

READING CURRENTS IN THE FLOW OF HISTORY – Storms of Change

by Jessie L. Henshaw,
for westviewnews.org

History is a lot like the weather, events of change erupting like storms. Great changes of all kinds “erupt”, starting from small beginnings to transform their own environments. New technologies may emerge from spare parts in a garage, like Jobs’ and Wozniak’s invention of the personal computer. Huge empires dominating world politics may lose credibility and just vanish as if bankrupt, as happened to the Soviet Union.

As a research scientist I study such “natural systems” and how they erupt to change the world “making life lively” by what makes them universal. You find them in all kinds of physical and social systems producing rapidly changing organization, unique, complex and impossible to stop to look at. They’re “lively” in not following rules but creating them, as bursts of distributed reorganization not seen as a whole from any one view.

So, they’re often not expected, being invented as they occur, not ‘caused’. They then disappear as mysteriously, leaving change seeming “20/20 in hindsight”, because of how perfectly it fits into the future world they create. Because neither foresight nor hindsight tell us much about them you build narratives for their whole growth and climax, “connecting the dots” by the continuity of their chains of events.

As they change our world we may talk a lot about them, if not understanding them more than the weather. As with the world financial collapse or the looming threats of catastrophic climate change, we feel fairly helpless. We could do more understanding them better, of course. Still, by their nature eruptions of change are “out of control” as self-propagating viral processes. Like a forest fire, once they get going they can take different paths but don’t go backward, and will proceed to their natural end.

Being run-away viral processes, then, if you want to understand how they work that’s what you need to identify and study. It’s usually hidden from view by the great waves of effects they generate. So, “the news” of those waves is generally *not* what’s happening! “What’s happening” is generally some tight knit cell of creativity like the intimate “social scenes” we see

creating new forms of culture as the ones creating “rock and roll” and “hip-hop”. Such creative cells are naturally invisible, by leaving most everyone else “out of the loop”. The public only gets “the news” of external effects, like explosions of record sales or conflicts with established culture. With fires or flashes of lightening, the “creative cell” organizes an emerging energy use, just as growth energizes economies too.

As viral processes must, they all “blow out” as how they come to climax. It’s often internal change in their creative cell not external forces. It can be lenders and borrowers unable to keep up with the frenzied replacement of greater debts with greater credits to keep a bubble growing, slipping up on the paperwork. A small family business does the opposite, using their “viral process” to build the business to where the income is enough to let them turn their attention to other things, ending the sacrifice for growth when the business is secure and lets them live better and educate their children, as their original purpose.

jlh