

## **Bubble 2.0: Online Organized Critique of Web 2.0**

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### **Abstract**

Business-to-business marketing company CMP Media trademarked “Web 2.0” in November of 2003. A year later, technology publisher and “evangelist” O’Reilly Media and IT tradeshow producer Medialive International bestowed visibility on the neologism as the title of a business conference. Here, “Web 2.0” referred to the conference theme of “the web as platform.” Since then, the name has taken on broader meanings that are still the subject of debate. This paper sketches the contours of this definitional debate, still underway, in which Web 2.0 finds itself stretched from marketing buzzword to umbrella for larger a social phenomenon involving collaborative uses of technologies valorized for participatory, egalitarian, and democratic potential. The triumphalism of Web 2.0 proponents is examined in light of Jodi Dean’s concept of “communicative capitalism,” in which message contribution dilutes and substitutes for actual social conflict, as well as my 13 years experience in corporate advertising and name-creation. From these perspectives, Web 2.0 is contextualized within familiar tropes of treating technology as semi-autonomous, monolithic, discrete, and ahistorical. Finally, I present online Web 2.0 critiques, such as those of Wikipedia and the Bubble 2.0 Snark Group. The irony of Web 2.0 critics using Web 2.0 technologies is not lost, but examined as a possible conceptual route out of dualistic technology debates and struggles over meaning.

**PRESENTATION DRAFT for Media In Transition 5, M.I.T., April 2007.**

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## **Names and Naming**

I begin with two anecdotes from corporate naming and promotion to anchor my discussion of “Web 2.0” in its similar roots in corporate marketing--marketing which frequently deploys rhetorics of empowerment, participation, liberation, collaboration and other social ideals in order to literally sell users on technologies being promoted. It is a well-worn path in advertising from functional to aspirational: you don't sell what the product does, you sell what dreams it offers the consumer: who they want to be, what they want to do, what kind of world they want to live in.

In a former life, I worked in the advertising industry. My last employer was at an agency, working primarily with a technology client, doing writing, editing, brand strategy--and naming. Typically we would be hired to examine a company's product or service, analyze its relationship to the company's other offerings and current brand strategy, research their competitors' offerings, and develop scores of potential names, naming conventions, and related nomenclature that would work within the company's portfolio, challenge competitors, and sell the product or service. We would hash out options with the client, conduct market research and testing to gauge consumer reaction to the potential names, and carry out international trademark and domain name searches to assess the availability of the candidates. Final surviving top naming systems would then be explored in mockup creative executions and presented to clients for final selection.

Many jobs involved a technology and its numeric iterations: Technology 2.0, 2.5 and 3.0. Much of our work with one client involved naming these iterations. With one major product, we argued to just use the numbers, that consumers were familiar with these from software and operating system numbering, and this familiarity was tied into compelling them to upgrade: “Oh, you still only have Technology 2.0?” However, the client felt consumers were too stupid or scared of

numbers. (I would argue this reflected the client's marketing teams rather than actual customers.) Furthermore, the product we were working on was not version 3.0. It did not meet the technical specifications spelled out by the international standards organization in the field. It was technically 2.5, which our client used internally, but felt was not sufficiently impactful to use with consumers or business customers. So we developed euphemistic, descriptive names for the new version, neologisms along the lines of Techspress, Flexivity, or PowerVision. After months and months of interminable meetings and obscene amounts of dollars, a candidate was chosen. Launch materials and advertising were prepared. Employees were trained in proper customer service and selling of the new names and nomenclature. The new name was launched and lived ... for one week.

What had happened? One of our client's competitors had announced plans to launch a similar service, and was using a numeric rather than descriptive name. Moreover, the competitor was using the wrong number: They were calling their service 3.0, even when it was clear it did not meet the technical standards. Our client immediately changed strategy, instructing their employees (and vendors such as ourselves) to start using 3.0. Concerns about technical accuracy were no longer relevant, and all the work on the previous naming project was thrown out.

