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**Keen, Andrew - *The Internet Is Not The Answer*, Atlantic Books, London, 2015
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Teaching media students about the internet often makes you feel like a sales person making a pitch about the wonderful things you can do with social media tools, smartphone apps and programming languages. These are, after all, what employers want – young graduates who can provide all the answers in the digital world.

However, as Andrew Keen makes clear in *The Internet Is Not The Answer*, we would be deluded if we simply let the internet shape us and the way our students think and work, instead of the other way around. The book is a summary, a lament and a warning of the destructions and disruptions behind the breathtaking mantras of the internet entrepreneurs such as 'failure is success' that is celebrated in events like FailCon and in the shiny headquarters of Google.

The book argues that a big part of the successes of the internet's golden children such as Facebook, Google and Axciom are results of the failures of governments and society in overseeing and controlling what these companies are doing to make profits, especially with private data of their users. He observes:

> " From social media networks like Twitter and Facebook to the world's second most valuable company, Google, the exploitation of our personal information is the engine of the 'big data' economy. All these companies want to know us so intimately that they can package us up and then, without our consent, sell us back to advertisers (p. 117). "

Keen is also worried not only about the rise of a new kind of bubble separating the internet billionaires from the society around them, but also how the ideas of well-intentioned technologists who contributed to the early creation of the web are still used in the new capitalism environment that the internet has brought.

Keen uses the Battery, a social club started by two internet entrepreneurs in San Francisco, as an example. The 'unclub' was built with the Silicon Valley's 'lexicon of disruption': it declares to eschew status, allowing jeans and hoodies for their members instead of stuffy business suits. But the members of this social club are the young technologists, graduates from prestigious universities around the world, new emperors of the new networked society hanging out in a place Keen describes as 'opulent as the most marble-encrusted homes of San Francisco's nineteenth century gilded elite' (p. 3) with its 200-person domestic staff, a glass elevator, 3,000-bottle wine cellar and a fourteen-room luxury hotel.

There are other examples such as the Google bus services that use public bus stops to pick up Google employers while others have to use the old public buses. In addition there are 'unconferences', such as FailCon, that glorify failures while outside of the hotel where the event was held, there were people struggling with real failures, such as the 20% of the population of the Silicon Valley who were homeless.

Keen's book is, however, not only a bitter lament. It is easy to see it as an angry rant of a failed startup

entrepreneur – Keen tried to launch a music startup called AudioCafe, which failed. But it is more than that – it is a passionate argument for us to see how the internet has created a new kind of capitalism that has created economic and cultural inequalities that can compete with, if not be worse than, the old style of feudalism where the winners take all. He writes:

> " In today's digital experiment, the world is being transformed into a winner-take-all, upstairs-downstairs kind of society. This networked future is characterized by an astonishingly unequal distribution of economic value and power in almost every industry that the Internet is disrupting (p. 7). "

Every chapter is built around a concept of how the internet decimated old ways of doing things without necessarily offering better ways to fix what might not be broken anyway.

The first chapter is a good summary of the history of the internet, including an introduction to some of the well-intentioned ideas of the first pioneers of web technology such as Tim Berners Lee, Vannevar Bush and Paul Baran. This is then contrasted in the second chapter, which explains how the Internet has created a new way of using private data for profit. Chapters three and four compare Kodak and Instagram to look at how the digital image revolution has brought the 'personal' revolution where 'everything has degenerated into the immediate, the intimate, and, above all, the self-obsessed' (p. 108).

Chapters five and six argue that, while there is an abundance of choice for consumers, it is only a small number of investors and intermediaries who have really benefitted from this abundance while many creators, such as musicians, are struggling to make money. Chapter seven looks at the idea of the Panopticon to see how the internet has created some of the best spying technologies in the history of humanity.

Chapter eight describes the manner in which, instead of delivering the early promise of the internet to create a society that is progressive and equal for everyone, Silicon Valley has given us a glimpse of how some of the richest entrepreneurs even have toyed around with the idea of creating a new type of secessionism, an 'opt-in' world that is separate from the old one. An example of this is the venture capitalist Tim Draper's idea to create Silicon Valley as a new state, and startup entrepreneur Balaji Srinivasan's notion of a complete withdrawal of Silicon Valley from the United States.

In the last chapter, Andrew Keen offers us what he thinks as the answer – history. He invites us to disrupt the disruptors by looking at how the success of capitalism, and the success of the creation of the internet itself, was made possible by government and public support. He notes, however, that most governments around the world are also trapped in the notion that the internet is going to provide the answers to everything, or are too complicit in the ability of the internet to control and collect data, to challenge the likes of Facebook and co.

The book is a timely warning for us to take stock, and echoes similar sentiments from writers such as Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca Solnit, whom he quotes, Jaron Lanier and Cory Doctorow. With the latter, there is a similarity in the way that Keen warns that what is happening right now is the decimation of the middle-class work.

Keen's involvement and access to Silicon Valley provides great stories and characters that have formed the present culture of the place. He is a very good storyteller, moving seamlessly and passionately from the musician Paul Simon to Schumpeter's idea of the perennial creative destruction, between the ideas of Ayn Rand to Uber and the technologies and practices behind Facebook or OKCupid's social experiments, all of which have a Benthamite shade of influence.

It is a sprawling book that shifts from idea to idea, and Keen does a great job in summarising some of the best writers as well as technologists who are deeply involved in Silicon Valley. However, this strength is also its weakness, as the book does not provide us with an in-depth look at any one issue. As mentioned in the acknowledgment section, the book is meant to be a summary, and in doing that, it is a successful. While it is a sprawling text, it is tied together by Keen's overarching thesis that the internet, despite its promises of equality, has created inequality so deep and wide that we must take heed and pay attention to where we are moving next.

While the storytelling and images are engaging, and the narrative revels in the bigger picture, many of the smaller details are missing. One problem is that the book focuses almost exclusively on Silicon Valley and the UK, and given the author's background and expertise, this is understandable. However, while his description of the ideas behind the most powerful companies in Silicon Valley provide a fascinating vantage point to consider the growth of the internet in other parts of the world, especially countries such as Indonesia, China and South Korea, it feels that the title of the book should carry an explanatory title.

However, especially for those of us teaching students how to work in the digital world, the book is a useful source to provide an antidote to an unfettered, uncritical acceptance to the digital disruptions that have been

occurring in the media industry.

About the reviewer

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Arsisto has worked as a journalist, writer, researcher and communications expert for more than a decade. He has worked in Australia, Indonesia and East Timor, and has held editorial and leadership positions at ABC's Radio Australia. He has written for international publications, including *The Guardian* and *Visual Arts Magazine*.

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