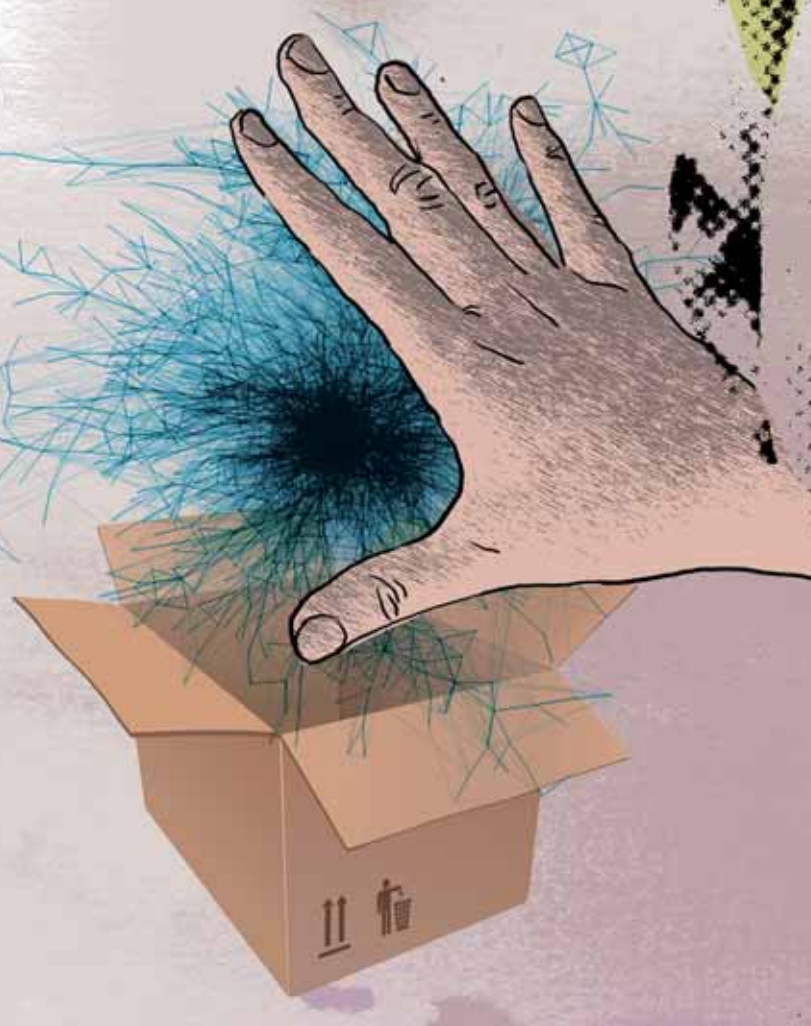
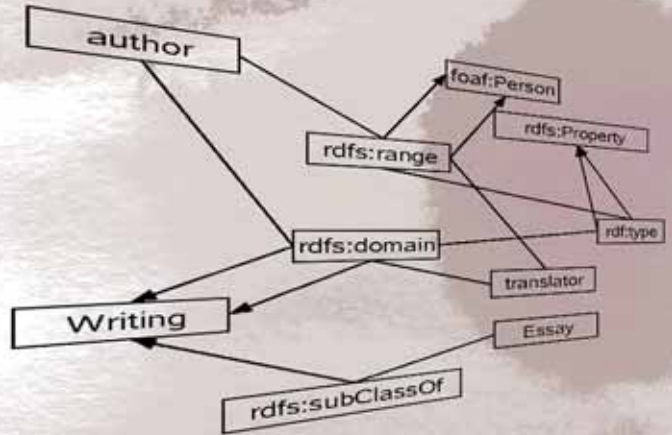


Web 3.0 : The Thin Line Between Simplicity and Stupidity

— With the Web 2.0 becoming increasingly obsolete, our tech-attention turns to the Web 3.0 and all its novelties. To attempt to make sense of it all, we talk to a panel of four experts who give us their views on the direction the web is evolving, and why they think their computer doing their groceries is the best thing to happen since the advent of personal computers.

