

ch-ent-



the times *they are a* **ch-changing**

**And things are happening so fast
your head is spinning. Every day you face a new world:
new countries, new diseases, new rules
of behavior and millions of new products.
CAN YOU FIND HAPPINESS IN
SUCH AN AVALANCHE OF CHANGE?
YOU BET YOUR VCR YOU CAN.**

Is life becoming too much for us? Is everything changing too fast? I myself will confess to some mild distress at discovering my stockbroker wearing a nose ring the other day. And it is obviously no fun to be the one whose job is downsized out of existence. But change is scary only if you choose to see it that way. It can also be engrossing, like a good book. Change just means that something is *happening*, and to someone born in the Fifties, as I was, that isn't necessarily bad. You had to be dead not to get a thrill out of seeing Neil Armstrong walk on the moon, and it is exhilarating to watch someone new be President—even if you didn't vote for him. At the very least, change keeps all the synapses popping.

Besides, no mere social upheaval could ever equal the life changes that nearly everyone lives through—the death of a parent, the start of a marriage, the birth of a child. Compared with these truly transforming events, the arrival of yet another pop star, form of exercise, word-processing system or diet regimen is hardly worth fretting over.

I don't believe I'm the only one sitting back and enjoying all these ch-ch-changes (as David Bowie put it), although I may be the only one to admit it. For all

the hand-wringing about the deplorable state of modern times, I don't see many Luddites opting out of it, choosing to give up electricity or grow their own food. "No one is saying, 'I want to get off the bus,'" notes Watts Wacker, a futurist for the research firm of Yankelovich Partners. "The media talk a lot about downshifting, but real people only fantasize about it. I don't see any marked trend of people trying to simplify their lives." As for the stress that is supposed to go along with all this change, Wacker calls the condition a "badge of self-definition," a desirable trait in today's cult of busyness. Anyone who is not stressed isn't fully living.

Things have definitely picked up in the past few years, no question. "Everyone can smell the change, see it, taste it, hear it and feel it," says Wacker. And we all get a rush as the shards of our increasingly fragmented culture whoosh past as if on some vast video-game screen: Marky Mark, "Socks" Clinton, infomercials, Generation X, Shaq, Crystal Pepsi, grunge, cyberpunk. "It's as if, wherever you live, you live in New York City," says Laurel Cutler, a market prognosticator for the NYC-based advertising agency

BY JOHN SEDGWICK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS CALLIS

ch-ch-ch-changing

Footnote Cone Belding. Jane Stern, the coauthor with her husband, Michael, of *The Encyclopedia of Pop Culture*, says that she is amazed at the pervasiveness of pop culture these days. "Until about the mid-Sixties," she says, "talking about what some singer or actress was doing was a dopey conversation." Now the fact that David Letterman is moving to CBS is discussed on television talk shows with "all the earnestness of *Meet the Press*." And we all must watch as these meta-events wing past.

But no matter how enveloping it is, the media display is just the wallpaper of our lives. What fills them up is real, tangible, for-the-most-part-technological stuff, and these goods are piling up faster and higher than ever before. ATM, HDTV, ISBN, VCR, CD...it's as if the language itself can't keep up with the electronic outpouring. And it's not just high-tech; the more mundane industries haven't slacked off either. "There used to be two kinds of mustard, yellow and brown," says Cutler.

"And there were two kinds of sneakers, low-top and high-top." Not anymore. Even after a prolonged recession, the fruits of American enterprise can make your head spin. The number of items in the supermarket has increased from 9,000 in 1976 to more than 30,000 today. The typical family received six television stations in 1975; it now gets at least 30, and it's not unusual to get more than a hundred (and still want more). In 1980 there were 564 mutual funds; in 1992 there were 3,347. In 1978 there were 10,000 scientific journals; in 1988 there were almost 40,000.

You are what you know, technologically speaking

It seems almost quaint to recall that although the typewriter was invented in 1714, no one got around to marketing it for a century and a half. Now such a gizmo would be in the stores in about five minutes. "The rate of development for new products, for new publications; the rate of species depletion; you name it, it all follows the same growth curve," says Rosalind Williams, Ph.D., an associate professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And that curve goes just about straight up.

