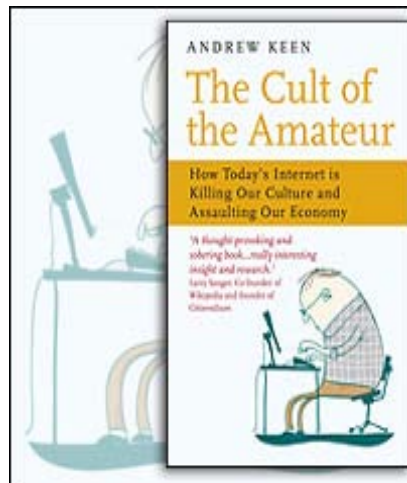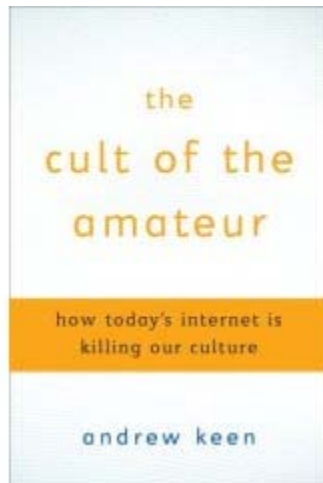# Web 2.0 & "*The Cult of the Amateur*"

Subtitle: *How today's Internet is killing our culture*

Andrew Keen

Adapted from ITConversations (a Gigavox Media Channel) @:

ITConversations
a GigaVox Media Channel

Despite the hype of social interaction and community as a result of the emerging internet, otherwise known as **Web 2.0**, there are those who have a contrarian view of how today's internet is killing our culture. **Dr. Moira Gunn** speaks with author **Andrew Keen**, who reflects on this trend and his latest book "The Cult of the Amateur."

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Adapted from New York Times Book Review @:

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Books

The Cult of the Amateur

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI
Published: June 29, 2007

Digital utopians have heralded the dawn of an era in which **Web 2.0** - distinguished by a new generation of participatory sites like

MySpace.com and **YouTube.com**, which emphasize user-generated content, social networking and interactive sharing - ushers in the democratization of the world: more information, more perspectives, more opinions, more everything, and most of it without filters or fees. Yet as the Silicon Valley entrepreneur **Andrew Keen** points out in his provocative new book, "*The Cult of the Amateur*," **Web 2.0** has a dark side as well.

Mr. **Keen** argues that "what the **Web 2.0** revolution is really delivering is superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment." In his view **Web 2.0** is changing the cultural landscape and not for the better. By undermining mainstream media and intellectual property rights, he says, it is creating a world in which we will "live to see the bulk of our music coming from amateur garage bands, our movies and television from glorified **YouTubes**, and our news made up of hyperactive celebrity gossip, served up as mere dressing for advertising." This is what happens, he suggests, "when ignorance meets egoism meets bad taste meets mob rule."

This book, which grew out of a controversial essay published last year by *The Weekly Standard*, is a shrewdly argued jeremiad against the digerati effort to dethrone cultural and political gatekeepers and replace experts with the "wisdom of the crowd." Although Mr. **Keen** wanders off his subject in the later chapters of the book - to deliver some generic, moralistic rants against Internet evils like online gambling and online pornography - he writes with acuity and passion about the consequences of a world in which the lines between fact and opinion, informed expertise and amateurish speculation are willfully blurred.

For one thing, Mr. **Keen** says, "history has proven that the crowd is not often very wise," embracing unwise ideas like "slavery, infanticide, George W. Bush's war in Iraq, Britney Spears." The crowd created the tech bubble of the 1990s, just as it created the disastrous Tulipmania that swept the Netherlands in the 17th century.

Mr. **Keen** also points out that **Google** search results - which answer

"search queries not with what is most true or most reliable, but merely what is most popular" - can be manipulated by "*Google bombing*" (which "involves simply linking a large number of sites to a certain page" to "raise the ranking of any given site in Google's search results"). And he cites a recent *Wall Street Journal* article reporting that hot lists on social networking Web sites are often shaped by a small number of users: that at Digg.com, which has 900,000 registered users, 30 people were responsible at one point for submitting one-third of the postings on the home page; and at Netscape.com, a single user was behind 217 stories over a two-week period, or 13 percent of all stories that reached the most popular list in that period.

