

# Got any change?

Here's a cliché that needs to be stood on its head: the rate of change is steadily increasing.

We hear about this astounding pace of change every time the phone company introduces a new service or a software company releases a new operating system.

But I have another theory. Young people in our society (those of us under, say, 60) are increasingly obsessed with fantasy, such as computer games or wizard movies, because we are bored. We're bored because nothing much has changed as long as we've lived.

Think back 50 years. If you grew up in North America, people were already travelling in cars, which moved along at about 60 miles per hour. You lived in a house with heat

and running water, and you could just flick a switch to turn on the lights. You turned on the TV or radio to get instant news. You could pick up the phone and actually talk to relatives on the other side of the country.

For ease of daily living and communication, things haven't changed much in the last 50 years for most North Americans.

But think about the changes in the previous half century. My grandparents grew up on the prairies, at a time when central heating and plumbing were almost unimaginable luxuries. My grandfather made an 800 mile journey by horseback to find his family, when motorcars were still exotic playthings. Then the magic of telephone reached into rural areas, and soon my grandparents adjusted to the even more astonishing development of moving pictures, transmitted to television sets in the living room. The airplane was invented about the time my grandparents were born, but they lived long enough to fly on passenger jets, and they watched the live newscasts as astronauts landed on the moon.

Our grandparents lived through real

change, but what do we get? OK, our Xbox displays 3D images twice as fast as our PlayStation did (and will absolutely *need* to be replaced twice as quickly). Yes, we have 100 channels of TV. But moving from no channels to one channel is a momentous change; moving from one channel to ten or 100 is trivia. Being able to talk on a cell phone from your car or backyard is a modest improvement on having to dial the phone in your kitchen; the really big change happened when our ancestors no longer had to travel for days to contact other family members, but could simply pick up a handset and ask an operator to dial DRexel 805.

Is it any wonder our compatriots are chronically bored? Is it any wonder people lose themselves in hour after hour of online games or so-called reality TV? Clearly, the excitement is gone from daily life.

And just as clearly, I've grossly oversimplified the case. A quick look around the world shows that life-altering changes are sweeping through many societies, and we've had some unsettling ripples here. In the next ten, 20 or 50 years, we too may have to deal with real social upheavals: new diseases or victories against epidemics, famines, wars of conquest or liberation, economic booms or collapses.

And there are computers and the internet. Hundreds of millions of us now possess more computing power than rocket scientists could dream of harnessing a generation ago. Connected into a world wide network, we can share knowledge that governments would like to keep secret, and we can organize new movements that cross all borders, in hours or days.

Using these amazing electronic tools, we can really transform our world.

Or we can keep busy downloading the very latest, up-to-date, ever more life-like simulation games.

