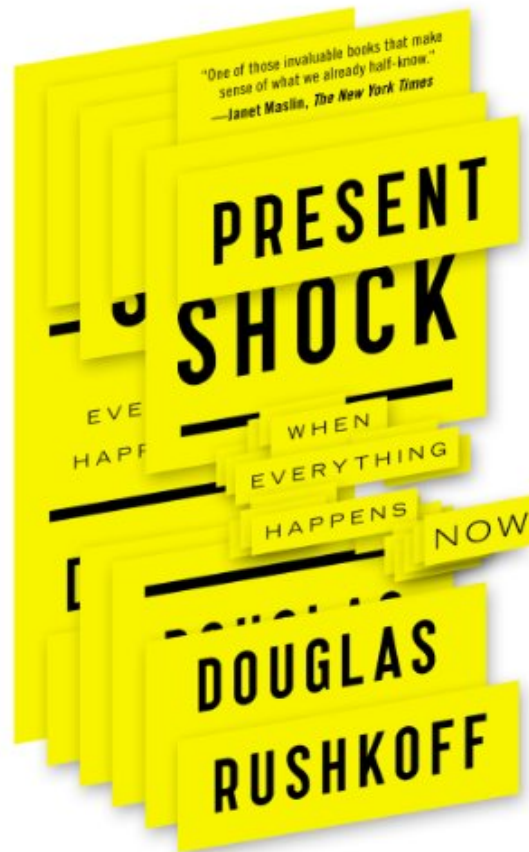
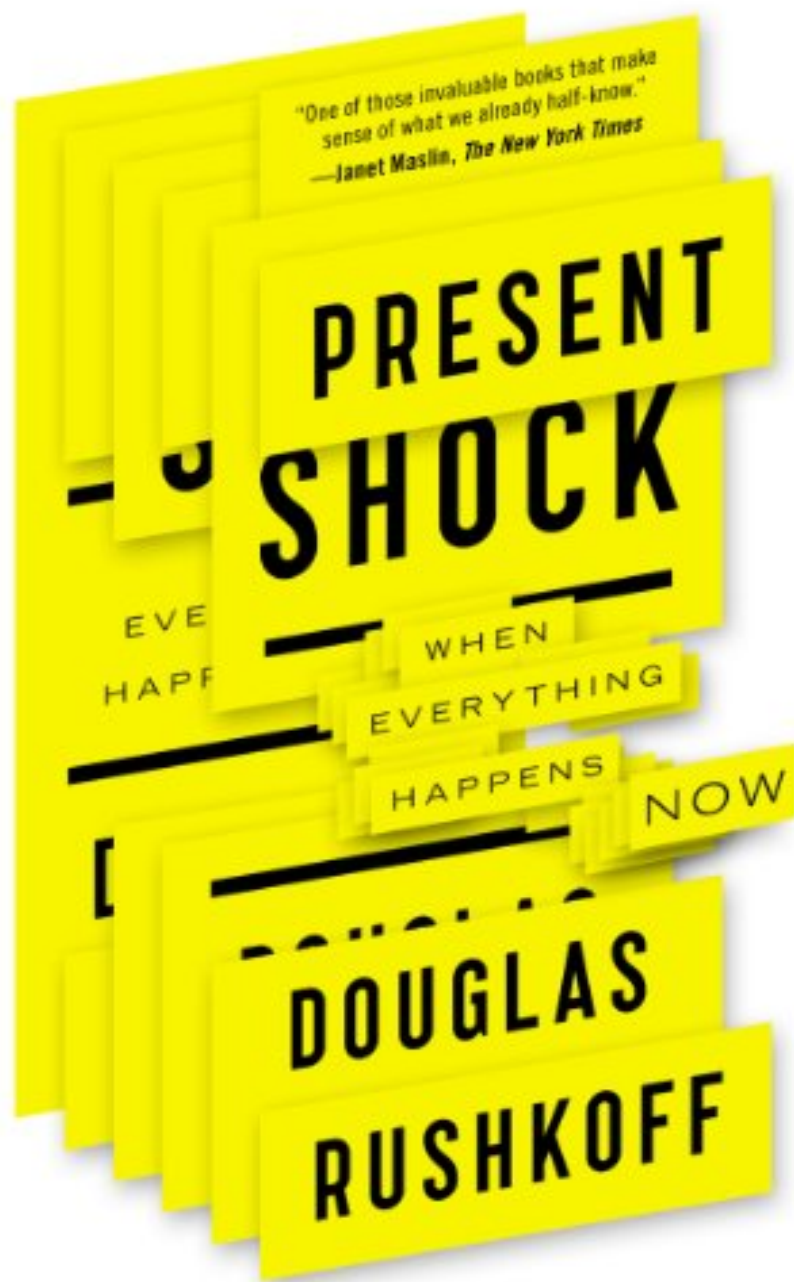