Because Web 2.0 celebrates the "noble amateur" over the expert, and because many search engines and Web sites tout popularity rather than reliability, Mr. **Keen** notes, it's easy for misinformation and rumors to proliferate in cyberspace. For instance, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia (which relies upon volunteer editors and contributors) gets way more traffic than the Web site run by Encyclopedia Britannica (which relies upon experts and scholars), even though the interactive format employed by Wikipedia opens it to postings that are inaccurate, unverified, even downright fraudulent. This year it was revealed that a contributor using the name **Essjay**, who had edited thousands of Wikipedia articles and was once one of the few people given the authority to arbitrate disputes between writers, was a 24-year-old named **Ryan Jordan**, not the tenured professor he claimed to be.

Since contributors to Wikipedia and YouTube are frequently anonymous, it's hard for users to be certain of their identity - or their agendas. Postings about political candidates, for instance, can be made by opponents disguising their motives; and propaganda can be passed off as news or information. For that matter, as Mr. **Keen** points out, the idea of objectivity is becoming increasingly passé in the relativistic realm of the Web, where bloggers cherry-pick information and promote speculation and spin as fact. Whereas historians and journalists traditionally strived to deliver the best available truth possible, many bloggers revel in their own subjectivity,

and many Web 2.0 users simply use the Net, in Mr. Keen's words, to confirm their "own partisan views and link to others with the same ideologies." What's more, as mutually agreed upon facts become more elusive, informed debate about important social and political issues of the day becomes more difficult as well.

Although Mr. Keen's objections to the publishing and distribution tools the Web provides to aspiring artists and writers sound churlish and elitist - he calls *publish-on-demand services* "just cheaper, more accessible versions of vanity presses where the untalented go to purchase the veneer of publication" - he is eloquent on the fallout that *free, user-generated materials* is having on traditional media.

Mr. Keen argues that the democratized Web's penchant for *mash-ups, remixes and cut-and-paste jobs* threaten not just copyright laws but also the very ideas of authorship and intellectual property. He observes that as advertising dollars migrate from newspapers, magazines and television news to the Web, organizations with the expertise and resources to finance investigative and foreign reporting face more and more business challenges. And he suggests that as CD sales fall (in the face of digital piracy and single-song downloads) and the music business becomes increasingly embattled, new artists will discover that Internet fame does not translate into the sort of sales or worldwide recognition enjoyed by earlier generations of musicians.

"What you may not realize is that what is free is actually costing us a fortune," Mr. Keen writes. "The new winners - Google, YouTube, MySpace, Craigslist, and the hundreds of start-ups hungry for a piece of the Web 2.0 pie - are unlikely to fill the shoes of the industries they are helping to undermine, in terms of products produced, jobs created, revenue generated or benefits conferred. By stealing away our eyeballs, the blogs and wikis are decimating the publishing, music and news-gathering industries that created the original content those Web sites 'aggregate.' Our culture is essentially cannibalizing its young, destroying the very sources of the content they crave."

<p style="text-align:center">✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳</p>

Adapted from Lessig Blog @ :

Lessig | Net | Content | Info |
Blog | News | Wiki | Mixter | Whine | | search

Keen's "*The Cult of the Amateur*": BRILLIANT!

May 31, 2007 12:33 AM

Tomorrow is the official on-sale date for **Andrew Keen**'s "*The Cult of the Amateur*," but the book is already getting lots of attention. **Keen**, a writer, and failed Internet entrepreneur, spends 200 pages attacking the rise of the "*amateur*" and the harm -- economic, social, cultural and political -- these amateurs will cause. Without "standards," without "taste," without "institutions" to "filter" good from bad, true from false, the Internet, **Keen** argues, is destined to destroy us.

There's much in the book that even we *amateur-o-philes* should think about. How can we build trust into the structures of knowledge the Internet is enabling (**Wikipedia**, blogs, etc.)? How can we make sure the contribution adds to understanding rather than confuses it? These are hard questions. And as is true of **Wikipedia** at each moment of every day -- there is more work to be done.

But what is puzzling about this book is that it purports to be a book attacking the sloppiness, error and ignorance of the Internet, yet it itself is shot through with sloppiness, error and ignorance. It tells us that without institutions, and standards, to signal what we can trust (like the institution **(Doubleday)** that decided to print his book), we

won't know what's true and what's false. But the book itself is riddled with falsity -- from simple errors of fact, to gross misreadings of arguments, to the most basic errors of economics.

So how could it be that a book criticizing the Internet -- because the product of a standardless process where nothing is "vetted for accuracy" (as he says of **Wikipedia**) -- could itself be so mistaken, when it, presumably, has been "vetted for accuracy" and was only selected for publication because it passed the high standards of truth imposed by its publisher -- **Doubleday**?