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The Experts



CLO WILLAERTS



Blogger and reader, heavy user of Twitter, RSS social and professional networking sites. Hopes the Web 3.0 will do her groceries.

BART BECKS:

Belgian, lives between California and Europe. On the board of four digital media and technology startups, and is creating two himself. Would like the web to become so smart he doesn't have to read through the communication clutter anymore, allowing him basically to stop typing. Something he calls instant mind messaging.



NIELS SCHILLEWAERT



Professor in marketing research and founder of Insites, Europe's leading market research company. Like Clo, he would like his fridge to do the groceries for him.

ALBERTO PEPE:

PhD student at UCLA. Hopes his computer will one day choose the right wine for his meal, instead of taking trips to taste wine.

Defining

Technology and laziness have always gone hand in hand. A lot of technological advancements stem from a certain quest for laziness but – if that sits better with you – we could also call it a normal evolutionary human zeal. By wasting less time on doing the dishes, we have more time to learn different things, or just to relax.

Although Web 3.0 is still an early phase of the web and won't solve all your problems yet, it will simplify things – similarly making your web life that much more stress free. **CLO WILLAERTS:** "Right now we have so much RSS feeds, blogs and status updates to follow and process, it's very tiring. Information is like a snowflake that keeps rolling, it aggravates itself, especially with the 'wisdom of the crowds' and publishing overkill from Web 2.0. Although I enjoy a lot of Web 2.0 phenomena, there are just too many websites, too little time and we still have to make too much of an effort. I'm curious as to how Web 3.0 will make life easier in this respect and give us more time to think things through."

ALBERTO PEPE explains it this way: "The most important feature of Web 3.0 is the focus on structured data. The web today, or Web 2.0, engages users in the production, sharing, annotation and publishing of data. Now, although a lot of the promises of Web 2.0 have not been met, the web is awash with user-generated data of all kinds. Truth is, not only are these data hard to mine because they lack a standard structure, very often they are also hidden from search queries and practically undiscoverable and thus largely unusable. The chaos this brings along is tackled by some social platforms like Facebook. People want to manage their data in a 'safe' environment that they get used to navigate in, after the free-for-all mentality of Web 2.0. Now users can find stuff because it is sitting in a well-structured working environment. In my opinion, Web 3.0 is about data and making it more usable, discoverable and interoperable by the use of good-old URLs and typed relationships."

BART BECKS adds: "Because computers will better communicate with each other, it will make our human workflow easier. I'm looking forward to these meaningful communications that simplify our lives. Laziness and efficiency are tied close together in this sense. I, for one, would already be happy with self-organizing emails and simpler and more efficient social media so that I can spend more time surfing-literally that is. Down with social online labour, up with physical labour! For some web people

though, Web 3.0 evokes the same feelings of hope and change as the election of President Obama. That, in my opinion, is overrating the effects (laughs)."

Change

But things will change, no? **NIELS SCHILLEWAERT** sees three major functions for Web 3.0: "it will be automational (it will work for you), informational (better quality of data) and transformational (new phenomena will emerge on top of the former two functions)." The transformational aspect is what fascinates him the most: "Marketing research, a traditionally conservative field, needs to challenge its basic assumptions: for example, focus moves from the profile of the user to the topic he/she talks about. Web 2.0 brought about so much information for marketing research, and once these data become more contextualized and open, the possibilities are limitless."



BART BECKS



" For some web people though, Web 3.0 evokes the same feelings of hope and change as the election of President Obama. "

For **ALBERTO PEPE**, Web 3.0 will become an even richer source of information. "The web will become the de facto platform for the vast majority of scientific as well as social research. Being a social researcher who uses scientific tools, I predict that 90% of my research work will be performed analyzing data on the web. Think of the endless pos-

sibilities of cross-analyzing heterogeneous data from different sources by performing a simple query. You could, for example, query: "gimme the names of all the Facebook fans of The Word that live in Brussels and are fans of Sigur Ros"

But isn't that a bit scary, the web becoming an openly accessible, intelligent database with all our likes and dislikes linked back to one uniform e-ID? And won't marketeers gladly use this data for playing tricks on unassuming consumers? "No", **NIELS** says, "as I said, marketing research will be less about tracking an opinion back to the specific user profile but rather about the content of what the user is saying and writing, to form a complete picture of the brand's image. Nevertheless, if a new sort of intelligent spamming or identity-theft would appear, because of Web 3.0 evolutions, I'm sure the system will correct itself. The internet has always been a space where good and bad sides of humanity meet each other, just like 'normal' society. I believe self-regulation has become stronger since Web 2.0: behave badly on a forum and you get kicked out by the administrator".