Organizations are having some trouble staying ahead of this curve. IBM, American Express and General Motors have all recently seen their management toppled because of their inability to keep up with change, thereby introducing a new term to the lexicon: To be

"stempeled" is to be tossed out on your ear by irate stockholders in the manner of GM's hapless CEO Robert Stempel. As management is stempeled, so are employees, producing unemployment and a pervasive angst among the employed. In 1950 an American could expect to change jobs three times; in 1993 it's seven times. A third of all adults have now abandoned the religion of their youth; a new religious denomination forms, literally, once a week. Abroad, entire countries seem to be imploding at about the same speed. "Patterns of largeness don't seem to be holding too well," notes Dr. Williams. She has a pet theory that the world has passed from an "imperial system" into a state of what she calls "neo-feudalism"—a kind of Mad Max-dom full of primitives and governed by local warlords.

It sure sounds scary. But we may not need to call in the undertaker for civilization just yet. Strip away the onetime events like the fall of Communism, peel back continuing liberation movements that have culminated in

multiculturalism and new roles for women (not to mention drugs and crime), and most of the changes we are currently undergoing, the changes that make us want to hold on to our hats, can be attributed to innovations in technology. "Technology is in the driver's seat, no question," says Charles Mauro, president of Mauro and Mauro, a prominent New York City human factors engineering firm that works on the interface between man and machine. "It used to be that religion was the driving

'There used to be two kinds of mustard—yellow and brown; and two kinds of sneakers—low-top and high-top.' Not anymore.

force. Then it was politics. Now it is technology."

Two well-known pieces of technology in particular—information processing and telecommunications—have put us in the state we're in. Together, they have created the information age, that much ballyhooed notion that has, just as advertised, revamped society as drastically as industrialization did. With one important difference: Industrialization took about 150 years to do it, starting with James Watt's steam engine in 1769. Computers have taken 16, starting with the appearance of the first popular personal computer, the Apple II, in 1977, and then proceeding through a stunning series of evolutions that show few signs of abating. No wonder people feel disoriented.

Technology never works its transformations in smooth, limited and predictable ways, however. Who would have thought that Edison's light bulb would create nightlife, or that Alexander Graham Bell's telephone would break down class barriers in romance and

The number of items in the supermarket has increased


give rise to talk radio? Technology's consequences are best explained by the Butterfly Effect of chaos theory, in which the flutter of a butterfly wing in Cambodia results in a hurricane in Texas.

Some of the more immediate consequences are easy enough to chart. First of all, of course, practically everybody now spends a good portion of their day staring into some video screen or other. Forty percent of all jobs now involve computers, which is amazing when you consider that almost none did when Jimmy Carter became President. That has required a lot of training—and then retraining every time the software changes, which is often. Every year, companies spend more money training employees than all colleges and universities spend educating undergraduates.

But a larger effect is that the whole world is plugged into the same data stream, lighting up the entire known universe with the pixilated images of Madonna and Michael Jordan. Trends can sweep around the globe quicker than The Wave can make it around Yankee Stadium. And even the most remote corner of the world sends its messages pulsing back to Anywhere, U.S.A. This has led to the hodgepoding of culture best typified by the "comma cuisine" at more adventurous restaurants, where such things as Nantucket scallops, Maui onion confit and Milanese pasta are jumbled together in a single dish.

Age-old hierarchies have crumbled as information has spread, pulling everyone down to the same level. Thus the presidential candidates all had to put up with Larry King last year. In industry, technology has rapidly sped up the development of new products. In national politics, advances in telecommunications allow grass-roots movements like Ross Perot's to become national forces virtually overnight. Within individual organizations, E-mail puts everybody instantly in touch with everybody else, drastically enlarging what Stuart Card, Ph.D., a cognitive psychologist at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, calls the "radius of interaction." This has broken up the traditional chain of command, and it has swamped employees. Dr. Card says he gets 50 to 60 E-mail messages a day, and he is expected to respond, if possible, within three hours. As E-mail has become portable with the development of go-anywhere Personal Digital Assistants, a new version of the laptop, there is no escaping it, either. "It makes for a just-in-time life," says Card wearily.