And then it hit me: **Keen** is our generation's greatest self-parodist. His book is not a criticism of the Internet. Like the article in Nature comparing Wikipedia and Britannica <http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikipedia_and_Britannica_about_as_accurate_in_science_entries,_reports_Nature>, the real argument of **Keen**'s book is that traditional media and publishing is just as bad as the worst of the Internet. Here's a book -- **Keen**'s -- that has passed through all the rigor of modern American publishing, yet which is perhaps as reliable as your average blog post: No doubt interesting, sometimes well written, lots of times ridiculously over the top -- but also riddled with errors. *Keen's obvious point is to show those with a blind faith in the traditional system that it can be just as bad as the worst of the Internet.* Indeed, one might say even worse, since the Internet doesn't primp itself with the pretense that its words are promised to be true.

So lighten up on poor Mr. **Keen**, folks. He is an ally. His work will help us all understand the limits in accuracy, taste, judgment, and understanding shot through all of our systems of knowledge. The lesson he teaches is one we should all learn -- to read and think critically, whether reading the product of the "monkeys" (as Keen likens contributors to the Internet to be) or books published by presses such as **Doubleday**.

*   *   *   *   *

Adapted from LA Times @ :

Los Angeles Times
calendarlive com.

BOOK REVIEW

'The Cult of the Amateur' by Andrew Keen

The Web entrepreneur laments the rise of the amateur blogger.

By James Marcus, Special to *The Times*

LONG, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away - which is to say, during the loony apex of the 1990s Internet boom - **Andrew Keen** was an entrepreneur. An Englishman by birth, he relocated to Silicon Valley and in 1996 founded Audiocafe.com, one of the earliest websites devoted to digital music. Like most such ventures, his *crashed and burned* before it could earn a dime.

At this point, many a man might have retreated from the Web in a permanent sulk. Not **Keen**. As late as 2000, he was producing *MB5: The Festival for New Media Visionaries* (the title alone makes me weak with nostalgia). Four years later, however, the scales finally fell from **Keen**'s eyes.

The occasion was the annual pajama party thrown by multimillionaire **Tim O'Reilly**, who made a fortune publishing tech-related books and magazines. In earlier years, the 200 celebrators on hand would have been buzzing over the latest wrinkle in e-commerce or broadband

penetration. In 2004, the flavor of the month was Web 2.0 - a "shiny new version of the Internet," as the author puts it, which stressed the participation of a mass audience. **Keen** was having none of it. Where his companions saw democratization, he saw a vast throng of blabbering narcissists. Get thee behind me, Facebook!

Keen was, from that moment, a man with a mission. And now he has produced his manifesto in *"The Cult of the Amateur."*

What Web 2.0 has really delivered is "superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment," he writes. "Moreover, the free, *user-generated content* spawned and extolled by the Web 2.0 revolution is decimating ... our cultural gatekeepers, as professional critics, journalists, editors, musicians, moviemakers, and other purveyors of expert information are being replaced ... by *amateur bloggers*, *hack reviewers*, *home-spun moviemakers*, and *attic recording artists*."

Nobody can deny that the Internet has produced an ocean of drivel. In April, the Technorati search engine company estimated that there were 70 million blogs in existence, with another 120,000 being created each day. And there are more than 182 million profiles on MySpace. Most of this stuff will never be seen by another human being. Much of it has been created specifically to fleece any visitor bold or bored enough to stop by. **Keen** is right to deplore it.

Alas, he keeps undermining his argument by ignoring the genuine benefits of Web 2.0, and hanging every societal ill around its neck. You would never know from *"The Cult of the Amateur"* that the Internet has fostered real communities as well as *sociopathic claques*, or that there are smart, thoughtful, ferociously informed bloggers. **Keen** soft-pedals the fact that many of those "gatekeepers" have already expanded their reach onto the Internet. **Keen** himself has a blog - whoops, a **podcast** - called **"AfterTV,"** which presumably is not on trial in his rather selective kangaroo court.

Internet porn is a problem. Child predation is a problem. So is identity theft and the pilfering of copyright-protected music. **Keen** laments

them all, dishing up an abundance of blood-curdling details. But few of these rackets can be attributed to an evil cult of amateurs: When it comes to crime, in fact, it's the experts we have to fear.

