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

By Fred Turner

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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 enthrallment 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 uptopia."

"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 Cyberculture" 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 "digirati" 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 Cyberculture" 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)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Leroy Torres:

A lot of people always spent all their free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the entire day to reading a book. The book From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not too costly but this book possesses high quality.

Teresa Riggs:

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read. If you would like get information about your research, you can read education books, but if you want to entertain yourself look for a fiction books, these kinds of us novel, comics, in addition to soon. The From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism will give you a new experience in reading a book.

Patricia Trevino:

In this time globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make professionals understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information better to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. The actual book that recommended to you is From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism this reserve consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This book was represented how can the world has grown up. The language styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some research when he makes this book. That's why this book appropriate all of you.

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