Here's a similar anecdote. As content editor for a business-to-business startup during the dotcom boom--one that included "portal" in its name, to give you an idea how much we succumbed to buzzwords--I commissioned an article on a Web 2.0 technology, although that term was not as yet in circulation. Application service providers, or ASPs, we informed our visitors and clients in one of our many free, value-added pieces of original content, relieved businesses of software installation, housing, training, and maintenance through outsourcing. You didn't have to deal with, for example, conferencing software; you can go to a third-party company on-

line who will manage it for you. These web-based services, we told our customers, offered a great benefit of financial savings and efficiency, of which they should take advantage. Our unstated but intended implication was that they should start with web services such as ... ours.

My intent here is not to argue that “Web 2.0” is merely a marketing gimmick, indeed such dualistic debates of real v. hype perpetuate a reification of authenticity I assiduously wish to not perpetuate. Instead, my aim is to situate my perspective as someone who studies technological culture only after years being well paid to deploy such technological marketing gimmicks. Regardless of to what degree Web 2.0 names a social movement, it is important to bear in mind Web 2.0’s roots in marketing rather than social movement.

### **Definition**

Business-to-business marketing company CMP Media trademarked “Web 2.0” in November of 2003 (Forrest, 2006). In October of 2004, technology publisher O’Reilly Media--who describes itself as “An active participant in the technology community ... [with] a long history of advocacy, meme-making, and evangelism” (About, n.d., ¶1)-- and IT tradeshow producer Medialive International bestowed visibility on “Web 2.0” as the title of a business conference, which continues to this day (About Web 2.0 Summit, n.d.). Here, the neologism referred to the conference theme of “the web as platform.” This referred not to a major new release, update, or version of the Internet or World Wide Web, as the numbering convention from software releases typically suggests and these borrowers of it were no doubt aware. Instead, a convention for naming significant (read: you must buy) upgrades was shifted from product to user. Web 2.0 referred to the new ways *people*, enabled by new applications, were using the web to distribute, collaborate, reconfigure, and share information rather than merely read and post discrete pages and sites. An article

in *Digital Web Magazine* entitled “Web 2.0 for Designers” described this as a move from documents to *data*, microcontent users could, through new applications, share, remix, deconstruct and recombine, citing the now-familiar litany of RSS, Flickr, del.icio.us, semantic markup languages, Google Maps, et al. The “new” element of user control was touted as a “paradigm shift” that would affect “the people who use it socially, culturally, and even politically” (McManus & Porter, 2004, Summary section, ¶1). Yet the marketing connection was still prevalent: “Because content flows across the Web in RSS feeds and can be remixed along the way, Web designers must now think beyond sites and figure out how to *brand the content itself*” (McManus & Porter, 2004, Remixing Content... section, ¶5, emphasis original). However, the social, user-focus of the name is what has steadily grown in recognition. In August of 2005 *Wired* proclaimed “We are the Web ... behold the power of the people” (Kelly, 2005, headline/subhead). By the end of the following year, *Time* proclaimed “you”--as exemplified by YouTube--its Person of the Year (Person of the Year, 2006). In sum, the neologism “Web 2.0” represented a marketing buzzword regarding web tools and applications, the social implications of which grew to overshadow them as the term referred to a larger perceived social movement. Such emotional perception or branding, can be gauged successful when it brings out the curmudgeons. In early 2007, *The Weekly Standard* opined

From the French and Russian revolutions to the counter-cultural upheavals of the '60s and the digital revolution of the '90s, we have been seduced, time after time and text after text, by the vision of a political or economic utopia.

Rather than Paris, Moscow, or Berkeley, the grand utopian movement of our contemporary age is headquartered in Silicon Valley, whose great seduction is actually a fusion of two historical movements: the counter-cultural utopianism of

the '60s and the techno-economic utopianism of the '90s. Here in Silicon Valley, this seduction has announced itself to the world as the "Web 2.0" movement.