In the course of fingering democratization for the collapse of our culture, the author also champions some unlikely victims. "Our ability to *trust {?????}* conventional advertising is being further compromised by the spoof of advertisements proliferating on the Internet in large numbers," he thunders at one point. **(A reminder: Advertisers are not purveyors of expert information - they're salespeople.)** **Keen** also springs to the defense of former **Sen. Conrad R. Burns** (R-Mont.), whose serial bloopers were caught on camera by his opponent, then posted on YouTube. "Given that **Burns** really did commit these gaffes, the videos weren't technically lies," concedes the author. Well, no, they weren't lies at all, and *a legislator who was videotaped dozing off during a congressional hearing deserves all the ridicule he can get*.

Still, there's a deeper flaw here. **Keen**, who plainly loves the culture he sees on its last legs, keeps confusing different types of authority. He hunkers down in the trenches with *political hacks*, *advertisers*, *news anchors* and the *panicky proprietors of your average Hollywood studio*. These are the people he deputizes to keep the barbarians at bay. But **talent** - *the great wild card in the human endowment* - is not the monopoly of upper management. And the blogger in her proverbial pajamas, or the twitchy nerd with his battered acoustic guitar, may well end up carrying the cultural torch. Who's to say?

In any case, amateur is hardly the dirty word **Keen** makes it out to be, and his *reflexive obeisance to people in charge* cripples his polemic. After all, **James Madison** (whom **Keen** cites approvingly for having a similarly jaundiced view of human nature) wrote: **"The truth is that all men having power ought to be mistrusted."** I believe it was the professionals he had in mind.

--

James Marcus is the author of "*Amazonia: Five Years at the Epicenter of the Dot.Com Juggernaut*" and the proprietor of a

blog, **House of Mirth**.

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Adapted from BBC TWO @ :

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/2007/06/the_cult_of_the_amateur_by_andrew_keen_1.html

Book club

The Cult of the Amateur by **Andrew Keen**
  * Newsnight
  * 5 Jun 07, 02:07 PM

The Cult of the Amateur
How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy
by **Andrew Keen**

"If we are all amateurs, there are no experts."

Watch the Newsnight discussion here (click here).

Andrew Keen's new book, *The Cult of the Amateur* is the latest addition to the **Newsnight** book club. In it, the author expresses his concern for the profligacy of online amateurism, spawned by the digital revolution. This, he feels, has had a destructive impact on our

culture, economy and values.

He says, "[They] can use their networked computers to publish everything from uninformed political commentary, to unseemly home videos, to embarrassingly amateurish music, to unreadable poems, reviews, essays, and novels".

He complains that blogs are "collectively corrupting and confusing popular opinion about everything from politics, to commerce, to arts and culture".

He claims that **Wikipedia** perpetuates a cycle of misinformation and ignorance, and labels **YouTube** inane and absurd, "showing poor fools dancing, singing, eating, washing, shopping, driving, cleaning, sleeping, or just staring at their computers."

He warns that old media is facing extinction - "say goodbye to experts and cultural gatekeepers - our reporters, news anchors, editors, music companies, and Hollywood movie studios."

What do you think? We've published two extracts from **Andrew Keen**'s book below. Have a read and share your thoughts - is he being alarmist about the effects of the **Web 2.0** revolution, or raising genuine concerns? Are we at the mercy of the amateur? Can kids tell the difference between credible news sources and the amateur's blog? What, in any case, can be done?

Extract from CHAPTER 1 – THE GREAT SEDUCTION

… democratization, despite its lofty idealization, is undermining truth, souring civic discourse, and belittling expertise, experience, and talent. As I noted earlier, it is threatening the very future of our cultural institutions.

I call it the great seduction. The **Web 2.0** revolution has peddled the promise of bringing more truth to more people - more depth of information, more global perspective, more unbiased opinion from dispassionate observers. But this is all a smokescreen. What the **Web 2.0** revolution is really delivering is superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment. The information business is being transformed

by the Internet into the sheer noise of a hundred million bloggers all simultaneously talking about themselves.

Moreover, the free, user-generated content spawned and extolled by the **Web 2.0** revolution is decimating the ranks of our cultural gatekeepers, as professional critics, journalists, editors, musicians, moviemakers, and other purveyors of expert information are being replaced ("disintermediated," to use a FOO Camp term) by amateur bloggers, hack reviewers, homespun moviemakers, and attic recording artists. Meanwhile, the radically new business models based on user-generated material suck the economic value out of traditional media and cultural content.

We - those of us who want to know more about the world, those of us who are the consumers of mainstream culture - are being seduced by the empty promise of the "democratized" media. For the real consequence of the **Web 2.0** revolution is less culture, less reliable news, and a chaos of useless information. One chilling reality in this brave new digital epoch is the blurring, obfuscation, and even disappearance of truth.