PRESENT SHOCK: WHEN EVERYTHING HAPPENS NOW BY DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF



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People spent the twentieth century obsessed with the future. We created technologies that would help connect us faster, gather news, map the planet, and compile knowledge. We strove for an instantaneous network where time and space could be compressed. Well, the future's arrived. We live in a continuous now enabled by Twitter, email, and a so-called real-time technological shift. Yet this "now" is an elusive goal that we can never quite reach. And the dissonance between our digital selves and our analog bodies has thrown us into a new state of anxiety: present shock.

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Visit www.Rushkoff.com

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The dawn of the Digital Age

By Amazon Customer

This is copy of a review that I blogged at [...]

This is a very difficult book to summarize, so I'll begin with a very specific argument the author makes, delivered completely out of context, but probably familiar to most people of my generation:

"The show's gags don't even relate to the story or throughline (such as they are), but serve as detours that thwart or halt forward motion altogether. Rather than simply scripting pulp culture references into the scenes, *Family Guy* uses these references more as wormholes through which to escape from the temporal reality of the show altogether, often for minutes at a time, which is an eternity on prime-time television. In one episode the mom asks her son to grab a carton of milk "and be sure to take it from the back." Apropos of nothing, a black-and-white sketch of a man's hand pulls the child into an alternative universe of a-ha's iconic 1984 "Take On Me" music video. The child runs through a paper labyrinth with the band's front man for the better part of a minute before suddenly breaking through a wall and back into the *Family Guy* universe."

All of which makes me wish he'd tried to describe the fight with Chicken in such delightful academic language.

If there's a unifying theme to "Present Shock", it's probably this: the invention of computing and digital communication is at least as transformative for our species as the Industrial Revolution, and possibly as transformative as the invention of writing. Therefore the way we think about time, money, democracy, relationships, and work is changing in much the same way as it changed during the Industrial Revolution.

Rushkoff is particularly (and I would peculiarly) interested in how we think about time. Before the invention of writing, there was, in a sense, no time. Things obviously did change, but they changed gradually and as there was no way to create permanent records it was likely undetectable to the inhabitants of that era. There were also no days of the week or months of the year. Writing allowed records to be kept, but the Industrial Revolution and in particular the invention of railroads necessitated the invention of precise time: clocks and watches and the need to know time accurately to the minute (my current town of Waltham, MA became famous - and wealthy - by manufacturing the first pocket watches just when there was suddenly a need for them). The digital era is changing it all again, when, as the title suggests, everything happens now.

The quote about Family Guy, above, is meant to illustrate how our changing relationship with time has in turn altered our relationship with the traditional story has changed, especially in the 21st century, as a result of this new relationship with time. The Simpsons, Mystery Science Theatre 3000, The Office, Family Guy, and Community are all examples of the TV shows that give their characters awareness of the fact that they are in a TV show, and so satirize narrative itself. Contrast this with the classic situation comedy: "The `situation' usually consisted of a history so important to the show that it was retold during the opening theme song" (yeah, I never made that connection either).

