

## Does the WWW need an extreme makeover?

Contributed by Debbie Smit  
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In 1971, an uncommonly insightful ratbag ('strine' or Australian for "contagious eccentric to be shunned") wrote a book that, because of its unabashed attack on the welfare state, labelled him a troublesome figure best forced into intellectual exile.

Ivan Illich was, according to the obituary written for him in The Guardian when he died in 2002, an "archaeologist of ideas" rather than idealogue, who plumbed the historic depths of institutionalism to cast light on our current enslavement to modern institutions. The book that caused all the trouble is *Deschooling Society*, in which he uses education as a paradigm to explore alternatives to universally accepted norms of schooling, media, politics, health care, church, security and media.

He went as far as to dismantle his own organisation Centro Intercultural de Documentación because "the soul of this free, independent and powerless thinkery would have been squashed by its rising influence... [a positive] atmosphere invites the institutionalisation which will corrupt it."

Illich's solution to the "funneling" that is practised in modern schools is to use technology to set up "educational webs which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring". Sounds like what the internet is supposed to be, rather than the vast catalogue of goods to be bought and sold that it is. Is it time for the Web, robbed of freedom, independence and powerlessness to be dismantled like Illich's thinkery? Is the Bridging the Digital Divide Movement nothing more than an institutional excuse for ignoring the problems of poverty and warfare and encouraging gross consumerism, conveniently forgetting that the gap is not defined by access to but by benefit from technology?

One of the small reminders of the fecundity of summer in our wintry garden is a commercially available fly trap hanging in the pear tree. There it waits for some courageous soul to come and dismantle it and its vomituous contents that send an inglorious stench wafting like an unpleasant surprise in the midst of an otherwise happy day.

It is an annual visitor at the insistence of my husband who believes that its installation will discourage the seasonal plague of nasty six-legged creatures by attracting them away from our kitchen. It is my contention that it serves only as a breeding ground, but every year we buy a Red Top. This year I will not relent. I will make my own from a "two-litre" according to instructions which I found on the Center for Insect Science Education Outreach's website which cautions one to "be careful not to pinch off wings, legs or squeeze them too hard". OK, OK, on further investigation I did realise that the trap is meant to be used for research purposes rather than for exterminating the little buggers, but then I thought: why not take a closer look? At least I'll be able to claim that I am an expert on fly sex!

Tim Berners-Lee, so-called "father" of the World Wide Web named his precursor to the Web, ENQUIRE, after a 19th century book which he recalled from his childhood called *Enquire Within Upon Everything*. The introduction to the book is a vision of self-sufficiency outside the constraints of a syllabus decided upon by a committee :

“Whether You Wish to Model a Flower in Wax;  
 to Study the Rules of Etiquette;  
 to Serve a Relish for Breakfast or Supper;  
 to Plan a Dinner for a Large Party or a Small One;  
 to Cure a Headache;  
 to Make a Will;  
 to Get Married;  
 to Bury a Relative;

Whatever You May Wish to Do, Make, or to Enjoy,

I Hope You will not Fail to “Enquire Within.” © Debbie smit — The Sunday Independent