(Keen, 2006, ¶2-3)

One of the unintended consequences of the Web 2.0 movement may well be that we fall, collectively, into the amnesia that Kafka describes. Without an elite mainstream media, we will lose our memory for things learnt, read, experienced, or heard. The cultural consequences of this are dire, requiring the authoritative voice of at least an Allen Bloom, if not an Oswald Spengler. But here in Silicon Valley, on the brink of the Web 2.0 epoch, there no longer are any Blooms or Spenglers. All we have is the great seduction of citizen media, democratized content and authentic online communities. And weblogs, course. Millions and millions of blogs. (Keen, 2006, Speaking of Kafka section, ¶5)

Perhaps such reaction is sign of a debutante social movement's successful coming out. The critique above will be detailed this summer in the book *The Cult of the Amateur: How today's Internet is killing our culture* (*The Cult of the Amateur...*, n.d.), but you can read all about it now--on the author's blog and podcast (Keen, n.d.). Critique the concept via the tools that gave rise to the concept. More on this later.

### **Context**

Utopic or dystopic, the inflation of technological change to paradigm shift, social movement, or cult is familiar but I would argue dangerous territory. As a context for further discussing Web 2.0, I will now sketch some historic characteristics of technological discourse.

Despite its apparently straightforward, mechanistic subject matter, technological discourse often can be far from rational. Futurists' breathless prognostications, hyperbolic advertising and

marketing, fictional narratives, and popular news panics regarding technologies can all be suffused with cultural projections or sublimations. Dean (in press) articulates how technological fantasies of abundance and democratic participation materialize as a technological fetishism in which communicativity replaces actual communication; “the intense circulation of content in communicative capitalism forecloses the antagonism necessary for politics.” Other cultural historians of technology identify a pattern of recurrent irrationality, both utopic and dystopic, and around emergent communication technologies (Carey, 1989; Jones, 2006; Mattelart, 1996; Robins & Webster, 1999; Spigel, 2001; Winston, 1998, 2006). Miller (2006) outlines a history of similar cultural excitements related to communicative technologies, ranging from typography’s heretical menace to video games’ threat to childhood innocence--a pattern we see recently around social networking sites such as MySpace. Stern (1999, and Handel, 2001) traces how Internet panics related to addiction as well as availability of sexual content are familiar patterns with emergent communications media. Several scholars explore the spectacular and supernatural associations related to the very lifeblood of contemporary communications technology, electricity (Marvin, 1990; Milutis, 2006; Sconce, 2000; Simon, 2004). Cultural scholars examine technological discourse as the site of displaced social anxieties around topics such as gender (Balsamo, 1996; Easlea, 1984), nation (McClintock, 1996) and family structure (Banet-Weiser, 2004). Such attitudes of technology as *sui generis* suggest not only misconception of technologies as discrete, independent forces shaping culture, but also an ahistorical focus on the present, attitudes that Williams reminds us continue to lurk in most discussions of new media--regardless of protestations to the contrary (2004). Indeed, she notes that the concept of “technology,” understood as a “semi-autonomous, dominant agent of historical and social change, the force with the most ‘impact’ on our lives, the one that defines our historical period,” did not emerge until

after World War Two (437). Nye notes as well that such technological determinism, even if banished in the academy, “in public life remains a vigorous and misleading idea, one that tells citizens they have no agency” (2006, 615). Mattelart (1996) argues that triumphal, utopic enthusiasm goes beyond discussions of communication technologies and is recurrent in the history of the very concept of communication itself.

Optimistic ideas of the culture-shaping power of technology have had various expressions, a common one being that of increasing civic participation. Particularly in regards to communication technologies, the ability of various media to reach new, wider, or more niche audiences has been lauded, as has their ability to be harnessed by these new, wider, or more niche users, who can then better join the mediated public sphere and participate in civic deliberation to varying degrees (e.g., Baker, 2002; Barlow, 1996; Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, 2004; Negroponte, 1995; Ratcliffe and Lebkowsky, 2004; Rushkoff, 1994; Unsworth, 2004)—despite some contrary research findings (e.g., Cole, 2004; DiMaggio et al, 2001; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2004). A recent keynote address to the Association of Internet Researchers gushed, “Everyone can create their own work and publish it, via MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and other platforms. While most such work is circulated among small groups or communities of interest, the *potential* is always there for someone’s bright idea, performance or personal charm to win an audience of millions—it happens regularly” (Hartley, 2006, “Consumer co-creation” section, ¶3-4, emphasis mine).