By the same token, as telecommunications expands around the world, it has pushed competitive pressures to a global scale, forcing everyone to work faster and harder—or the job you do today will be done in Taiwan tomorrow. Companies have slimmed down to boost productivity, shafting even the most loyal employees. And it has altered residential patterns, allowing people to live farther and farther from their place of employment, and stay in touch by modem.



What did we do before cash machines?


For most of us, it's hard to remember a world before ATMs or VCRs. How *did* we get money on a Sunday afternoon when the bank was closed? But it really hasn't been that long. The following list is just a sample of what has been gained—and what has been lost—in the remarkably short span of about 15 years.

what's new

Faxes
Cellular phones
Camcorders
ATMs
VCRs
Personal computers
Voice mail
NutraSweet
MTV
Test-tube babies
Madonna
AIDS
CDs
StairMasters
Step classes
PG-13
Slovakia
Bungee jumping
The Terminator
Digital radios
Talking cars
American Gladiators
PMS
Air bags

gone but not forgotten

LPs
Betamax
Manual typewriters
Comiskey Park
The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Berlin Wall
Rotary telephones
Carbon paper
Casual sex
Superman
Breast implants



From 9,000 in 1976 to more than 30,000 today.

ch-ch-ch-changing

The evolving self

Okay, life is changing, but so what? Man is the most adaptable of all animals, able to survive in every climate from the equator to the South Pole, to withstand famine, pestilence and wars. There is no reason to think that we will not survive the information age as well. In fact, we have already started to adapt to it in interesting ways. Kenneth J. Gergen, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, argues in his book *The Saturated Self* that our media-soaked lives have given rise to a new kind of self. In the nineteenth century, he says, the self was essentially Romantic—passionate, mysterious and deep. At the start of the twentieth century, it turned modernist, riding the wave of scientism to become a piece of engineering—and thereby able to be re-engineered by a piece of technology like the Skinner box. And now, in the information age, we have the postmodernist self, which, amid the media welter, might be represented as a mélange of glittering and ever-changing images, a kind of interior Times Square. “Under postmodern conditions,” Dr. Gergen writes, “persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated.”

Gergen is not entirely sanguine about the new developments. He believes the multiplicity and fragmentation of our lives have afflicted us with a condition he terms “multiphrenia,” characterized by self-doubt, a lack of dominant values, and the paralysis that results from being able to see too many sides of a question at once. In such a muddle, irony has become the prevailing mode of discourse for the chattering classes. Since nothing can be seen in just one way, nothing can be taken seriously. (This must be why CBS reportedly gave David Letterman \$16 million.) “Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality,” writes Gergen, which is as good a description as any of the *Letterman* show.

Gergen goes to some trouble to see the up side of all this. He notes that as the self has become more malleable through plastic surgery, cross-dressing and the like, the center of life has been transferred outward to relationships between the self and others. According to new theories of psychology, for example, emotions are no longer seen as residing purely within an individual. “In the same way that Ivan Lendl’s movements on the tennis court make sense only in terms of Boris Becker’s actions on the opposite side of the net, so emotional performances gain their significance as components of ongoing relationships,” Gergen writes. Such a reaching-out to others is a welcome development after the self-centeredness of previous eras. And Gergen sees a flexibility to the postmodernist self that was missing in its predecessors. He notes that individuals commonly maintain a secret or shadow self—the

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the more

The results of SELF’s Gallup Poll are in, and it turns out that—surprise, surprise—people do like change after all. Almost half our sample said their lives had changed “a great deal” in the past two or three years, and nearly two thirds said that those changes had been for the better. In fact, many have become addicted to change; people who wanted even more of it outnumbered by two to one those preferring less.

Also, our respondents are gizmo-crazy. Fax machines, car phones, the hot video game Sega Genesis—you name it, they love it. So long as it isn’t too complicated, that is. While they singled out the computer revolution as by far the most important technological change in our era, their own favorite techno-toys were largely computer-free. The microwave was everyone’s number-one darling, winning 83 percent approval (a measly 4 percent gave it a negative rating). It was closely followed by VCRs (80 percent approval), then answering machines (62 percent) and Federal Express-style overnight mail (58 percent). Personal computers came in fifth (55 percent). From our list of 14 technological innovations (see chart at right), only shop-at-home TV and cars that “talk” earned negative marks—perhaps because people haven’t tried them yet.

