



From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism

By Fred Turner

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In the early 1960s, computers haunted the American popular imagination. Bleak tools of the cold war, they embodied the rigid organization and mechanical conformity that made the military-industrial complex possible. But by the 1990s—and the dawn of the Internet—computers started to represent a very different kind of world: a collaborative and digital utopia modeled on the communal ideals of the hippies who so vehemently rebelled against the cold war establishment in the first place.

From Counterculture to Cyberculture is the first book to explore this extraordinary and ironic transformation. Fred Turner here traces the previously untold story of a highly influential group of San Francisco Bay-area entrepreneurs: Stewart Brand and the *Whole Earth* network. Between 1968 and 1998, via such familiar venues as the National Book Award-winning *Whole Earth Catalog*, the computer conferencing system known as WELL, and, ultimately, the launch of the wildly successful *Wired* magazine, Brand and his colleagues brokered a long-running collaboration between San Francisco flower power and the emerging technological hub of Silicon Valley. Thanks to their vision, counterculturalists and technologists alike joined together to reimagine computers as tools for personal liberation, the building of virtual and decidedly alternative communities, and the exploration of bold new social frontiers.

Shedding new light on how our networked culture came to be, this fascinating book reminds us that the distance between the Grateful Dead and Google, between Ken Kesey and the computer itself, is not as great as we might think.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

On first glance, back-to-the-land hippies and dot-com entrepreneurs might not seem much alike, but it turns out that they have a whole lot in common underneath those scraggly beards and goatees. Drawing a direct line from dog-eared copies of the *Whole Earth Catalog* to the slickly techno-libertarian *Wired* magazine, Stanford University communications professor Turner follows countercultural figures like Stewart Brand, who shaped the information revolution, according to their aspirations to break down the boundaries of individual experience and embrace a larger collective consciousness. Less a biography of Brand than of the swirl of relationships surrounding him, the book shows how the ride of the Merry Pranksters and LSD experimentation led to the early online discussion board Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (the WELL), and into the digital utopianism surrounding the hyperlinked World Wide Web. Turner offers a compelling genealogy of both the ideals and the disappointments of our digital world, one that is as important for scholars as it is illuminating for general readers. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In this unique, provocative work of cultural history, Turner teases apart the visions, myths, and rhetoric that have swept us into cyberspace. This concentration on the ethos of our digital enthralment rather than on technology revolves around gifted entrepreneur and networker Stewart Brand. Inspired by Buckminster Fuller, Ken Kesey, and the back-to-the-land commune movement, Brand created the *Whole Earth Catalog*, an innovative interdisciplinary compendium that won the National Book Award in 1971 and, as Turner convincingly argues, generated the paradigm that led to the World Wide Web. Brand then declared that the computer was "the new LSD" and a "tool for transformation," and, as a hippie turned cybermystic turned nimble businessman, he founded *Wired* magazine and the megaprofitable and conservative Global Business Network. Turner tells many an eye-opening tale and connects many dots in this avidly researched, keenly analyzed, and stunningly ironic chronicle of how counterculture ideals transmuted into corporate strategies. In conclusion, Turner assesses the myriad ways digital utopianism has changed the texture of our lives and incisively exposes the staggering hubris of the digerati and the complex social and environmental consequences of computerization. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Brand's trajectory from arty 60s mayhem to the halls of Congress reflects, Turner argues, a realisation that "the natural world and the social world really "were" all one system of information exchange."'"

"Turner convincingly portrays a cadre of journalists who strove to transform the idea of the computer from a threat during the Cold War into a means of achieving personal freedom in an emerging digital utopia."

"Chapter by chapter, Fred Turner shows inventively and with a deep knowledge of the whole scene how cold war technology met hippie communalism to produce the "Whole Earth Catalog," WELL, "Wired," and everything that followed. This book is a tour de force of historical digging, sociological analysis, and full understanding."

"In Turner's meticulously detailed . . . book, he postulates that Brand was an idealistic (albeit Barnum-esque)

leader of a merry band of cybernetic pranksters who framed the concept of computers and the Internet with a seemingly nonintuitive twist: These one-time engines of government and big business had transmogrified into a social force associated with egalitarianism, personal empowerment, and the nurturing cocoon of community."

"Turner's fascinating "From Counterculture to Cyberspace" gives us a detailed look at one slice through this marvelous story. Unlike many other histories that focus on the technical innovators . . . this account focuses on a key player whose role was making the counterculture-cyberculture connection: Stewart Brand. . . . There are a myriad of fascinating little historical details that [Turner] dug up that will surprise and enlighten even the key players in the drama."

"With its countercurrents and nuances, [the book] recalls works of the highest standard that also address technology's interactions with national culture: David E. Nye's "American Technological Sublime" (1994) comes to mind, as does Norman Mailer's "Of a Fire on the Moon" (1971). . . . One of the many strengths . . . is that [the book] articulates the sociological forces that created this revolution in our time. Twenty-nine dollars will never buy you more book than this."

"Fred Turner's richly detailed history of how the alliance between the counterculture and "digerati" was formed is a fascinating story demonstrating that the computer's metaphoric implications are never simply the result of the technology itself. Engrossing, deeply researched, and rich with implications, "From Counterculture to Cyberspace" is highly recommended for anyone interested in how technological objects attain meaning within social and historical contexts."--N. Katherine Hayles

"Turner's enjoyable deep cultural history traces the roots of 1990s techno-utopianism in the acid tests and communes of the 1960s." -- Steven Poole "Guardian" (08/23/2008)

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Cinthia Beltran:

As people who live in the modest era should be update about what going on or information even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which can be always change and advance. Some of you maybe may update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know which one you should start with. This From Counterculture to Cyberspace: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and want in this era.

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Your reading 6th sense will not betray a person, why because this From Counterculture to Cyberspace: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism publication written by well-known writer whose to say well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written with good manner for you, still dripping wet every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your personal hunger then you still skepticism From Counterculture to Cyberspace: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism as good book but not only by the cover but also by

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Paul Avila:

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