



# Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

*Clay Shirky*

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## **Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations** Clay Shirky

In "Here Comes Everybody, the author writes about the current social revolution where groups of people are coming together to share with one another, work together or take some kind of public action. The writer gives his analysis on what the social impact will be.

## **Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations Details**

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## From Reader Review Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations for online ebook

### Catherine says

If you're someone who wonders what those kids are up to these days, and you've heard of facebook but don't know what it does, and someone mentioned twitter to you once, but that pretty much escapes you - this is the book for you.

Needles to say, it was not the book for me.

Much of this book is spent describing various social networking / new media sites, and exploring their function as part of an altered vision of social organizing. The internet, runs Shirky's argument, allows users to cut out the middle man - they write their own news stories; they offer their own editorials; they organize their own events; they act in concert to focus on issues of social justice, and in short, the whole world's experiencing a revolution.

Except . . . that's where his book falls down. Beyond the first chapter, there's no mention of the 'whole world' in this book, or the vast numbers of people who live without, say, electricity, much less an iPhone. New technologies and social media sites may be changing the globe, but that change is top down, from wealthy countries to poor countries; from certain classes within countries, and there's a set of power relations being appropriated and expanded there that Shirky's book doesn't address. Power may - may! - be becoming more diffuse in the United States (although I find that a little hard to swallow, to be honest) but the power dynamics of the United States vs. the rest of the world are only exacerbated by new technology, not erased. It's a serious lack in the book that this doesn't come up.

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### Bernard O'Leary says

A book that describes the exciting new text-messaging service called Twitter can only be described as quaint, but I see how it would have been revolutionary at the time of publication. Shirky understood the significance of online collaboration back then, at a time when everyone else thought MySpace was an amusing toy.

He also comes close to guessing, at various points, that these changes won't all necessarily be positive. For the most part, he sticks with the tech-utopian populist vision of a world where The People, unencumbered by The Elites, will only do good things, because The People are inherently good. Occasionally, however, there is a dark note, and a fear that things will go wrong. One observation that really sticks out in 2016: when a group emerges online, it very quickly reaches a state of homeostasis and becomes almost immune to influence from the outside.

Fairness to Clay, a lot of his contemporaries are still upbeat utopians, while the run-up to the election saw Clay become one of the angriest pundits on the text-messaging service known as Twitter. I hope he writes a book about what just happened in 2016.

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### Jamie says

This should be required reading for all librarians, if for nothing else than Chapter 3, in which he mentions how the people inside the institutions have the hardest time seeing how the institution is becoming obsolete. (yikes! but true!) AND Chapter 5 in which he explains how Wikipedia works. I also loved the later chapters on the importance of failures, and how institutions often have a hard time letting things go because they've already paid for them.

This "failure" concept first occurred to me in about, oh 1987 or so, when I went to the Newport Music Hall in Columbus to see Nazareth. Yes, this was about 10 years past Nazareth's "prime" such as it was and I remember having the epiphany "I've already spent \$10 (or whatever) to get in here, and I can't get it back, wouldn't I rather be ANYWHERE but here right now? Why should I be even MORE miserable just because I spent \$10? He uses this analogy (only talking about people sitting through bad movies) for the same reasons people don't pull the plug on projects that obviously aren't working.

Not to mention he answers many of the unenlightened critics of blogs, Twitter, and Facebook in beautiful, easy to read language. Even if you're in his "choir" I challenge you not to think while reading this very thought provoking book.

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## Caroline says

I love the title of this book - Here Comes Everybody - and that is exactly what is celebrated here.

Shirky discusses the way the internet has made coming together and communicating infinitely easier for people, and the ways in which the structure of certain groups at places like flickr or Meetup facilitate this getting together. He also talks about internet groups that have had startling effects in the real world.....like the organisation of flash-mobs, or mass protests that have made big corporations change their policies, or channels of communication that have enabled political activists to keep tabs on one another.

He also discusses the *intimacy* found in groups on the internet, which explains why so much of the conversation on Facebook or Twitter appears to be so facile. These aren't people tweeting messages of importance to the world, but rather people tweeting to five or so close friends - friends who are happy to see pix of their new haircut, or to read about what they had for lunch. These snips are not meant for the cold outsider's eye, but for the close coterie of friends that most people have, within the giant outer wrapper that is Facebook or whatever.