Happy about their own lives, our respondents did get a little nervous about developments beyond their personal spheres: 44 percent believe the world is changing too fast, while 17 percent think it is changing too slowly and 36 percent see it as going along just about right. Yet when they were asked about specific social changes, they felt okay about them. Eighty percent, for example, agree with the increased concern for the environment, 78 percent enjoy the emphasis on family life, 68 percent gobble up all the news and information in the media and 66 percent are into the fitness movement. By contrast, the least-liked social development—the increase in TV talk shows, which annoyed 37 percent of respondents—is hardly earthshaking.

Only when they were asked to ponder a small number of national and international developments did the respondents get uniformly troubled, but who wouldn’t, when asked whether the rise in crime was reason to be “extremely” or “very” concerned? Ninety percent said yes to that one. Eighty percent said the same about AIDS, as did 73 percent about world terrorism. (Our poll was taken just after the World Trade Center bombing in New York City.) The collapse of the Soviet Union unnerved 45 percent, and the fall of the Berlin Wall bothered 36 percent.



Forty percent of all jobs now involve computers;

things change...

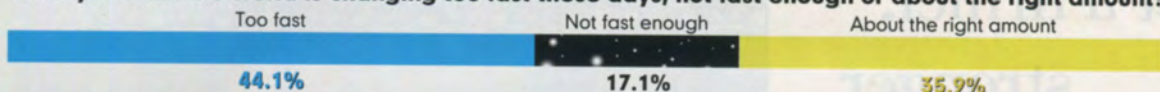
the happier we are

Different groups responded differently, though. In general, women were more sensitive to change than were men—52 percent felt there had been a “great deal” of change in their personal lives, as compared with 45 percent of men—but only 61 percent of women said they liked it, compared with 64 percent of men. As might be expected, young people were generally more psyched than their elders about all things new. The young are, after all, the essence of change. A full 78 percent of the Generation X-ers (under 30) viewed change positively,

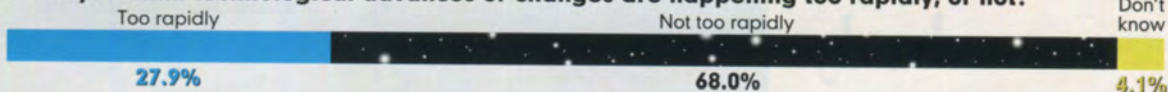
as compared with 68 percent of the Boomers (between 30 and 49) and a mere 43 percent of the, um, pre-Boomers (50 and over).

The important point to take away from all these numbers, of course, is simply that our survey shows a remarkable acceptance of change on the part of just about everyone. At least for now. But, hey, things change. People may feel differently tomorrow.

1. Do you think the world is changing too fast these days, not fast enough or about the right amount?

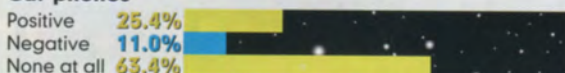


2. Do you think technological advances or changes are happening too rapidly, or not?

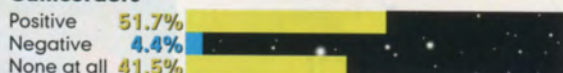


3. Which technological advances have had a positive impact on your life? Which, negative?

Car phones



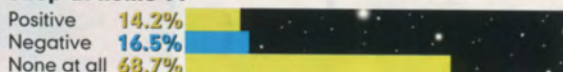
Camcorders



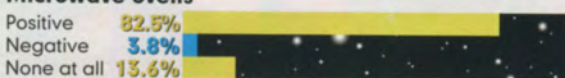
Personal computers



Shop-at-home TV



Microwave ovens



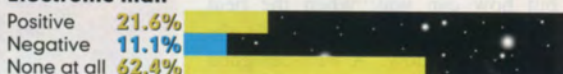
Cars that "talk"