Potential is a tricky thing, and the often overlooked fulcrum in such discussions. Yes, audiences of millions can be reached (with the resultant social change implied), but how likely is it? What impediments lie in its path? How does one compete in the viral sweepstakes online with drunken celebutantes, passionate sing-a-longs, and virtuoso light-saber demonstrations? If suc-

cessful, to what ends? In trumpeting mere potential, such rhetoric elides the audience-gathering realities of competition and sensationalism, the challenge of being heard above the din of so many voices. As Dean (in press) relates, participation in the mere proliferation of messages is by no means necessarily engaging others in antagonistic, productive, political debate. Furthermore, her technological “fantasy of participation” parallels such recurrent belief in technological change as an agent in advancing democracy, equality, and justice. The cultural history of such deterministic sentiments goes deep (e.g., Fleetwood, 2006; MacDougall, 2006; Nye, 1994). Williams writes that, “In current raptures about the Internet, we still hear faint echoes of the Enlightenment and its conviction that a new phase of history is nigh, thanks to the universal circulation of information accumulated through reason-based inquiry” (2004, 442). Blogging was celebrated in the 2004 election, perhaps overly, as I have argued elsewhere (Scott, 2007); the 2006 mid-terms were proclaimed the “YouTube election.” Naming YouTube one of its top ten Entertainers of the Year for 2006, *Entertainment Weekly* asked, “Is there a website that more richly fulfills the populist promise of the Internet than You Tube?” (Vary, 2006, 58). The “you” of this and other Web 2.0 interactive technologies was anointed *Time* magazine’s Person of the Year (Person of the Year, 2006/2007).

### **Online Critique**

Web 2.0 as a name and concept has been variously critiqued. I will now address two sites of online, organized critique: Wikipedia’s “Web 2.0” entry and the Bubble 2.0 Snark Group.

One of the poster children of Web 2.0--and, as such, targets for Web 2.0 bashings such as Keen’s, is Wikipedia. As such, its own entry on Web 2.0 (Web 2.0, n.d.) offers a fruitful site of analysis, particularly considering potential conflicts of interest. If one believes in the idea of Web 2.0 as real or potential social movement, financially supporting the donation-reliant, nonprofit

Wikipedia, one of the movement's best examples, would be a prime way to support the movement. Therefore, Wikipedia has a clear material incentive to support the vision of Web 2.0 as social movement. Yet, on its Web 2.0 page, directly below an appeal for donations, its entry on Web 2.0 begins with the line "Web 2.0, a phrase coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004, refers to a perceived second-generation of Web-based services..." (§1). The first phrase of the first sentence grounds "Web 2.0" as a marketing neologism. It then proceeds to assert the uncertainty of Web 2.0 as a signifier: "a *perceived* second-generation." From its first words, a paragon of Web 2.0 asserts Web 2.0's roots in marketing and dubious accuracy. Indeed, the three introductory paragraphs before the official Introduction section of the entry deal with the term's marketing history, inaccurate suggestion of a new iteration of the web, and critique by technology experts.

The rhetoric throughout this encyclopedia entry is remarkably skeptical, provisional, contingent: "perceived," "suggests ... [but] does not refer to," "alluding," "hints," "advocates," "imply," "proponents," "buzzwords," "interested parties continue to debate," and "basic characteristics. ... might include." Furthermore, the two illustrations included are less than supportive. One, a timeline of Web 2.0 buzzwords, clearly places the name in a continuum including the likes of "collective intelligence," "long tail," "ASP," and "mashup," terms that already or may be destined to sound a bit long in the tooth. The other illustration is a mind-map of Web 2.0 memes, such as "aggregators," "six degrees," "convergence," "semantic," "remixability," "usability," "folksonomies," and "pay per click." In both of these illustrations, aspirational values along the lines of "power to the people" are minimal to missing. Furthermore, the term "buzzword" is clearly disparaging and, "meme," although to a lesser degree, I argue carries similar connotations of manipulation and evanescence. Both suggest rhetoric in the colloquial, pejorative sense of the word: messages not transparently self-evident but calculated, exigent attempts to persuade or sell

some you (on) something. O'Reilly's self-description as "meme-makers" and the use of a mind map, a conceptual tool not exclusive to the business world but popular within it, underscores this commercial, corporate association.