Truth, to paraphrase **Tom Friedman**, is being "flattened," as we create an on-demand, personalized version that reflects our own individual myopia. One person's truth becomes as "true" as anyone else's. Today's media is shattering the world into a billion personalized truths, each seemingly equally valid and worthwhile. To quote **Richard Edelman**, the founder, president, and CEO of Edelman PR, the world's largest privately owned public relations company:

"In this era of exploding media technologies there is no truth except the truth you create for yourself."

This undermining of truth is threatening the quality of civil public discourse, encouraging plagiarism and intellectual property theft, and stifling creativity. When advertising and public relations are disguised as news, the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred. Instead of more community, knowledge, or culture, all that **Web 2.0** really delivers is more dubious content from anonymous sources, hijacking our time and playing to our gullibility.

Need proof? Let's look at that army of perjurious penguins - "**Al Gore**'s Army of Penguins" to be exact. Featured on **YouTube**, the film, a crude "self-made" satire of **Gore**'s pro-environment movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, belittles the seriousness of **Al Gore**'s message by depicting a penguin version of Al Gore preaching to other penguins about global warming.

But "**Al Gore**'s Army of Penguins" is not just another homemade example of **YouTube** inanity. Though many of the 120,000 people who viewed this video undoubtedly assumed it was the work of some SUV-driving amateur with an aversion to recycling, in reality, the *Wall Street Journal* traced the real authorship of this neocon satire to DCI Group, a conservative Washington, D.C.,

public relationships and lobbying firm whose clients include Exxon-Mobil.2 The video is nothing more than political spin, enabled and perpetuated by the anonymity of **Web 2.0**, masquerading as independent art. In short, it is a big lie.

Blogs too, can be vehicles for veiled corporate propaganda and deception. In March 2006, the *New York Times* reported about a blogger whose laudatory postings about Wal-Mart were "identical" to press releases written by a senior account supervisor at the Arkansas retailer's PR company.3 Perhaps this is the same team behind the mysterious elimination of unflattering remarks about Wal-Mart's treatment of its employees on the retailer's Wikipedia entry.

Blogs are increasingly becoming the battlefield on which public relations spin doctors are waging their propaganda war. In 2005, before launching a major investment, General Electric executives met with environmental bloggers to woo them over the greenness of a new energy-efficient technology. Meanwhile, multinationals like IBM, Maytag, and General Motors all have blogs that, under an objective guise, peddle their versions of corporate truth to the outside world.

But the anticorporate blogs are equally loose with the truth. In 2005, when the famous and fictitious finger-in-the-chili story broke, every anti-Wendy's blogger jumped on it as evidence of fast-food malfeasance. The bogus story cost Wendy's $2.5 million in lost sales as well as job losses and a decline in the price of the company's stock.

As former British Prime Minister **James Callaghan** said, "A lie can make its way around the world before the truth has the chance to put its boots on." That has never been more true than with the speeding, freewheeling, unchecked culture of today's blogosphere.

1. "Liquid Truth: Advice from the Spinmeisters," PR Watch, Fourth Quarter 2000, Volume 7, No. 4.
2. Antonio Regalado and Dionne Searcey, "Where Did That Video Spoofing Al Gore's Film Come From?" Wall Street Journal, August 3, 2006.
3. Michael Barbaro, "Wal-Mart enlists bloggers in PR campaign," New York Times, March 7, 2006.

From THE LAST WORD

At the 2005 TED Conference, **Kevin Kelly** told the Silicon Valley crowd that we have a moral obligation to develop technology. "Imagine **Mozart** before the technology of the piano," he said. "Imagine **Van Gogh** before the technology of affordable oil paints. Imagine **Hitchcock** before the technology of film."

But technology doesn't create human genius. It merely provides new tools for

self-expression. And if the democratized chaos of user-generated **Web 2.0** content ends up replacing mainstream media, then there may not be a way for the Mozarts, Van Goghs, and Hitchcocks of the future to effectively distribute or sell their creative work.

Instead of developing technology, I believe that our real moral responsibility is to protect mainstream media against the cult of the amateur. We need to reform rather than revolutionize an information and entertainment economy that, over the last two hundred years, has reinforced American values and made our culture the envy of the world. Once dismantled, I fear that this professional media - with its rich ecosystem of writers, editors, agents, talent scouts, journalists, publishers, musicians, reporters, and actors - can never again be put back together. We destroy it at our peril.

