

Why the internet is rubbish – and 'trainshift'

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[Andrew Keen](#) is an Anglo-American Silicon Valley entrepreneur who thinks that the internet is bringing all kinds of evil. That's different isn't it? In brief, his book, [The Cult of the Amateur: How The Internet Is Killing Our CUlture](#) blames the internet for either creating or worsening the following:

pornography, gambling, death of quality literature and music, the death of newspapers, a celebrity-ridden, narcissistic culture, decline of democracy, end of the family.

Unfortunately, for all the people who share these fears about the internet, at a [seminar](#) he told me that he doesn't really believe his own work:

"I am not interested in abstract forms of justice, I am interested in building my brand as an author and a polemicist"

That kind of disappointed the assembled web experts who were dying to take on this apostate of the internet, this demoniser of all things digital. Well, in the end he did provoke interesting introspection on the part of the Web 2.0 workers. Keen's arguments about the net are a-historical and exaggerated. At heart he is simply a disappointed conservative who has swallowed the hype of the libertarian left and right in the States regarding both the promise and the pitfalls of the internet. His real concerns are nothing to do with the internet, he is worried about a cultural and political authority that is passing. I asked him whether he really thinks the internet is as big a change as the railways were for society, was this a 'trainshift' I asked? He simply can't answer because for him it is truly caught up in a universal cultural crisis. My answer is that yes, the internet is going to change the way we live. But just like the coming of the railways – and the way they changed our sense of time and place – it is up to us to manage what the outcomes will be. At the very least, Keen's confused but entertaining intervention has helped stir up a much-needed debate.

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