The entry's ambiguous tone dissipates in the sections providing an overview of technologies associated with Web 2.0, but it has already framed them. It reappears, naturally, in the "Criticism" section. This is the next-to-last section and begins with this statement: "Given the lack of set standards as to what 'Web 2.0' actually means, implies, or requires, the term can mean radically different things to different people" (Criticism section, ¶1). It goes on to list several points:

1. Many of the technologies associated with Web 2.0 existed in earlier networked systems
2. Use of Web 2.0 as marketing buzzword has diminished its meaning and disconnect it from "with little connection to most of the worthy but (currently) unrelated ideas originally brought together under the 'Web 2.0' banner" (Criticism section, ¶3).
3. Web 2.0 technologies are not a significant change to the underlying, fundamental technologies of the web--which still function the same as they ever did--but a layer of adjuncts added to them.
4. It represents another spate of dot-com style ebullience lacking real business models--"Bubble 2.0," as *The Economist* as termed it.
5. The term is still significantly unfamiliar to be relevant to consumer applications.

Criticisms 1 and 3 represent straightforward challenges toward the term's meaning: It does not accurately describe what it purports to, it is a bad name. More interesting are the other points, which all assume the perspective of Web 2.0 as a marketing buzzword, not as a criticism but a

given, and one that supercedes other meanings. Point 2, rather than positioning a dualism of contradictory, exclusive meanings of marketing v. social movement, asserts that, while both exist, the marketing usage not only dominates but actually deflates the social movement meaning. Points 4 and 5 do not even address the social movement meaning, but critique Web 2.0 as a business marketing device. They do not suggest that it is a marketing device, in criticism of the social movement meaning, they take its meaning as marketing buzzword for granted, as its operational definition, and critique its utility *as* a marketing buzzword--not whether or not it *is* one.

The entry concludes with a Trademark section, which relates the ongoing US and European trademark applications for the term, noting a brief 2006 attempt to stop IT@Cork, an Irish technology industry nonprofit, from using the phrase in the name of a mini-conference it was holding. This Trademark section provides the literal last word in Wikipedia's overview of Web 2.0. Although the section is free from editorial rhetoric or skeptical commentary, its final placement is significant, raising the subject of intellectual property rights and potential abuses, a subject of great debate and concern among proponents of the free collaboration, sharing, and remixing of information that is the hallmark of Web 2.0-as-social movement. Whether an issue of standardized formatting or not, the conclusion of the Wikipedia entry serves up Web 2.0 criticism and Web 2.0's imbrications in one of the negative flashpoints of the ideals of Web 2.0 proponents as the literal final words on the subject. In short, the Wikipedia entry begins and ends focusing on the name's corporate, marketing origins, current use, and involvement in struggles antithetical to the social values espoused by its proponents.

In sum, through its skeptical rhetoric, overview of criticisms, and organizational structure, the encyclopedia entry on Web 2.0 in Web 2.0 poster child Wikipedia, an organization with a material interest in the perpetuation of Web 2.0-as-social movement, is strikingly dubious.