So let's not go down in history as that infamous generation who, intoxicated by the ideal of democratization, killed professional mainstream media. Let's not be remembered for replacing movies, music, and books with YOU! Instead, let's use technology in a way that encourages innovation, open communication, and progress, while simultaneously preserving professional standards of truth, decency, and creativity. That's our moral obligation. It's our debt to both the past and the future.

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Adapted from ICA @ :

http://www.ica.org.uk/Book%20Launch:%20'Cult%20of%20the%20Amateur'%20by%20Andrew%20Keen+13726.twl

The Club: Andrew Keen on the Cult of the Amateur

25 June 2007

Andrew Keen, Silicon Valley pioneer turned **Web 2.0** contrarian, comes to The Club at the **ICA** to argue that the **Web 2.0** revolution is killing our culture and undermining our economy. His controversial book, *The Cult of the Amateur*, seeks to expose the economic, ethical and social dangers of a *digital culture* where *author and audience are one and the same* - a culture, **Keen** argues, where genuine talent and expert opinion is lost in the glut of "user generated nonsense". Is **Britannica** indeed superior to **Wikipedia**? Is it that **YouTube** and **Myspace** contain few gleaming gems in a deluge of junk composed by no more than cynical PR firms and shameless self-promoters? Where plagiarism and piracy are rife, is our creative culture really at risk?

He will be in conversation with **Bryan Appleyard**, special feature writer for *The Sunday Times*, and author of *The Culture Club: Crisis in the Arts*, amongst others.

The talk will be followed by a drinks receptions and book-signing by the author.

£10 / £8 ICA Members / Free to ICA Club Members

RSVP essential for Club Members: sionparkinson@ica.org.uk

Date	Time	Venue	Book
Monday 25 June 2007	7:15 pm	Nash & Brandon Rooms	Sold Out

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Adapted from Amazon.com @ :

amazon.com

Book Description

Amateur hour has arrived, and the audience is running the show

In a hard-hitting and provocative polemic, Silicon Valley insider and pundit **Andrew Keen** exposes the grave consequences of today's new participatory **Web 2.0** and reveals how it threatens our values, economy, and ultimately the very innovation and creativity that forms the fabric of American achievement.

Our most valued cultural institutions, **Keen** warns - our professional newspapers, magazines, music, and movies - are being overtaken by an avalanche of *amateur, user-generated free content*.

- Advertising revenue is being siphoned off by *free classified ads* on sites like **Craigslist**.

- Television networks are under attack from *free user-generated programming* on **YouTube** and the like.

- *File-sharing and digital piracy* have devastated the multibillion-dollar music business and threaten to undermine our movie industry.

- Worse, **Keen** claims, our *"cut-and-paste" online culture* - in which intellectual property is freely swapped, downloaded, remashed, and aggregated - threatens over 200 years of copyright protection and intellectual property rights, robbing artists, authors, journalists,

musicians, editors, and producers of the fruits of their creative labors.

In today's *self-broadcasting culture*, where amateurism is celebrated and anyone with an opinion, however ill-informed, can publish a blog, post a video on **YouTube**, or change an entry on **Wikipedia**, the distinction between trained expert and uninformed amateur becomes dangerously blurred.

When *anonymous bloggers and videographers*, unconstrained by professional standards or editorial filters, can alter the public debate and manipulate public opinion, truth becomes a commodity to be bought, sold, packaged, and reinvented.

The very *anonymity* that the **Web 2.0** offers calls into question the reliability of the information we receive and creates an environment in which sexual predators and identity thieves can roam free.

While no Luddite - **Keen** pioneered several Internet startups himself - he urges us to consider the consequences of blindly supporting a culture that endorses plagiarism and piracy and that fundamentally weakens traditional media and creative institutions.

Offering concrete solutions on how we can reign in the *free-wheeling, narcissistic atmosphere* that pervades the Web, *THE CULT OF THE AMATEUR* is a wake-up call to each and every one of us.

About the Author

ANDREW KEEN is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur whose writings on culture, media, and technology have appeared in *The Weekly Standard*, *Fast Company*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Listener*, and *Jazziz*. As the Founder, President and CEO of Audiocafe.com, he has been featured in *Esquire*, *Industry Standard,* and many other magazines and newspapers. He is the host of the acclaimed Internet show *AfterTV* and frequently appears on radio and television. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Remarks / Reviews

"My initial reaction to the book was: 'Geez, I have a lot of things to think about now.' For people immersed in the social communities of Web 2.0, this is bound to be a thought-provoking and sobering book. While I don't agree with everything **Keen** says, there is page after page of really interesting insight and research. I look forward to the much-needed debate about the problems that Keen articulates - which can't be lightly dismissed."

