

Weinberger, David  
SMALL PIECES LOOSELY JOINED  
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A Web visionary's largely successful attempt to place the new medium within a social and cultural context.

As the publisher of the *Journal of the Hyperlinked Organization*, a contributor to *Wired* and other magazines, and a commentator on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, David Weinberger is in the thick of the ever-changing brave new geography-less world of the World Wide Web. Though his subtitle, "A Unified Theory of the Web," is a little premature, his presentation remains straightforward, avoiding the McLuhanesque convolutions that embellished, and often obscured, attempts to understand the previous new medium of television. Tracing Web history back to the 1993 development of Mosaic, a progenitor of Netscape, Weinberger looks at the effects the Internet has had upon every institution it touches, from business, to education, to government. Terming the Web both a "wanker's paradise" and a "collective, global work of literature," the author concludes that, the dot-com implosion aside, Web hype was not "unwarranted, only misdirected." He drops tantalizing statistics regarding the Web, such as its being responsible for a 28 percent drop in TV viewing, or that at any given moment there are ten billion "bytes in flight," the equivalent of 30 thousand books, in the wires of Internet infrastructure. The overall focus, however, is on the social and cultural ramifications of a medium "constantly in the throes of self-invention." Conceding that the Web is "profoundly unmanaged" by design, he goes on to describe a realm where nearness is based, not on contiguity, but on similarity of interests, where, in a paraphrase of Andy Warhol's bon mot, "everyone will be famous to fifteen people." At the opposite end of the spectrum from the pointy-headed *digerati* elite who decry the usurpation of the Internet by *hoi polloi*, Weinberger is a democrat who sees the Web not as a medium of mass stupefaction like TV but as a new and intense form of social interaction. He concludes on the hopeful note that the Web can be a "place free of what's been holding back our better selves."

Weinberger's premises are ultimately neither radical nor obtuse, and readers with a general familiarity with the Web will be prepared to understand his coherent and cogent arguments.