He also discusses celebrity - be it the celebrity of a well known film star or the celebrity of a famous blogger. In these instances two way communication is obviously severely restricted, and the role of friend (found in intimate groups) morphs into follower. There is massive disparity between those on the internet whose work is popular versus not so popular. Basically there are very few people whose output is prolific, or who are extremely popular.

There is also a lot of fascinating discussion about Wikipedia - about how its ethos has encouraged good practice, about the rules in place to prevent vandalism, and about the ways in which different people contribute towards it. Did you know that they 'lock' contentious topics until people's temper tantrums have quietened down? Whilst the likelihood of these pages being vandalised is high only Wikipedia members are allowed to edit them. At any given time about 10% of Wikipedia's pages are locked in this fashion. Another thing I found fascinating is that a lot of its pages start out as 'stubs'. This means that someone will just put down a sentence or two - merely to indicate that the topic needs covering. In time, more and more detailed information will be added to the topic. One example is 'asphalt'; the original description laid down for this

was "Asphalt is a material used for road coverings". One hundred and twenty-nine people went on to edit this topic - and the description for asphalt now has the level of detail we associate with Wikipedia entries.

The book also celebrates other generators of open source information available on the internet. All the hundreds of people working on things like Linux programmes, or contributing to Genbank (a public database of genetic sequences), or contributing to one of the myriad other organisations giving out their knowledge and expertise for free. I am personally always blown over by the generosity of people on the internet, and the amazing access to information that is there for the asking, and thoroughly enjoyed these parts of the book.

Another aspect of modern communication that was explored was the collapse between amateur and professional in several areas of life. The reproduction of music, journalism and photography, have all been deeply affected by the rise of the internet and technology which enables all of us to cheaply and easily do these things. The author doesn't say that these boundaries have disappeared completely, but the perimeters have changed.

All in all I found this an interesting read. A good book for anyone who uses the internet - and as the title suggests - don't we all.

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My favourite example of cooperation via the internet - Matt Harding dancing his way around the world...

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/Pwe-pA6...>

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## Georg says

This book unfolds and explains an interesting theory about the internet and how it changed modern communication, our day-to-day life and our thinking. I liked his description of the steps from the medieval scribes to Gutenberg's printing technique, from the telephone and the radio/TV to the first years of the Internet and then the generation of Facebook, Flickr and Twitter. It opened my eyes how much this revolution arose from economic (and time sparing) facts and rules and how professional writers saw the wrong danger for their professional future (not "America Today", but "The New York Times-online"). I learnt a lot of details I have never been aware of: That flash-mobs took place in Belorus for political reasons, that the German tanks in the Blitzkrieg were inferior to the French ones, but were equipped with radios, the development of Small World Patterns, and Linus and Meetup, and many other interesting details as well.

Now we get two the two stars I did not give to this book. First it's the lack of speed, especially in the beginning chapters. I mean how many words do you need to explain that it is slightly cheaper, quicker and more efficient to create a website to reach a million of readers in 2006 A.D. than to do the same by distributing hieroglyphics in 2006 B.C.? I think 34 words are enough to get the idea, but Shirky thinks it should take at least 20 pages.

Second – and that's probably only my problem – I have too often read about the "Birthday Paradox" in the last months. In many books and in most of the big papers. Seems to be en vogue nowadays. And it never works for me. Asked if I would take a bet if two of 50 people share the same birthday I would always say yes. Not because I look through the obscure rules of probability-math because I – as a professional gambler (lawyer) – take ANY wager no matter how bad my chances are. The same has to be said for the Evergreen "Prisoner's Dilemma". Next time I will read about his I will swear to whistle-blow everyone for every atrocity, no matter if he's guilty or no

## Patrick Brown says

A life-changing book, comparable to *The Omnivore's Dilemma* in how it reshaped my thinking on a subject. Highly recommended for anyone interested in how the web is impacting social interaction. While Shirky can drift into techno-utopianism from time to time, he seems to always look at the world with fresh eyes. Unlike other writers on the subject, Shirky's prose is clear, and his examples are quite convincing.

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## Josh Braun says

Reprinted from my website:

Clay Shirky's new book, *Here Comes Everybody* is at once highly readable and a massive undertaking. He sets out to explain, as many recent authors have done, how new communication technologies and the people who use them are changing the world we live in. This is a task so large that, to my mind, no one's really done it successfully. But watching people try is always enlightening. In effect, reading through books on Internet and society is like watching a multitude of really smart blind folks grope the proverbial elephant. I claim no special knowledge as to what the final shape of the beast may be, but I will say that some descriptions are more satisfying than others, and this is one of them.