And the advertising business? The Word did not talk to an advertizing guru, but hopes there is a way out of see-through advertorials and intrusive banners. **NIELS**: "Actually, the things you mention will probably be improved, because information in general will need to be better tailored, the advertising market will need to improve and listen to the customers. Inevitably, certain business models will have to change, and some industries will have to understand it's never going to be a champagne holiday again, good wine will do! Just like the global recession, Web 3.0 will filter out the mediocre content, and offer chances to innovative minds."

So what is the downside to all this kind of artificial intelligence? Geeks and techies might be well aware of which intelligent technologies are pushing content onto their desktops but people with less 'information literacy' might lose touch with all the automated mechanisms and not even realize how 'lazy' or passive they have become. "No," says **ALBERTO PEPE**, "the web isn't that intelligent just yet. In contrast, we will have more time to think for ourselves."

Spiva Novack, CEO of Web 3.0 application Twine, cornered the term 'Artificial Stupidity': to him, the web, which now has more pages than the human brain has neurons, should be used in a self-serving manner, free us from idiotic tasks, like organizing email, filing documents, organizing folders, remembering things, coordinating schedules,

responding to routine messages, re-organizing things, linking and tracking things and leave the higher-level thinking to our own brains. He simply doesn't believe in computers 'overpowering' the human brain. It would just not be fun, to have your past behavior determine your future actions, would it? If you just read an article on renaissance, you might change to detective stories, cartoons or the Japanese Vogue at the click of a mouse. We're just too manic and complex to be predicted by our past preferences. Do you still listen to the records you bought five years ago? You might, but this doesn't mean you're stuck in them. Anyway, as **ALBERTO PEPE** argues, "These recommendation thingies are not what the Web 3.0 is about, that's rather some kind of 2.5 process."



ALBERTO PEPE

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Still, as **CLO WILLAERTS** and **NIELS SHILLEWAERT** both argue, we can't just trust our own intellect or common sense in the web wide world: "Education about information technologies and how to use them will become of paramount importance. If not, there will be a new digital divide: this time, not between the broadband haves and have-nots, but between the surfers who make the web work for them and those that are being manipulated by it." **BART BECKS** also has some dystopian visions in the sense that,

given the many blog- and Facebook-related work accidents, people have been fired because they did not realize the impact of their online behavior on their real lives: "I don't think people should be limited on the web, I'm not a reactionary, but still, I don't know where the limits are of what you can share and what not. If I see someone drinking and flirting and I know that person is married to someone else, should I publish that on a blog? Or you doing a job interview whilst your boss just promoted you? Or even worse, what if I know your cancer is terminal? I guess, just like in the 'real' world, self-regulation will have to prevail, and I think it will."

This brings us to the subject of the economy of trust and reputation. **CLO WILLAERTS** is a non-believer of this 'reputational economy': "Although the transparency of my life and lack of privacy is not such a problem to me, I don't believe in this general profile. Imagine a 100% trustworthy seller on ebay, with a great professional network, who might also be a pedophile or simply an arrogant bastard who insults people via blogposts or social networking sites." "Nothing to worry about, because it will solve many of our problems," says Dick Heardt, one of the advocates of an open ID: "Trust decisions are contextual, so it is a case by case situation -- so there are challenges to a reputation economy outside of high value, broadly accepted, critical scenarios. Still, I do think a more accountable net is coming through."

Whether all this makes sense to your human intellect or not, outlooks are good for people who don't mind some changes. And those who don't want to, can just sit back and relax, lazily enjoying the waves of the web as they pass by. ■