Part 1

Ways of Looking at Reality
Editors’ Note: Ways of Looking at Reality

by Kurt April

How individuals, organizations, communities and societies navigate the shifting currents of human, organizational, political, social, economic and technical evolutions, and sometimes revolutions, represents significant opportunities and difficulties at the very same time. Transformative movements, not least the advent of, and apparent spreading of, intertwined economic-democracy, make three promises: to provide us with ever-increasing standards of living that are equally desirable and achievable, to periodize and encapsulate the unfreedoms of the past by adopting transparently different and democratic policies, and by implementing institutions and processes that remedy and reconcile the injustices inherited from the past. For the majority of the world, however, economic-democracy has not brought jobs, foreign investment, poverty alleviation, basic infrastructure, economic growth and self-acceptance in a globalized world. No doubt, certain countries and industrial sectors have done well, some extremely well as a result of globalization. But the broad majority of citizens around the world, from a multitude of cultures and ethnic backgrounds and particularly those formerly, and currently, disenfranchised and poor, have not seen significant improvements in their life chances and, in reality, cannot expect to see them in the immediate future.

Something new, something different, some new lenses are required soon if we all are to live in a secure world. It is vital and reassuring, at times, to recognize that the real world is filled with different edges like a diamond, as Sylvia Vriesendorp reminds us in her article entitled: Diversity – A Diamond in the Rough. The real world, in fact, is far messier – more open, variable and changing – than the few paradigms of development on offer, that promote a certain dominant prototype of life. Everyday life and the roles people take on, are forced to take on, choose to take on and cannot take on, provide the rich diversity of scattered light that we need to recognize as sources of variable aspiration and variable balance towards hope. The papers selected for this section were chosen to provide a non-exhaustive “flavour” for the new ways in which the world is coming to see itself, and the tensions and paradoxes it invokes.
As the industrialized world begins exploring Mars, suns of distant planets and the implications of its findings for our globe, most of the emerging world are hoping that they, their countries, and their issues would land up in the “telescopes” of the thinking and planning of the industrialized world – since, as the last Davos event reminded us, the emerging and developing world and particular parts of it, like Africa, parts of Central Asia and Latin America, are not “in their sights.” Many individuals and societies have seen upliftment over the past century in their standards of living and, in the Western world mainly, growing material wealth – however, at what cost? At the cost of marginalizing other parts of the world, other societies, other communities and worst of all, marginalization of our own families and friends. Even more worrying, as Hofman and Moore remind us in their article entitled Restore Talent and Leadership, are the well-being effects on individuals, and the misdirected approaches for dealing with symptoms, as opposed to the real causes for the degradation of our well-being, increased family breakdowns, crime increases, increased suicides, increased chronic diseases, increased stress and burnout of younger and younger age groups, and a world in which there is a rising intolerance (bordering on hatred) of “the other,” “those who are different” and “those not like us.” Is this the promise of development, the future that developing and industrialized countries dreamed of?

Recently, whilst looking through one of the world’s largest telescopes in the Chilean Andes on a television program in the USA, the host Alan Alda (of MASH fame) claimed that there was a battle going on out there (in deep space) that will determine the fate of the Universe. He claimed that it was a battle between two great forces – one trying to pull the Universe together, the other trying to push it apart. In this program, Alan joins voices of some of the world’s leading astronomers as they try and make sense of the startling and amazing implications of science’s latest discoveries: that everything we can see, from the world around us to the most distant galaxies, is only a tiny fraction of what the cosmos is made of. We are told that Dark Matter, the majority of what’s out there and still unknown to scientists on earth, pervades space and Dark Energy (repudiated by Einstein though) whistles undetected through our bodies each day – we are told that one day, this Dark Energy will push apart the stars and galaxies so that everything we can see today will have disappeared into blackness. As many folk in emerging and developing economies ponder on the relevance of all of this, they wonder whether such “pushing apart” already exists here on earth, and what the future (not even long-term) may be if we do not do something about it now. Herein lies the paradox: as the world squanders billions in money and energy in trying to understand this “Dark Nothingness,” of which they can do nothing, and that which they can do something about – equality in the world, alleviating hunger, eradicating poverty, celebrating difference, closing the gap between have and have-nots, etc. – is not seriously entertained or even rigorously thought about. What is our world coming to when the money spent on cosmetics in any one of the top three industrialized nations can totally eradicate world hunger? As
Wim Kok, previous Premier of The Netherlands reminded us after September 11th, now is the time to do something different in the world. The end-game is simple and obvious – if we continuously ignore the majority of the world, eventually they will take the whole world down. Much that is evidenced and labelled as terrorism and ethnic conflicts we do not believe has much to do with jealousy or religion (perhaps only really at the extreme). We are reminded about the famous statement of Vaclav Hamel (previous Czech President): “I am not an optimist because I do not believe that everything ends well, but neither am I a pessimist because I do not believe that everything ends badly. I could not accomplish anything if I did not carry hope within me, for the gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.” There are a multitude of opportunities existent if we approach the world through the lens of hope, and if we are willing to suspend judgement on others, on other ways of doing things – in fact, there may be huge opportunities (even financial ones) for those who are willing to take the time to understand “the other” and look through the lens of “the other.” In many ways, we have prepared this book, as a gift of hope for a new world – a world that begins to work for all, and in which everyone can be acknowledged in their full humanity.

Scientific revolutions result from the discovery and study of anomalies – phenomena that conflict with prevailing scientific theories. Yet, historically, science has been and still is, resistant to, and intolerant of, anomalies. In both scientific journals and mainstream science magazines today, articles and papers on topics deemed “outside the box” by the scientific establishment are often subject to a form of censorship. This appears to be no different from management practice and theory, social practice and theory, political practice and theory and, generally, human behavior. Unfortunately though, censored humans do not wait to be discovered, they act – often becoming the revolution. Many such revolutions, fortunately, are constructive and positive, and Tony Ehrenreich, in his personal view on globalization, reminds us of the disintegrating consequences of promotion of economic instrumentalism without cognisance for the common good and creating a democratic world that works for everyone – however, in many ways, he signals the integrating growing concern by civil, labour, public and private movements about the motivations of public and private enterprise in the 21st century. The desire and intention to lead a different world are being made explicit from all corners of the globe, and at all levels of society – leadership, it would seem, is no longer only rooted in “positions of leadership” (such as CEOs, CFOs, Directors, and so on; and may not even be found there in many instances), but “new leadership” is found in acting on intention, on purpose, by making to choice to help emerge our collective consciousness.

Perhaps we should all start our own revolutions (or is that called “innovations” in our modern world), and become proactive activists and seek out similar activists, thus becoming activist communities – questioning the dominant paradigms of our world, and being noticed. What are you, the reader, looking at through your telescope – nothingness or a revolution?