The author makes a number of fascinating arguments in the book, but these I see as the main ones:

(1) The Internet and new communications technologies have caused the cost and difficulty of forming groups to collapse, and as a result, online groups frequently perform tasks that traditional organizations won't take on because the resources involved in traditional infrastructure and management would make these tasks unprofitable.

(2) Because of the traditional cost of publishing, much of the overhead involved in the workings of traditional organizations has been in the cost of selecting, gathering, and filtering information and ideas that are ready for prime time. But this only makes sense when it costs something to put your product out there. New groups aren't limited to the number of column-inches they can print, or the amount of airtime they can spare. It makes more sense for them to "publish then filter." To put everything out there, then see what sticks among users and readers. As a result, the Internet is filled with a few great things, and near-endless crap. But on the whole, this system produces more cool stuff than the expensive professional systems of production that came before. Moreover, online groups get value from users who contribute next to nothing, simply because they don't have to pay for the privilege of using those people's *good* ideas, however few and far between they might be. Organizations can't afford to hire one-hit-wonders, and while they may benefit from hiring the most productive people, they also can't take advantage of the tiny contributions made by the least productive folks, which are actually valuable in aggregate.

(3) Shirky concludes that three things are necessary, but not sufficient, for new-style groups to be successful. First, they must put forward a "plausible promise" (Eric Raymond's term). That means, they must promise users something for their efforts that seems both engaging enough and realistic enough to inspire their participation. Second, they must employ an appropriate tool for users to work together. A blog or a wiki isn't good for just any task. Shirky emphasizes that tools must take into account the number of people a group involves and the length of time a group must exist. Finally, the group must strike an appropriate bargain with users. This ranges from the terms in the license agreement—"Wikipedia will never sell your work"—to the

rules and norms that are set for participation.

Overall, I think Shirky makes a compelling case for these theses. The second chapter, on Cosean economics, is particularly well-argued, and I'll be assigning it to students next semester. Casual readers should get a great deal of food-for thought out of Here Comes Everybody, and academic readers will be pleased as well.

From a theoretical standpoint, Shirky's book provides a lot of mill-grist for scholars engaged in the long-standing debates over technological determinism. He denies that the mere act of technological invention changes societies, saying that technologies only become socially interesting once they've become ubiquitously adopted. Discussions of how people co-create tools and content are also at the heart of his book, and he suggests at the outset that technology merely offers affordances for our hardwired group-forming instincts. In short, there are many paeans here to the notion of technology as socially constructed.

At the same time, Shirky is at times very much in the "technology as revolution" camp. He suggests that our control over technological adoption is limited—comparing the progress of the information age to steering a kayak. We have some control, but the path is largely inevitable.

Shirky may be synthesizing constructionist and determinist perspectives in interesting ways, but he's bound to draw some criticism from entrenched theorists in the process. He employs the widespread adoption of the printing press and moveable type as an example of a previous world-changing technological revolution, which has been one of the most contentious historical examples with which social scientists examining technology have bludgeoned each other.

His claim that online communities succeed or fail based in large part on whether their tools support the longevity and size of their endeavors mirrors Harold Innis' claim that successful empires require communication technologies that extend their rule over time and physical expanse—scholars who read Innis as a technological determinist may push on this notion in exploring Shirky's work.

In the end, though, the book is a collection of sharp, highly readable thinking about not just the possibilities, but also the hard truths, surrounding new communication technologies. It's a must-read for people interested in these topics, and an early entry into what I hope will become a larger corpus of academic literature detailing the influences on, and day-to-day realities of, online groups in as thorough and critical a manner as previous generations of scholars looked at media professions from filmmaking to journalism.

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### **Kimberly Lightle says**

This book really hit home in terms of the amazing changes that are occurring because of the read/write web and the digital tools that are available to everybody. Amazing cultural and social shifts are occurring. One of my favorite quotes from the book (and there are many) is - We're not dealing with information overload, that's been happening since the 1500s with the invention of the printing press, we're dealing with filter failure.

