

## The Tipping Point

Consider this a primer on how to change the world by changing only a few small things. If you can launch the germ of an idea in the right context, then a little shove can push that idea into taking over the entire world. Think hulu hoops and environmentalism. That small, critical nudge is known as the tipping point. Gladwell digs deep into social science to uncover all manner of marvelous research on how ideas propagate via friend-of-a-friend networks (he has the real story of the famous six degrees of separation) so that by leveraging the logic of networks, a whisper becomes a shout.

—KK

### The Tipping Point

#### How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

Malcolm Gladwell  
2000, 279 pages  
\$25  
Little, Brown

*The Tipping Point* is the biography of an idea, and the idea is very simple. It is that the best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, or for that matter, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to think of them as epidemics.

In all of the city of Colorado Springs—a town of well in excess of 100,000 people—the epidemic of gonorrhea tipped because of the activities of 168 people living in four small neighborhoods and basically frequenting the same six bars.

Six degrees of separation doesn't mean that everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps. It means that a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few.

When it comes to finding out about new jobs—or, for that matter, new information, or new ideas—"weak ties" are always more important than strong ties. Your friends [strong ties], after all, occupy the same world as you do....How much, then, would they know that you wouldn't know? Your acquaintances [weak ties], on the other hand, by definition occupy a very different world than you. They are much more likely to know something that you don't. To capture this apparent paradox, Granovetter coined a marvelous phrase: the strength of weak ties.

The Power of Context says you don't have to solve the big problems to solve crime. You can prevent crime just by scrubbing off graffiti and arresting fare-beaters; crime epidemics have Tipping Points every bit as simple and straightforward as syphilis in Baltimore or a fashion trend like Hush Puppies.



## The Self-Made Tapestry

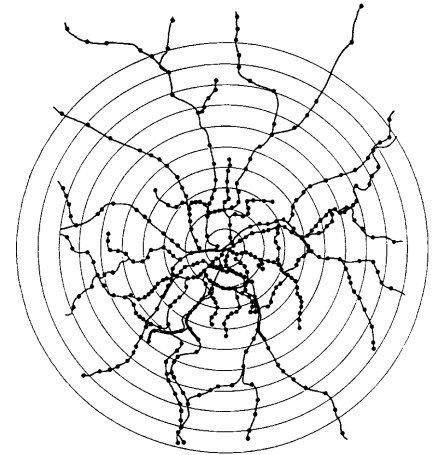
The most comprehensive, and most comprehensible analysis of patterns in nature and the nature of patterns.

—KK

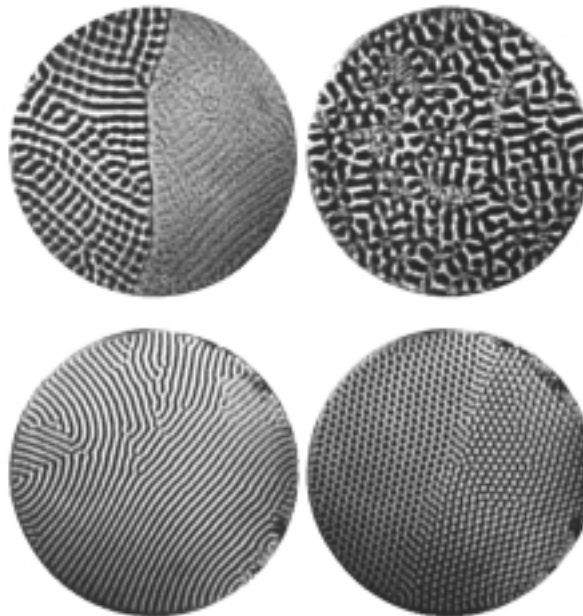
### The Self-Made Tapestry

#### Pattern Formation in Nature

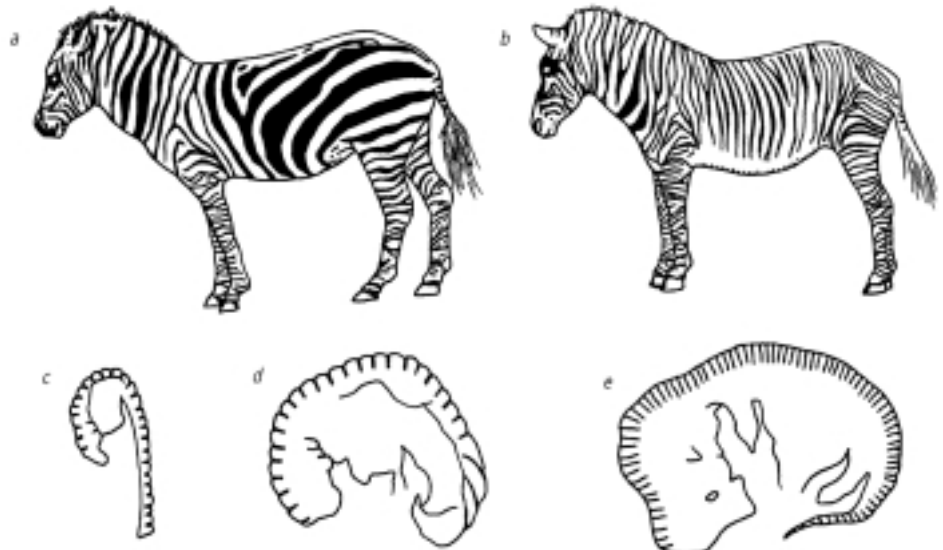
Philip Ball  
1998, 324 pages  
\$37.50  
Oxford University Press



The Paris Metro is a branched network with a fractal form.



When shaken vertically, a shallow layer of grains can develop complex wave patterns, including stripes, square and hexagonal patterns.



The adult zebra *Equus grevyi* (b) has more and narrower stripes than the adult *Equus burchelli* (a). This is thought to be because the striped 'pre-pattern' is laid down on the embryo of the latter at an earlier stage: after twenty-one days for *Equus burchelli* (c), but after five weeks for *Equus grevyi* (e). The smaller embryo supports fewer stripes, and so by the time it is of comparable size (d), its stripes are wider.