I turn now to a much more explicit critic of Web 2.0, the Bubble 2.0 Snark Group (BSG). BSG describes itself as “a collection of elite bloggers, snarks, ranters, malcontents and professional beer drinkers dedicated to desecrating everything Web 2.0 and much that isn't” (Bubble 2.0 Snark Group, n.d., ¶1). The group consists of three blogs: Supr.c.ilio.us, whose name pokes fun at Web 2.0 exemplar del.icio.us, RSS'ing Down Under, an Australian perspective, and Geek Entertainment TV, self-described as “an emerging global media empire, reporting from deep inside the bubble as it re-inflates. GETV covers buzzword compliant topics such as web 2.0, tagging, AJAX, social software and the bubble juice known as VCs” (Geek Entertainment TV, n.d., home page). These three sites list two “affiliated projects,” Long Tail Camp and Hack 2.0 Workgroup. Long Tail Camp (Anderson, 2005; The Long Tail of Camps, n.d.) was a semi-serious, semi-parodic project of ad hoc public gatherings to discuss long-tail -related concepts, riffing on the similar BarCamps and FooCamps (think flash mobs with content, queer or costumed guerilla bar takeovers with an educational/technie focus instead). Announced in November of 2005, the logo remains on the BSG homepage, although its website and wiki are no longer online. Hack 2.0 Workgroup (n.d.) has a similar mix of parody and sincerity, describing themselves as “a network of sub-premium weblogs that hack content exclusively about the new generation of the Web. Combined, these hacks reach a large readership of influential technology and media professionals” (Hack 2.0 Workgroup, n.d., ¶1). BSG blog Supr.c.ilio.us is also a member of this network.

Supr.c.ilio.us (n.d.) began in October of 2005, and featured regular posts by a handful of contributors, except for a two-month hiatus in February and March of 2007. Their posts consist of Web 2.0 reporting, memes and their spreading, parodies, contradictions, gossip, and humor. Typical posts include: “Blow Your Own Bubble,” “Supr.c.ilio.us Not Acquired by Yahoo!”

“Stays Crunchy Even in Hype,” “AOL Reinvents Rootkit, Calls it Search Engine,” “Office-less Office is Back,” “How to Win Friends and Influence Google,” “Stop Reading my Blog, Watch TV Instead,” “1999 Called. They Want Their Bubble Back,” and “Pathfinder.com 2.0.” Such posts are organized by categories such as “So Meta It Hurts,” “Milk That Meme!” and “Everything Old is New Again.”

RSS'ing Down Under (Barren, n.d.) has a far less overtly satiric focus than Supr.c.ilio.us and, although containing many questioning or skeptical technology posts, such as reflecting on the dot com bubble--“Don't worry about that. There is no valuation. There's only orchestration.” --or looking at emerging Web 3.0 hype--“I believe that geographic-dependent context will be the next key shift. GPS, mesh networks, articulated presence.” However, the blog can also be geekboy enthusiastic, and, especially given the surrounding posts on Tarantino movies and pictures of hot female celebrities, it appears, on first glance, or without knowing its association to BSG, like a typical fanboy/techie blog.

Geek Entertainment TV (n.d.) is a video podcast focusing on Web 2.0 related topics and the entertainment industries, posting on topics such as the South by Southwest Interactive conference, a 24/7 Swedish girl gaming house, and broader technology topics along the lines of the releases of Windows Vista and Nintendo's Wii. The tone continues the snarky spirit evidenced at Supr.c.ilio.us as it mocks hype: “Justin.tv is the mobile Internet lifecasting phenomenon that's blowing up the new and old mediasphere” (ekai, 2007, headline). However, while silliness is fairly consistent, snark is often replaced by celebration. Episodes such as “Previewing Digg Version 3,” “Kicking Ass with the Top Quake 4 Players,” and “Who is your Secret Vlogger Crush?”--all in the top 10 of GTE's most popular episodes--lack an apparent critical edge or intent but feel quite supportive, enthusiastic, and warm, displaying familiar techno-defensiveness,

such as gamers aren't losers or look at the big checks we win at tournaments. Overall, the snark in GETV feels like a noticeable flavor--perhaps a brand attribute?--more so than RSS'ing Down Under. GETV's snark is featured in its self-description and fundraising T-shirt, which reads, "I was internet famous once." In contrast, RSS'ing Down Under does not make humor as predominant, but more typically uses gentle understatement: "Just bringing Web 2.0 to Australia" (Barren, n.d.). In short, critical humor is consistent, but to varying degrees, across the members of BSG: snark appears as an occasional element in RSS'ing., a brand attribute in GETV, and the mission of Supr.c.ilio.us.

