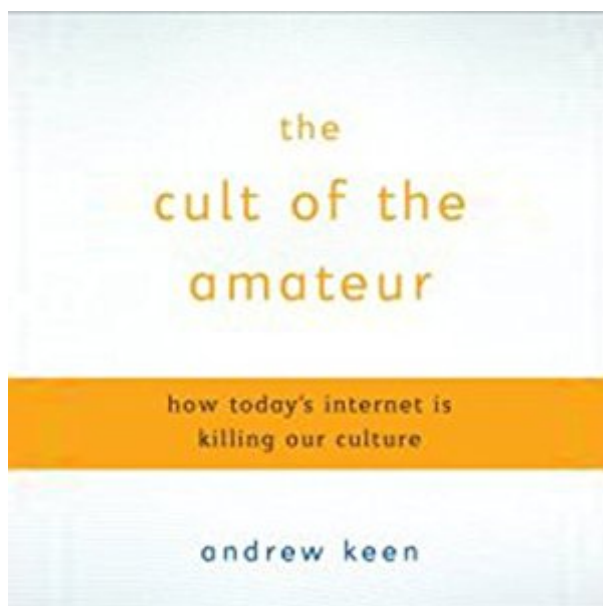


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The Cult Of The Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture



Synopsis

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 rein 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.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hours and 22 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: June 5, 2007

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B000RWCBOE

Best Sellers Rank: #321 in Books > Computers & Technology > Business Technology > Social Media for Business #471 in Books > Law > Intellectual Property #505 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Computers

Customer Reviews

Quite possibly one of the most important books to be written about the new information age, and one that very neatly encapsulated some of my the thoughts I've struggled to express to others in recent years. I'm grateful I now have a source with *gravitas* with which to back up my thoughts. The increasing trend of amateur content to crowd out the contributions of skilled artists in just about any field of interest has been alarming. I can only report what I've observed in my own main area of interest, military history. As a published author with degrees in communications and history, I've observed keenly the rise of self-publishing, YouTube, and the ease of self-expression now enjoyed by hobbyists. I certainly agree with the mostly angry and hurt reviewers who would argue there is a freedom involved with this new self-expression, but the value this adds to the communities is mitigated by the loss of authoritative knowledge, the trust we have formerly had in respected institutions, and the ability to seek out concrete facts from established sources. Keen has very clearly defined the erosion of these institutions in general terms, and if one stops to examine how these forces have come to play in their own world, there is a universality to them. I certainly see that the picture Keen paints with, for example, music recording, also applies in the areas of military badge collecting, for example, or wargame publications. There used to be a number of wargaming magazines, to continue the example, that in part reviewed new games. These magazines have all gone bankrupt thanks to free content on the internet. (The destruction of old institutions by the Internet is one of the themes Keen explores.) A look at YouTube or sites like boardgamegeek will show thousands of review videos now, by untrained amateurs, that are mostly rambling and incoherent with low or no production values. Videos of people unwrapping boxes. Videos by people who haven't played games, giving 'first impressions'. Some of these, as Keen points out, may even be corporate skills for all we know, with a veneer of trustworthiness unearned. There are a relative handful of high quality productions, but the energy expended in finding them is immense, and

moreover, what has the cost been in providing them? Keen lays the foundation for anyone to make the same connections with their own interests and hobbies. Perhaps the negative reactions to the book are predictable. Web 2.0, as he calls the democratization of the Internet, is empowering. People generally like doing what is bad for them. Like eating a whole bag of potato chips, we just can't stop ourselves.

I am at once sympathetic to and turned off by this book. You have to appreciate it for its courage and, simultaneously, take some of its hysteria with a pinch of salt. Its main weakness is shared with most debates about media in general: much of the discussion that centers on television, radio, film and the Internet is framed as a discussion of the medium when it is really about the content. I do not believe, as both Mr. Keen and his enemies in the "digital mob" appear to accept uncritically, that the "medium is the message." Any idealization of pre-Internet mass media is as misinformed as the cultural critics who decried the death of the book in the heyday of television. Or the low-rent Utopians who expect the Web 2.0 to bring forth Jerusalem. The printing press itself is more or less neutral depending upon the social context in which you place it. It can both serve to propagate Galileo's Dialogues as Mein Kampf. YouTube can broadcast both the speeches of Martin Luther King and cats playing pianos. More precisely, the medium can be molded according to the objectives of the people who use them, which is the point the author makes toward the end. In any case, this book is well worth reading, since it is a refreshing balance to manifestos like Chris Anderson's "Free" and the entire "Wired" ideology, which are in dire need of some kind of skeptic counterpoint. Read this along with Jaron Lanier's "You Are Not a Gadget," which argues along similar lines.

Most people will hate this book because it's about them and their mediocrity - the rush to say something creates the publication of total rubbish based on wishful thinking, abysmally poor analysis and even lower standards of education and critical thinking. The bonus is all this stupidity will remain in the ether for ever so the amateurs will never be able to hide themselves. The new paradigm will be "Who Cares" as the social media overload is seen as being worthless, even by the moron class.

For the last few years, many people have been talking up the idea of Web 2.0, community, collaboration and participation. But in this book, Andrew Keen presents the other side of the equation. The sub-title of the book pretty much sums up his point of view "How today's Internet is

killing our culture and assaulting our economy". His main argument is that the new Internet promotes popularity over expertise, trivia over serious news, and sound bites over substance. He also talks about things like the death of specialty music stores because of easy access to downloadable music; the slow demise of newspapers and TV due to "citizen journalism" through blogs and forums; and the growth of on-line gambling, pornography and other "Net nasties". I don't agree with everything he says, but I do think he's right - to some extent. This is a well-reasoned book, and one worth reading, especially if you're a fan of everything Web 2.0. There's so much out there praising it; it's worth seeing the opposite side of the debate.

This classic is wonderful, but now dated. I'm sure some of the author's opinions have changed a bit, and many of the sources, websites, and programs he refers to no longer exist (which is a good point to make in the rewrite). You have to read "Wikipedia" after reading this, to counterbalance the arguments each author makes. Well written, funny, a little heavy-handed, but a must read for journalism/communications students.

When I read this book, I felt as though the author were writing from attack mode arguing with an unseen foe. I found it difficult to get through. It made me think though, so that's a good thing.

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