shifts from ownership to subscription.

A device-level agent is the next step in this evolution - a personalised monetisation layer.

And that is the point at which the system collapses under its own weight.

Not because people revolt.

Not because governments intervene.

But because the model becomes so granular, so invasive, so relentlessly transactional that it breaks the very trust it depends on.

People begin to feel managed.

They begin to feel nudged.

They begin to feel observed.

They begin to feel monetised.

They begin to feel owned.

And once people feel owned, the system loses legitimacy.

The monetisation of the nth detail is not just greedy.

It is self-destructive.

5. The Split the World Is Moving Toward

The pressures acting on the world today are not pointing toward a single outcome. They are pointing toward a divergence.

On one side is the path the money-centric system is drifting into almost without noticing. It assumes that AI will strengthen its position - that automation will increase profits, that data will create new markets, that efficiency will extend the lifespan of a model already stretched thin. It is a quiet, almost passive belief that technology will keep the old world running a little longer.

But this belief rests on an illusion. The illusion is that financialisation can continue indefinitely. The illusion is that everything can be turned into a subscription, a licence, a fee.

The illusion is that people can be endlessly squeezed without consequence.

AI exposes the limits of that illusion. It accelerates the demand for energy the system cannot supply. It automates work faster than new forms of employment can be invented. It pushes the logic of extraction to a point where it simply stops working.

And when the financialisation model hits that wall - when the system can no longer extract enough to sustain itself - the people inside it are not empowered. They are displaced. They are replaced. They are treated as surplus to requirements in a world that has mistaken automation for progress.

That is one direction the world can go.

But it is not the only one.

There is another direction that becomes possible the moment the energy question is resolved - when energy is no longer the bottleneck, when abundance is not a slogan but a physical reality.

In that world, the logic of extraction loses its grip. The need to meter, price, and control every aspect of life dissolves. And when that happens, the relationship between people and the system changes completely.

Instead of being treated as consumers to be monetised, people become contributors to a shared world. Instead of being excluded by cost, they are included by design. Instead of being impoverished by fees, they are enriched by participation.

This isn't an abstract ideal. It is a practical shift in how society functions.

6. The People-Centric Alternative: Real, Practical, Ready

A world built on abundance needs a different organising logic - one that treats people not as units of consumption but as participants in a shared human project.

That logic already exists. It is built on four pillars.

Personal Sovereignty

This is the foundation.

It means people own their choices, their data, their direction.

AI becomes a companion that strengthens autonomy, not a gatekeeper that restricts it. It helps people navigate life without monetising their existence.

Basic Living Standard

This is not welfare.

It is infrastructure.

Food, shelter, energy, connectivity - guaranteed because abundance makes it possible.

AI helps optimise distribution, reduce waste, and ensure fairness. It becomes the infrastructure of dignity.

Contribution Culture

In a world where survival is not tied to wages, contribution becomes the centre of value.

People contribute through care, creativity, maintenance, teaching, growing, building, repairing.

AI helps match people to roles, supports their learning, and amplifies their abilities.

Value stops being something taken from people and becomes something created with them.

LEGS (The Local Economy & Governance System)

This is the structure that makes it all work.

Communities govern their own economic activity.

AI acts as a facilitator - coordinating resources, matching needs with contributions, maintaining transparency - without extracting value.

It brings decision-making back to the level where people actually live, work, and contribute.

In this world, an AI agent is not a monetisation layer.

It is a sovereignty amplifier.

It helps people live, not spend.

It helps them contribute, not comply.

It helps them grow, not submit.

It walks beside them, not ahead of them.

7. What Happens After the Split

When the old system finally reaches the point where it can no longer sustain itself - whether through financial failure, political fracture, energy disruption, or technological misalignment - the world will not pause and wait for instructions. It will move quickly, and people will look for ideas that make sense of what they are experiencing.

They will look for ways of organising that do not depend on extraction.

They will look for ways of contributing that do not depend on employment.

They will look for ways of governing that do not depend on distance.

They will look for ways of living that do not depend on scarcity.

This is where contribution-based systems, local governance frameworks like LEGS, and the Basic Living Standard become essential.

They offer a way of organising society that aligns with abundance rather than fighting against it, and a way of integrating AI that strengthens communities rather than hollowing them out.

They make the people-centred alternative not just imaginable, but practical.

8. The Work Ahead

We are not drifting toward a single future. We are approaching a divergence.

One path leads to a world where AI dominates because the system that created it cannot imagine any other use for it. A world where people are replaced because the

logic of financialisation leaves no room for them. A world where abundance exists, but only for the few who control the machinery.

The other path leads to a world where abundance dissolves the need for extraction, where contribution becomes the basis of value, and where AI supports a society that is no longer built on scarcity. A world where people are not replaced, because the system is no longer trying to monetise their existence. A world where personal sovereignty is not a slogan, but a lived reality - the freedom to participate, to contribute, to belong.

The split is coming. The direction is not predetermined.

And the work now is to make the second path visible, understandable, and ready - so that when the moment comes, people recognise it as the future they were waiting for, not the future they were afraid of.

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