This is of course a bit of a leap, but it's a microcosm of the issues touched on by Rushkoff, many of which are not meant to be convincing arguments at all but rather thought provoking starting points. If we take as a given that the Industrial Age is firmly over, and we have now entered what we might call the Digital Age, then we need to re-think how we approach the economy, government, and work-life balance. If stock trades need to be made instantaneously by a computer, and need to be immediately profitable, then the very meaning of value - so far as stocks are concerned - is destroyed. Viewed through this lens, the financial crisis is just the beginning of the end of an era when those sorts of commercial exchanges made sense. Now that they don't, the market will have to reinvent itself.

Similarly, Occupy can be viewed not as a grassroots political movement with a particular goal in mind (like the civil rights movement) but as a first attempt to diversify - or even re-invent - the way people self-govern. Self-governance through representative democracy is after all a relatively recent invention. If the current dearth of voting options, lack of effective information through traditional media channels, and poisoning of the system through private interests is creating a climate in which government ceases to function, then what will replace it?

Rushkoff is primarily descriptive, not prescriptive, and the point of the book is not to say whether the coming of the Digital Age is good or bad. It simply is. Personally I find the basic idea exciting. The basic conceit means that much of the current anxiety we have over the 21st century so far is not so much a symptom of technology being bad for our souls, but a disconnect that arises from trying to ram Industrial Age mentalities into a place where they don't belong. With technology current technology we are able to work anytime, anywhere. That doesn't mean it's a good idea. After all, in the end the whole point of everything from telecommuting to Netflix is to save time, which in turn means to create time for other things. The question is: why haven't they?

44 of 50 people found the following review helpful.
Slow. Down. Everybody.

By S. Kittelsen

At a time when business and marketing urge us all to speed the pace of every interaction and transaction, churning ourselves into a frenzied, infinite state of NOW, Rushkoff reminds us that we are only human and as such, our capacity for authentic presence only goes so far.

The book explores the myriad symptoms of "presentism," a condition in which we never turn off the flood of information in an effort to achieve some kind of digitally connected immortality. Rushkoff began to describe this in his previous work, *Program or Be Programmed: 10 Commands for a Digital Age*. As in that book, here Rushkoff offers a clear and balanced perspective. He doesn't expect anyone, let alone himself, to cast our iPhones and tablets and laptops into the surf, but he does encourage everyone to understand that our demand and desire for everything to always happen right here, right now, is a false inclination perpetuated by systems of our own design. As such, we must design and use them responsibly.

34 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Everything Always Happens Now

By My Opinion

I think Rushkoff is a keen observer of the ever-evolving human/technology cultural interface. And I like this book. Alot.

What sets Rushkoff apart is that is that he has been doing this for years. Dissecting trends from a macro perspective, he is a good writer, and has a good handle on the technology.

Rushkoff recognizes and names different conditions arising from living in the distracted present. They are useful for finding yourself, your friends, your children and seeing quite clearly what we are becoming.

He tells us how story telling has changed as a result of technology. No more story, actually. No narrative. Just stuff. A few characters. A few frames of video. Repeated, over and over and over again so they take on an importance simply because of their frequency in the culture.

He reminds us that those with access (more capital, better technology, stronger contacts) still move the meter most. And while the truly creative have a way to find an audience... it probably won't be the mass audience.

And that eavesdropping - in real time - on the torrent, that used to be a stream, that used to be a trickle of conversation, is no substitute for participation and face-to-face engagement. In the now.

People these days just like to watch more than they like to do. And they think that because they are constantly monitoring and changing streams (from twitter, to facebook, to youtube, to whatever) - and watching something else, they actually are doing something.

Unplug. I dare you. See if YOU can stay unplugged for an hour. Or two. Or 24. Are you aware the sun is shining outside?

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