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### **Natali says**

This may be one of the best ethnographies of our time. Clay Shirky explores the ways in which technology has altered news consumption, social work, networking, self expression, and more. He argues that new media technologies are as revolutionary as the printing press and movable type once were.

Shirky takes examples from Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Digg. Those tools are still the leaders in social media but he could just as easily have written this five years ago using Friendster, Yahoo Groups, Kodak Gallery, or Lycos. The message would have been the same: people use the tools at their disposal to be heard. The beauty of open source and the socialistic nature of the Web allows the next generation of social media to learn from the first generation and create increasingly effective tools. It can only get better.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in user behavior and (post)modern communication. A few thoughts that I am still chewing on include:

*"The definition of journalist, seemingly a robust and stable profession, turns out to be tied to particular forms of production as well."*

So when the barriers to production drop and anyone can disseminate news, how does a professional journalist adapt and remain relevant?

*"This potential seems as if it should allow everyone to interact with everyone else, undoing the one-way nature of television. But calling that potential interactivity would be like calling a newspaper interactive because it publishes letters to the editor."*

Precisely my thinking when I see newscasters pushing their Twitter accounts on the air! So what is true interactivity in mass media? I don't think we've figured it out yet.

*"We have lost the clean distinctions between communications media and broadcast media."*

Can we get it back? More importantly, is that desirable? And if it is not desirable, will the outcome be a more informed news audience that places different (more socially responsible) demands on the professional media? Or is that overly Utopic?

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## **Irena says**

After reading Morozov, I just can't take this seriously. Shirky sounds super enthusiastic about group forming, power of groups, yeey..

First anecdote with the lost phone makes a great point and then the book goes downhill.

Shirky is cyber-utopianism galore. I can't--

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## **Ken says**

Why did you log in to GoodReads today? What is behind the explosion of Internet-based social networking in all its forms, from e-mail, to listservs, to Facebook, Flickr and Twitter? And more important: what does this new wave of truly participatory media bode for the future?

Clay Shirky takes on these big questions in *Here Comes Everybody*, and the result is an engaging, eye-opening book that draws upon social change theory, economics, and psychology. Shirky contends that the Internet, cell phones and other two-way communications technologies have lowered the barriers to group formation, such that people are organizing to great effect in ways that would have been impossible just a few years ago. This is taking place in all sorts of ways: social groups, political action groups, photo sharing, news and information sharing, lifestyle support groups, the list goes on and on.

Shirky believes that the power of these new tools at our disposal will be harnessed collectively in a positive direction. He acknowledges that many individuals seek to disrupt cooperative efforts (look at spammers, or

"trolls" on mailing lists, for instance). Tools that are overrun by those seeking to disrupt them, though, were flawed in some way, and will fall away in favor of tools such as Wikipedia that correct for such vandalism.

What of corporate and governmental entities trying to screen/censor Internet content? Shirky believes that such efforts are doomed to failure: due to the nature of the technology itself, people will find a way around those attempted impositions. So far, world events bear out his perspective.

Shirky doesn't deal much with inequities in access to these communications tools. But that may be peripheral to his point: after all, not everyone had access to a printing press, yet its relatively widespread availability led to great change all over the world. And anyway, Shirky isn't crazy enough to say that the new ease of organizing will eradicate inequality throughout the world.

*Here Comes Everybody* is an important counterpoint to those who think that social networking is just a popularity contest for kids, or who bemoan the "narcissism" of people who put their information into MySpace. There's a whole lot more going on there, and people of all generations are beginning to figure that out.

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### **Hezekiah Brown says**

This is a very good book to inform people about the way that the internet changes how people interact. It talks about how groups form, and the way that people have to interact differently thanks to the invention of social media.

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### **Judyta Szaci??o says**

If you have spent the last 20 years of your life in blissful ignorance of what was happening around you, it may as well turn out to be a fascinating book for you. However, if you are capable of watching the world around you and making your own conclusions, I wouldn't bother in your place, and I feel sorry that I did. It was a waste of time as I have not learnt anything new. The narrative flows nicely enough, but there are far too many repetitions, too many occurrences of only slightly rephrased points, some faulty translations and a number of spelling mistakes, at least in my edition.

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### **Mike W says**

Clay Shirky's book is enjoyable and worth reading, though the main point--that technological change has lowered communications costs tremendously, thereby also encouraging group formation--is obvious. The book is really a collection of anecdotes illustrating this central point. These anecdotes cover a wide range--from the creation of Wikipedia to a fashion obsessed blogger undermining a military coup to an online chat group for anorexics--and are generally interesting.