Such humor can be entertaining, and aims to temper Web 2.0 hyperbole. Dyer (1985), however, reminds us to question comedy's impact. He asks, in regards to comedic portrayals of masculinity in film but broadly applicable, how transgressive or subversive is humor that does not posit an alternative? Pointing out foibles, without articulating alternate visions, may serve to take the butt of a joke down a notch, but in so doing may ultimately humanize, support, or reify it. Consider how rarely your own intent in poking fun at something is truly intended as radical, cutting satire intended to destroy or reconfigure a subject. In the case of Supr.c.ilio.us, a necessary condition for appreciating the humor about Web 2.0 hyperbole is familiarity with it. They are in-jokes, meaning you have to be a participant in order to value them: "im in ur YASNs ignoring ur FOAFs" (Eran, 2006) is not quite ready for prime time, or even late night. Such Web 2.0 participation, whether a personal interest in, journalistic coverage of, or employment by an organization related to Web 2.0, suggests implication in and collusion with the very hype the blog sets out to deflate.

**Web 2.0 is ... and Web 2.0 Ain't**

The irony of Web 2.0 critics using Web 2.0 technologies as their mode of criticism is not lost. Moreover, it is central. I will conclude by arguing why this critique is necessary, and why this mode, rather than presenting a contradiction that could undermine the critique, is actually productive.

The danger in technological triumphalism, hype, or utopic rhetoric is that, if a story is one of triumph or impending salvation, it implies that the conflict is over or nearly over, that we have won or on the verge of winning. Williams writes that, “When hope for progress is invested in technology, then humanity looks not to great deeds and actions but to great inventions as the basic story line. Technology becomes the substitute for history itself. But the possibility of effective historical action diminishes as people assume that the story is about technology, not them” (2004, 446).

The mode of using Web 2.0 technologies to critique Web 2.0 hype is essential, and productive. Whether the dubious position suggested by Wikipedia, or the varying degrees of humor throughout Bubble 2.0 Snark Group, both refuse an exclusive position. Even while condemning Web 2.0 hype or critiquing it, they are using its tools and engaging in the very activities the utopian proponents of it would celebrate. This seeming internal contraction does not undermine their point but offers a way out of such dualistic thinking. The point is not whether Web 2.0 is real or hype, social movement or vaporware, the point is in traversing both ends of this perspectival spectrum, outlining and participating in flows of both, illustrating their mutual engagement and play. The visible enthusiasm, knowing in-jokes, and self-deprecating humor foreground collusion, imbrications and complicity, which further serves to prevent easy dualisms.

When framed as dualisms, such debates are essentially about authenticity: what is real resistance / liberation / consciousness / queerness / subjectivity / fill in the blank. In refusing an

either/or stance, these groups suggest a practice that refuses such either/or distinction by simultaneously mapping the halves of the binary and their blurring, interaction, and mutual constitution. Such a practice can be applied as a way out of similar dualistic impasses. As a Supr.c.ilio.us category reads, “Everything Old is New Again.”

This contradictory stance calls to mind Ralph Ellison’s definitional phrase “black is ... an’ black ain’t.” In his examination of what he calls Afro-sonic modernity, Weheliye (2005) examines how Ellison, in *Invisible Man*, resists the presumed dualism between black subjectivity and modern technology. Ellison’s novel “transacts the problem of the subject as a process and in so doing allows us to surmise how a subject comes to be rather than how it is” (48). Weheliye articulates a standpoint of “not only ‘becom[ing] acquainted with ambivalence’ but dwelling in the very realm of ambivalence, complexity, and contradiction” (61), a realm in which these Web 2.0 critiques clearly dwell. In them, I suggest we see a similar enactment of process--not a debate over what Web 2.0 authentically *is*, but a demonstration of *how* Web 2.0 is.

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