> - Larry Sanger, co-founder, Wikipedia and founder, Citizendium

"Marvelous and provocative … I think this is a powerful stop and breathe book in the midst of the obsessions and abstraction of folks seeking comfort in Web 2.0. Beautifully written too."

> - Chris Schroeder, former CEO, *WashingtonPost/Newsweek* online and CEO, Health Central Network

"Important … will spur some very constructive debate. This is a book that can produce positive changes to the current inertia of Web 2.0.

> - Martin Green, vice president of community, CNET

"For anyone who thinks that technology alone will make for a better democracy, Andrew Keen will make them think twice."

> - Andrew Rasiej, founder, Personal Democracy Forum

"Very engaging, and quite controversial and provocative. He doesn't hold back any punches."

> - Dan Farber, editor-in-chief, ZDNet

"**Andrew Keen** is a brilliant, witty, classically-educated technoscold - and thank goodness. The world needs an intellectual Goliath to slay Web 2.0's army of Davids."

> - Jonathan Last, online editor, *The Weekly Standard*

From *Publishers Weekly*:

Keen's relentless "polemic" is on target about how a sea of amateur content threatens to swamp the most vital information and how blogs often reinforce one's own views rather than expand horizons.

But his jeremiad about the death of "our cultural standards and moral values" heads swiftly downhill.

Keen became somewhat notorious for a 2006 *Weekly Standard* essay equating **Web 2.0** with Marxism; like Karl Marx, he offers a convincing overall critique but runs into trouble with the details.

Readers will nod in recognition at **Keen**'s general arguments - sure, the Web is full of "user-generated nonsense"! - but many will frown at his specific examples, which pretty uniformly miss the point.

It's simply not a given, as **Keen** assumes, that **Britannica** is superior to **Wikipedia**, or that record-store clerks offer sounder advice than online friends with similar musical tastes, or that **YouTube** contains only "one or two blogs or songs or videos with real value."

And **Keen**'s fears that genuine talent will go unnourished are overstated: writers penned novels before there were publishers and copyright law; bands recorded songs before they had major-label deals.

In its last third, the book runs off the rails completely, blaming **Web 2.0** for online poker, child pornography, identity theft and betraying "Judeo-Christian ethics."

✲   ✲   ✲   ✲   ✲

Andrew Keen's *Cult of the Amateur*

June 05, 2007

Andrew Keen's book, *The Cult of the Amateur* ... has given us a brickbat of a polemic, which is to say, it's blunt, mean and not very sophisticated. Think of his argument as: *Everything On or Transmitted Over or Affected By the Internet is Bad For You*. His actual subtitle is "*How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*." Same thing. For those of us with stock in the belief that the Internet has liberated a great deal of latent creativity, ideas and dare I say it, beauty, it's an offensive notion.

It is also, to hear **Keen**'s critics, a disingenuous one. Prominent voices like **Jeff Jarvis**, **Dave Winer** and **Robert Scoble** have all cast **Keen** in the role of a calculating and - worse, this - sophomoric provocateur, producing arguments that aren't worth a "thoughtful response," in **Winer**'s words, because they are "beneath criticism." (Rather than offer a round-up of the various leading lights who've taken the whip hand to **Keen**, I'll hand you over to **Dan Farber** at ZDNet, who does an admirable job of it.)

As everyone seems to have their basic talking points down - **Keen**'s not just wrong, he's terrible at being wrong - the only real debate in play is whether to engage **Keen** at all. The consensus is that **Keen** is a troll, and the only way to deal with trolls is ignore them. I can't say I agree. I read **Keen**'s book when I first received a review copy back in February, and had a similar reaction as many others. One, thank god someone's finally poking a stick in the Web 2.0 happy hive; and Two,

why does the welcome antagonist have to wield such a clumsy, ineffective tool?

I talked to my immediate editors at Wired about the book anyway. We agreed that the book was likely to get tons of press, and that you go to the ring with the opponent you have, not the opponent you want. I spent several, long hours battling **Keen** - who is not without personal charm and wit - and found him as exasperating as his book. For what it's worth, I believe **Keen** is in earnest, not merely out to make a buck. (Which isn't to say the two motives are mutually exclusive.)

In the end the decision was made not to run the piece. I have decided to run the interview on Crowdsourcing.com. Because while we all might know **Keen** is a troll, the *London Times*, *Forbes*, the *Financial Times* and some 45 other publications don't. According to the Nexis news database, they all gave **Keen** coverage in the last several months. The scientific community decided that Intelligent Design was beneath criticism too, and we know how well that went.