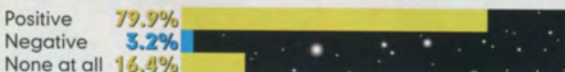
CD players



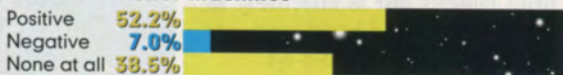
Electronic mail



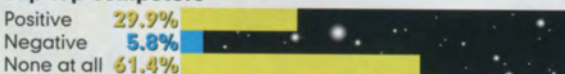
VCRs



Automatic teller machines



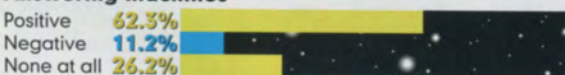
Lap-top computers



Fax machines



Answering machines



Home video games



Interview dates: March 31–April 11, 1993, of 1,003 American men and women ages 18 and over. Sampling error: plus or minus 3 percentage points. Totals do not reflect “don't know” or “refused” responses.

almost none did when Jimmy Carter became President.

RAPE

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The trial was what Schoener describes as "one of the ugliest cases I have come across." Roberts-Henry was put under 24-hour surveillance and was forced to hand over to defense attorneys all the details of her sexual history—even her personal address books. And when she took the case to the state Medical Examiners Board to try to get Richter's license revoked, she was unsuccessful. Richter is still practicing psychiatry in Denver today.

Yet experts believe that even licensing committees are becoming more sympathetic to the victims in these cases. And when the outcome is successful, it can do much to redress the balance of power. Says Schoener, "If the woman gets up the courage to take on the perpetrator, she may find she has more power over him than he ever had over her—the ability, potentially, to take away his career and most of his money, and perhaps do damage to his family, too." In other words, the consequences for the perpetrator can be substantial.

Rutter thinks that real change will come when society can admit that there is a dark side to sex that in the hands of a powerful man can be expressed improperly, as abuse. He explains: "By acknowledging [the dark side], instead of denying it and shielding it in silence, not only can we avoid specific professional sexual abuses, but we can also start to alter the wider social dynamic that has supported this male privilege."

Roberts-Henry, Brearly and Ward are all aware of the role they have played in bringing about change. Roberts-Henry has started a group in Denver specifically for victims of authority rape and has also spearheaded efforts to get Colorado's legislature to pass a law that will prevent the sexual histories of plaintiffs like her from being entered into evidence in court. Brearly has opened a fierce debate in her state about the responsibilities of the church to its members. And because Ward blew the whistle on her doctor, she helped to prevent a sex offender from exploiting more patients.

"It's so gratifying to get him to stop practicing," Ward told reporters after Namihas was ordered to close his office, "to stop seeing women, to stop touching them." □

CHANGE

(continued from page 114)

dentist who does t'ai chi chu'an — that would have been startling to discover just a generation ago. It is refreshing to see such openness to other perspectives, backgrounds and truths.

But Gergen needn't labor so hard. For, as Darwin observed, adaptation to changed circumstances is the only useful definition of *progress*. If a new environment dictates a new mode of being, then so be it. There is nothing about change itself that is inherently terrible. David McClelland, Ph.D., a psychologist at Boston University, once pointed out that change is always open to interpretation; it's a kind of Rorschach test of the popular mood. He noted that in a time of rising prosperity, change is generally seen as progress, whereas in a period of economic decline, it's seen as the opposite. This country's stagnant purchasing power since the mid-Seventies might, then, account for any national anxiety about change. Japanese society, by contrast, has been changing even more markedly, but

has not been subject to anything close to the American self-doubt, quite likely because of Japan's astounding national prosperity, dimmed now only slightly by its current recession.

Maybe change is like background noise: While almost no one actively enjoys it, one's reaction depends very much on one's mood. Studies have shown that people object far more to highway noise, for example, if they think it is lowering their property values than if they think it is raising them by bringing economic growth to the area. In the latter case, noise is the sound of money being made.

Or maybe change is like me and squash. I hadn't played the sport in 10 years when I tried it again the other day. And I was shocked, *shocked*, to discover that virtually everything about the grand old game had changed—the ball, the racket, the rules, the strategy, the strokes, the positioning. At first, I was very distressed by all this, and I couldn't hit a thing. But then I gradually got used to the new system. I adapted, you might say. And I started to score some points. That changed my attitude completely. I thought, Maybe this is okay. □



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