**Lanier, J. (2006). Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism.**

**Edge, The Third Culture.**

Within this article Lanier protests against the collective, in this case a form of collective intelligence that is formed by the numerous contributions of many individuals. He describes the collective as being analogous to a beehive (where the individual contributor cannot be identified). The beehive or hive consumes these individual contributions and produces an artificial, anonymous, quasi-authorative, an out of context mix that bears little or no relationship to the unique contributions of the original writers. Lanier compares reading a Wikipedia entry to reading the bible, that there are only faint traces of the voices of the original contributors left echoing in the background. The author explains that he has contributed to wikis and he observed a loss of insight and subtlety, indifference for individual opinions, and a greater tendency to espouse the core beliefs of the organisation over and above alternative views.

He sees many examples of these collectives or aggregators of knowledge and the more powerful they become, the further removed they become from the writers and reporters who created most of the content, this is explained by “the aggregator is richer than the aggregated”. Lanier, J. (2006). Some of this great regard for online collectivism, that the collective is all-wise, would have been frowned on in a pre-internet era. Some of my own thoughts on pre-eminence of collective structures would be tempered by knowledge received from people who directly witnessed and have shared memories of the terrible excesses of the collective party structure, where the individual was subsumed by the greater good of the party and collective consciousness in Nazi occupied Europe.

He closely scrutinises these hive sites and described them as morphing in their own self-styled identities, and harbouring ambitions to become a launch pad for the creation of artificial intelligence, he explains this process as “There's a frantic race taking place online to become the most "Meta" site, to be the highest level aggregator, subsuming the identity of all other sites"., The reference made to A.I. can be seen in light of the widespread media speculation of the potential that the vast servers operated by both Goggle and Wikipedia in those organisations desire to develop A.I.

Why are many large organisations preoccupied by the power of the online collective? my own thoughts is that some of this may be connected to the power of team working. The many apparent advantages of team working have been widely publicised, “The world of work is increasingly collaborative, driving changes in the way student projects are structured. Because employers value collaboration as a critical skill” (The NMC Horizon Report: 2012). Teams are seen as adding a powerful dimension to the workplace, combining the skills and creativity of a diverse number of people in order to produce an effective outcome (McGourtey & deMeuse, 2001).

Lanier makes the point, that many organisations have observed the remarkable growth of Google and Wikipedia and consider this as evidence of the dominance of the online collectivist model, the author disapproves of this trend, which he describes as the fallacy of collectivism, over estimating the wisdom of crowds, blind to their inadequacies and over relying on group think. “The reason the collective can be valuable is precisely that its peaks of intelligence and stupidity are not the same as the ones usually displayed by individuals. Both kinds of intelligence are essential”.

The author draws conclusions regarding the widespread use of wikis, and the naive trust of the “core belief of the wiki world is that whatever problems exist in the wiki will be incrementally corrected as the process unfolds” The actual process of writing is being undermined, the contention is made that “real writing is a lot more is more than a collection of accurate references, It is an expression of personality”. The author asserts that contributors can hide behind the wiki; this offers protection, as the material is an amalgamation, so you don’t have to stand over your own individual content, in this way you can make noteworthy contributions without worrying too much about its accuracy.

The overall motivation of the author in writing this article it to explain that it should be possible to find a humanistic and concrete way to maximize value of collective content on the Web without bamboozling individuals. The best guiding principle is to always cherish individuals first.

**References:**

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