Reflection 1

Selected artwork or reading: https://www.wired.co.uk/article/the-webs-greatest-minds-on-how-to-fix-it

Summary:

Internet giants such as Facebook and Google now dominate the landscape, bolstered by the huge amounts of data they collect in return for providing free services.

"For 20 years it was a reasonable assumption that if you kept [the web] open, great things would happen: Wikipedia, blogs, good things," says Berners-Lee, speaking at the London headquarters of the Open Data Institute, which he co-founded with Nigel Shadbolt in 2012.

As well as his role as director of the World Wide Web Consortium, Berners-Lee leads Solid, an MIT project that proposes one solution: decoupling applications from the data they produce.

Most companies offer an all-or-nothing approach to data sharing: to access their services, we must agree to hand it over.

As well as limiting control over how data is used, the model keeps web monopolies by exacerbating the effect of vendor lock-in: Facebook owns the data you've produced while using it.

An app built using Solid architecture would ask users where they want to store their data.

You'd retain ownership over data, and any app following Solid standards would need to ask for access.

Berners-Lee gives the example of fitness-activity data: rather than it being locked up with a company, we should be able to decide whether or not to share this information and with whom.

An app on the Solid platform could pull in your own data, plus any that others have shared with you.

Decoupling data from apps could also offer advantages to developers.

They wouldn't need to spend as much on building a backend to store data, so scaling up wouldn't be such an issue - potentially levelling the playing field against the big platforms.

Take AI algorithms: what if an individual could run an AI product across their personal data - plus any other data they have access to - without having to share it?

An insurance firm could send you a programme to run on your health data in order to offer a better quote, for example - but the calculations would happen on your machine and the company wouldn't get to take the data away with them.

This might be particularly attractive in light of regulation changes, such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which comes into force in May 2018 and places new obligations on organizations that collect personal data.

Although changing the dynamics of data sharing could weaken the chokehold of today's web giants, there's no technological cure for everything.

Jaron Lanier: Save the internet - but change the business model Something has gone very wrong: it's the business model.

Unlike [traditional] advertising, which works via persuasion, this business model depends on manipulating people's attention and their perceptions of choice.

So intrinsically, the business plan breaks apart the world, including any efforts to prevent things from stopping it.

But I think what happened is the web's one-way links (as opposed to the two-way links proposed by some early network designers) merged with a misguided ideology that everything must be free.

The things that Google does, and the things that Facebook does, are actually valued by people.

Eric Jardine: The dark web is the original ideal internet "Some would say that the dark web is what the internet was supposed to be.

The dark web returns to that initial vision [of the internet] by anonymizing traffic, encrypting crowd traffic and therefore making it private.

Brewster Kahle: It's time to make the web a level playing field The web is amazing.

Well, [TCP/IP co-inventor] Bob Kahn's DOI [Digital Object Identifier] alternative architecture aims to give more control over access to links and this could allow countries to create their own internet within digital borders.