

# Break free of this world wide delusion

**Bryan Appleyard**

1 **T**wenty years have passed since Sir Tim Berners-Lee created the world wide web. From 1989 to 2000 it grew exponentially. Then it crashed, and bright-eyed, cash-burning dotcoms across the world went bust. From the ashes emerged web 2.0, a cult created, engineered and run by Californians. This can be defined in many ways, but its principal features are, as with everything else in California, freedom and personal expression.

2 So, for example, you can publish to the world your every passing thought on Twitter, sneer at MPs on Blogger, display your life on Facebook, sell and bid for goods on eBay. And, all the while, Google, the biggest brand in the galaxy, will be watching everything you do, knowing where you live, logging your preferences and tracking your movements so that it can target its ads at you and only you.

3 Even if you don't indulge, your life has been changed. At every turn you are told to get online and buy. Web 2.0 is in your head and your pocket whether you like it or not. It will change everything.

4 What is wrong with this picture? Well, to start with, it is historically ignorant. "The internet", says David Edgerton, professor of the history of technology at Imperial College London, "is rather passé ... It's just a means of communication, like television, radio or newspapers."

5 One great promise of web 2.0 was that it would lead to a post-industrial world in which everything was dematerialized into a shimmer of electrons. But last year's oil price shock and this year's recession, not to mention every year's looming eco-catastrophe, show that we are still utterly dependent on the heavy things of the old economy. In fact, says Edgerton, we may, in retrospect, come to see coal as the dominant technology of our time. The web, like it or not, uses energy, quite a lot of it, and that will continue to be made with big, heavy, industrial-age machines.

6 24 The key feature of web 2.0 that is currently driving change is its intense focus on the individual. Google's power springs from its ability to advertise not to populations or groups but to individuals. Blogging, tweeting and Facebooking all give the individual the unprecedented opportunity to blather to the entire world.

7 "Why not?" say the Californians. "This is paradise, the individual set free."



The weird phenomenon of flash mobs

8 The first objection to this is that it destroys institutions and structures that can do so much more than the individual. Clive James, who regards the internet as “more of a blessing than a threat”, says that a newspaper story may need “half a dozen qualified financial journalists to put it together, and masses of research that no lonely blogger could possibly do ... This throws into relief the intractable fact that the liberty which the web offers to the individual voice is also a restriction on group effort.”

9 A further objection to the cult’s radical individualism is that it doesn’t have the intended hyper-democratic consequences. Wikipedia, for example, has tackled inaccuracy and subversion by introducing forms of authority and control that would seem to be anathema to its founding ideals. Even Twitter is already coming to be dominated by conventional, non-web-based celebrity – Oprah Winfrey in the US and Stephen Fry over here.

10 The slightly more sinister aspect of this is that excessive individualism leads with astonishing rapidity to 26. The banking crisis may not have been caused by the internet but it was certainly fuelled by the way connectivity and speed created a market in which everybody was gripped by the hysteria of the herd.

11 “There seems to be an inverse correlation between technological speed and intellectual diversity,” observes Andrew Keen, author of *The Cult of the Amateur: How*

*Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy.*

12 Or there is the weird phenomenon of flash mobs. People agree by text message or tweet to assemble in one place and, suddenly, do so. This was originally intended as a joke or art piece designed to demonstrate sheep-like behaviour, but it rapidly became an aspect of cultish libertarianism. It doesn’t work. Flash mobs in Russia are simply prevented by cutting off mobile-phone coverage. Old-world politics is more powerful than the web.

13 And finally, the everything-free, massively deflationary effects of the web may be over. Rupert Murdoch, head of The Sunday Times’s parent company, has said he is thinking of charging for online versions of his papers. The hard fact that somebody, somehow, has to pay for all this is breaking into web heaven.

14 The cult is the problem. I know that this article – it always happens – will be sneered at all over the web by people who cannot think for themselves because they are blindly faithful to the idea that the web is the future, all of it.

15 It is the cultists who threaten the web. They are the ones encouraging dreams of a utopia of the self. They fail to see that the web is just one more product of the biology, culture and history that make us what we are. There are no new worlds. There is only this one.

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## Tekst 7 Break free of this world wide delusion

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- 2p 22 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenkomt met de inhoud van de alinea's 1-3.
- 1 Web 2.0 has created a digital environment impossible to escape from.
  - 2 Web 2.0 has successfully brought bankrupt dotcoms back to life.
  - 3 Web 2.0 intrudes on its users' personal privacy.
  - 4 Web 2.0 seems to offer users countless ways of expressing themselves.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- 1p 23 What is Edgerton's claim, according to paragraphs 4 and 5?
- A The impact of web 2.0 took effect too late to prevent a worldwide economic crisis.
  - B The promise of web 2.0 was undone by unforeseen setbacks.
  - C Web 2.0 has limitless potential.
  - D Web 2.0 ultimately relies on conventional technology.
- 1p 24 Which of the following questions fits the gap in paragraph 6?
- A So what, if not everything, will the web change?
  - B Why, however, has the web continued its course?
  - C Will web 2.0 therefore change our energy consumption?
- "it destroys institutions and structures" (paragraph 8)
- 1p 25 Which of the following will suffer?
- A Freedom of expression.
  - B People's willingness to work together.
  - C The quality of information.
  - D The reliability of newspapers.
- 1p 26 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 10?
- A extreme egocentricity
  - B moral decadence
  - C slavish conformity
  - D social isolation

- 1p 27 Which of the following is true of paragraph 12?
- A It claims that in certain countries technological development is slow.
  - B It demonstrates how the web can be used as an effective political tool.
  - C It illustrates the writer's scepticism towards the web's potential.
- 1p 28 How does paragraph 13 contribute to Bryan Appleyard's discussion of web 2.0?
- A It adds the argument that free personal expression in online newspapers may soon be restricted.
  - B It concludes the writer's list of advantages of web 2.0.
  - C It demonstrates the direct economic impact of web 2.0 on deflation and inflation.
  - D It discusses another objection to the idea of web 2.0 as a dream come true.
- “The cult is the problem.” (paragraph 14)
- 1p 29 How does Bryan Appleyard substantiate this conclusion in paragraphs 14 and 15?
- By arguing that the cultists
- A are a threat to those who want to take progress one step at a time.
  - B are convinced that web 2.0 is a balloon about to burst.
  - C make users believe that web 2.0 equals eternal bliss for the individual.
  - D overrate their role in the development of the web's possibilities.

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