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### **Kelley says**

I really ought to write a fairer review. Alas, time constraints mean that I never get around to it. I end up snarking or kvelling way more than a book deserves, and never correct my initial impressions with a systematic review. So, I'll be lazy again and simply paste a few things I wrote to my friend, Dwayne Monroe:

Breaking: Clay Shirky discovers the sun. News at 11!

Clay Shirky needs to stop drinking kool-aid laced sterno. In his book, Here Comes Everybody, he concludes with this amazing news!

"What the open source movement teaches us is that the communal can be at least as durable as the commercial. For any given piece of software the question "Do the people who like it take care of each other?" turns out to be a better predictor of success than "What's the business model?" As the rest of the world gets access to the tools once reserved for techies, that pattern is appearing everywhere, and it is changing society as it does."

good christ on a broken pogo stick!

Watch out people! The revolution is coming. Any day now. The newsgroup alt.i.hearts.cats, Wikipedia, Myspace, Facebook, and even the programming language, Perl -- all of them are instantiations of a new, exciting world. Whereas community "has not historically been a good guarantor longevity," that is all changing with the advent of the InterToobz, social networking sites, and open source software. With this new technology community and love are remade in ways that have never been possible before.

Wide-eyed statements like this and claims that community "has not historically been a good guarantor of longevity" make me wonder if I'd do the world a favor by spending my free time looking for the rock Shirky lives under and turning it over so the guy can get some sunlight and vitamin D or something.

Yeah. Completely unfair. Whatever. (But please note: this is the internet, and this unfair review - my worse nature - is encouraged by it with the incessant demand for speed, short news cycles, new-new-new, and - most of all - short and easy to read. Alas, I'll get to that later.)

While there are some decent aspects of Shirky's book, I think my friend Dwayne is right. Shirky was awesome to follow, years ago. He was writing for an Internet [1] audience, typically a lot of bright programmers, developers, and network admins. This book seems to be written for marketing people and Vice Presidents (whatever that means these days): the technologically sophisticated and even restrained analyses I used to read from him are no more. Instead, his writing seems dumbed down and ginned up with the wide-eyed posturing in an effort to push an idea. As noble as it might be, I'd rather have the sophisticated analysis.

Here's an example of what I mean, in Shirky's first chapter, a quickie I dashed off to Dwayne Monroe and Doug Henwood after reading the first chapter:

Shirky opens the book with the story of a lost/stolen Sidekick phone. The woman who lost it in a cab told a friend about the loss, distraught because it contained all her information for planning her wedding. The friend creates a web page, stolensidekick.com. The link to the site gets passed from friend to friend, then on to Myspace, and then to Digg.

The friend was motivated to start the site because, while he'd figured out who had the phone and managed to get hold of the young woman, he had made no headway with her. She refused to return it and was getting pissy with him. She told the sidekick's owner that she and her friends and family would beat them up if they tried to come to their home and get their phone back.

The guy was outraged and did what a lot of people do. They share their story online, in order to vent. Friends

picked it up, passed it on, it went viral. With the encouragement of outraged readers, and on the advice of people trying to help him to get the cops to see it as a theft issue, not just a loss issue, he keeps at it, writing 40 updates on the issue across ten days.

Eventually, the police agree to treat it as a theft and the girl is arrested. The Sidekick is returned to its rightful owner.

Shirky thinks this is a revolutionary example of how "we are living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action -- all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations."

Except one big thing. Well, two things, both of which are traditional institutions and organizations: the New York Times (and the rest of the 3v11 MSM) and the cops. In all likelihood, he would never have gotten the sidekick back without these two, uh, "traditional institutions and organizations."

Shirky, himself, points out that things never would have changed -- the cops would never have treated it as a theft issue -- had the NYT not gotten wind of the story. But he manages to completely forget that bit when writing his wide-eyed-with-wonder "hallelujah! it's a revolution going on right before our eyes"-summary of how the story illustrates his thesis.

fish. barrel. smoking gun.

Shirky makes it too easy to blow holes into his tales of how the Web is supposedly changing everything -- and Everybody. They are coming alright. But it's not going to be pretty, lemme tell ya.

[1] (yes: I capitalize the word Internet. shoot me. I'm old anyway. )