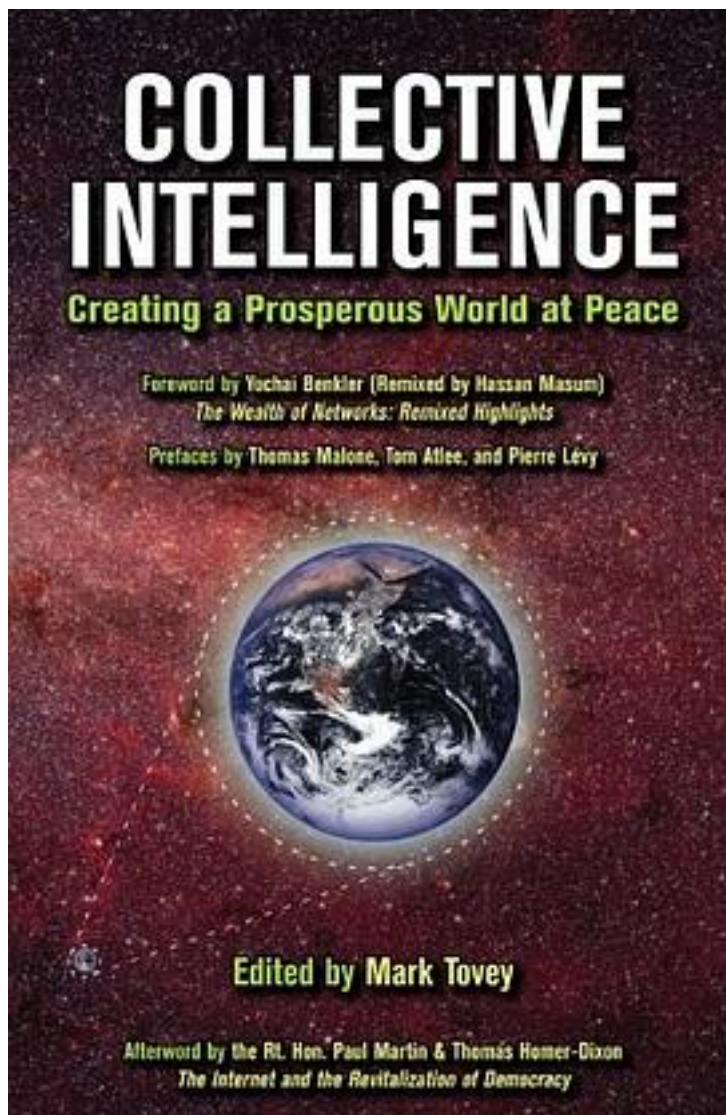


Collective Intelligence



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Pierre Levy sees us as moving past an information economy into an economy based on human interactions; a social economy. While the idea may seem startling, given our current emphasis on all things monetary, his reasoning makes you stop and give careful thought to ideas you may not have considered before. As technology advances, Levy points out, it's capable of taking on more and more advanced tasks--first simple labor and now the processing of information. As these capabilities become easier and well within everyone's reach, their value declines.

But the one thing that is beyond the reach of pure technology is the construction and maintenance of social interactions. What technology can do, however, is make it easier for humans to interact over greater distances and around obstacles. "Our humanity," Levy writes, "is the most precious thing we have." Levy, who is a professor in the department of hypermedia at the University of Paris, then predicts that we will take greater control of that value and everything related to it as we use technology to organize ourselves into what he calls Living Cities. Here, physical location is less important than the interactions of its members, and not surprisingly, the lack of territorialities will challenge present methods of governance.

Levy insists we are in the early moments of an historical paradigm shift of the magnitude of the Renaissance. And yet he avoids wild utopianism, keeping a clear eye on the realities and challenges inherent in any great transformation, complete with ample opportunities for things to go wrong. What emerges, however, is a different way of viewing the possible future, and plenty of reasons for asking why this utopian vision isn't attainable.

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