The fact is, **Keen**'s arguments will sound mightily persuasive to a significant constituency who do believe the Internet is primarily a repository of porn, spam and corrosive amateurism. Failing to recognize that the choir to which **Keen** preaches might just be larger than our own congregation is an arrogant, and potentially irreversible blunder. While Web 2.0 insiders might love to hate **Keen**, many in the world at large will love to love him. I should note that I'm not the only dissenter on this count. **Clay Shirky** wages a more eloquent version of my argument here.

As such, in the spirit that all debate is good debate, I'm publishing the Wired Q&A after the jump. We kept the truly vitriolic bits out, so excuse me if it reads a bit more courtly than what I've written above. If vitriol is what you're looking for though, tomorrow I'll be moderating a debate between **Keen** and *Time* writer **Lev Grossman** at the Strand in New York. If you happen to live in the city or be in town for a visit, I hope you can join the fray.

Hed: 'I'm Not a *Technomoralist*. I'm a *Technoscold*!'

Digital revolution? Andrew Keen doesn't buy it. He hates Wikipedia, despises the blogosphere, and believes YouTube is killing off the cinematic arts. In his new book, *The Cult of the Amateur*, he argues we're diving headlong into an age of mass mediocrity in which the mob replaces experts and we become collectively dumber. It's a living. **Keen** has become the media's go-to voice for *techno-skepticism*. (He's been quoted by *Newsweek*, *The Today Show*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, among others.) We decided to ask him if he was, you know, serious. - **Jeff Howe**

WIRED: You've got some pretty tough words for the digital revolution. Is there anything about technology you do like?

Andrew Keen: I know a lot of people will say this is just another Luddite tract, but I'm not anti-technology. I'm anti-technological utopianism. There's this idea that technology is going to liberate us all to become filmmakers and journalists. That's a seductive idea if you believe everyone is intrinsically talented. I don't believe that. I don't like the way technology is being used to attack institutions that I hold to be essential to our society, such as newspapers and record labels and film studios.

WIRED: Is *Blades of Glory* that much better than what you can find on Youtube?

Keen: Spend some time on Youtube, drift around the blogosphere for a while and then go listen to some random bands on MySpace. Afterward go read the *New York Times*, see a mainstream movie, and wander through a record store, if you can still find one. Then ask yourself which you'd rather have.

WIRED: I think *Ask-a-Ninja*'s pretty damn funny. Could the Ninja guy have broken through the old system of gate-keeping? Aren't there a lot more talented people out there then will ever break through using the traditional system?

Keen: This is where we fundamentally disagree. I don't want the crowd to tell me what's worth watching. I want a movie critic to tell me that. I don't want the crowd to tell me where to eat, because I don't trust them to know. Give me the old gatekeepers any day.

WIRED: *Techno-moralists* are in pretty short supply these days. How did you get into this particular line of business?

Keen: I'm not a *techno-moralist*. I'm a *technoscold*. I wrote the book because it seemed that people involved in **Web 2.0** are in an echo chamber. There isn't a debate, and there isn't a conversation. They're just listening to themselves. I find this incredibly dangerous. My background is in Eastern European studies. I spent the first half of my life studying communism and radical idealism. So I'm pretty skeptical of anyone who promises some sort of utopia.

WIRED: You've compared **Web 2.0** to Marxism. Explain.

Keen: In **Marx**'s early work he promises us that technology will liberate us from work, allowing us to farm in the morning, hunt in the afternoon, and write novels in the evening. I don't want to come off as McCarthism 1.0 or anything, but I find it ironic that people like [**Wired** Editor-in-Chief] **Chris Anderson** and [**Instapundit blogger**] **Glenn Reynolds** consider themselves libertarians. **Reynolds** sees the market as liberating us from our needs, which is pretty Marxist. He's like the poor man's **Chris Anderson**.

WIRED: What are your politics?

Keen: I'm liberal. Which is ironic. **Ariana Huffington** goes on and on about the left and right thing no longer being relevant, and I'm an example of that. Everyone thinks of **Wired** as a radical publication, but I think of it as more or less conservative, very *free market*. The kind of ideological map of the world now is one in which the *libertarian globalists* like **Chris Anderson** and **Thomas Friedman** - the Davos people - are on one side, and the old left and the old right are on the other. On one hand the world is flat, and on the other hand are those

of us who believe in anything, whether it's class justice or morality or cultural truth of one sort or the other.

Posted by **JeffPHowe** on June 05, 2007 at 07:20 AM in **Crowdsourcing Controversies**