Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now

Douglas Rushkoff

Download now

Read Online

Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now

Douglas Rushkoff

Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now Douglas Rushkoff
"*If the end of the twentieth century can be characterized by futurism, the twenty-first can be defined by presentism*."
This is the moment we've been waiting for, explains award-winning media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, but we don't seem to have any time in which to live it. Instead we remain poised and frozen, overwhelmed by an always-on, live-streamed *reality* that our human bodies and minds can never truly inhabit. And our failure to do so has had wide-ranging effects on every aspect of our lives.
People spent the twentieth century obsessed with the future. We created technologies that would help connect us faster, gather news, map the planet, compile knowledge, and connect with anyone, at anytime. 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.*
Rushkoff weaves together seemingly disparate events and trends into a rich, nuanced portrait of how life in the eternal present has affected our biology, behavior, politics, and culture. He explains how the rise of zombie apocalypse fiction signals our intense desire for an ending; how the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street form two sides of the same post-narrative coin; how corporate investing in the future has been replaced by futile efforts to game the stock market in real time; why social networks make people anxious and email can feel like an assault. He examines how the tragedy of 9/11 disconnected an entire generation from a sense of history, and delves into why conspiracy theories actually comfort us.
As both individuals and communities, we have a choice. We can struggle through the onslaught of information and play an eternal game of catch-up. Or we can choose to live in the present: favor eye contact over texting; quality over speed; and human quirks over digital perfection. Rushkoff offers hope for anyone seeking to transcend the false now.
Absorbing and thought-provoking, *Present Shock* is a wide-ranging, deeply thought meditation on what it means to be human in real-time.

Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now Details

Date	:	Published March 21st 2013 by Current
ISBN	:	9781591844761
Author	:	Douglas Rushkoff
Format	:	Hardcover 296 pages
Genre	:	Nonfiction, Science, Technology, Sociology, Psychology, Cultural, Culture, Society, Philosophy

Download Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now ...pdf

Read Online Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now ...pdf

Download and Read Free Online Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now Douglas Rushkoff

From Reader Review Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now for online ebook

Tracy says

I agree with other reviewers that this book is disjointed, and it's obvious that it took many years to write (I noted, for example, that many of the illustrations in the first chapter are more than a decade old). Despite those elements, I do think this book is worth reading and its ideas worth thinking about, whether or not one ultimately agrees with the author. The basic topics:

1. Narrative Collapse - Pop culture becomes more now-ist and self-referential beginning in the late 1980s-early 1990s (The Simpsons, Mystery Science Theater 3000, Seinfeld). Reality shows and the 24-hour news cycle demo other aspects of this phenomenon. Rushkoff writes about Occupy Wall Street also, but, perhaps because this movement was still so new at the time of publishing that we don't yet know the outcomes, I found this the most disconnected component of this chapter.
2. Digiphrenia -- In trying to keep up with everything, we lose perspective. "The quest for digital omniscience, though understandable, is self-defeating" (p. 75). I enjoyed Rushkoff's discussion of time as a technology in this chapter, particularly as the functioning of digital time does not align with the needs of the human's chronobiology. With this understanding, we can select uses of technology that help us rather than harm us.
3. Overwinding -- Another chapter about time. Living quickly loses sight of longer time horizons, and different kinds of time (Rushkoff discusses chronos versus kairos). Sometimes we do need to store time for the future (think of athletes who practice the same moves over and over in order to be able to execute them without a lot of conscious effort during competition). Sometimes we treat something as permanent that is more properly regarded as fleeting (for example, "catching up" with Twitter feeds is a form of living in the past), or something as fleeting that contains more substance. I found this to be the most interesting chapter of the book, and my notes here are only partial.
4. Fractalnoia -- The ability to connect anything with anything as a means of satisfying "our need to find patterns in a world with no enduring story lines....We can't create context in time, so we create it through links" (p. 199-200). This chapter contained an interesting discussion of corporate communications approaches and how those are eroded in a world in which feedback comes continuously and from all sides at once. On the positive side, this ability to link can create communities in which everyone feels welcome to participate in the community's development. Will living networks replace linear histories of the past? Rushkoff thinks so. The individual's limited vision is the failure of fractalnoia, seeing connections as only having to do with him- or herself, while "...in a fractal landscape, nothing is personal." (p. 241)
5. Apocalypto -- fears of transcending humanity, destruction of the human, union in the singularity. While the ideas are intriguing, on the whole I found this to be the least developed, and perhaps least convincing, chapter in the book.

All in all, I'm glad I read this, and it complements other readings I've been doing about the value of Sabbath practices and about engaging mindfully with technology. What I most appreciated about this book is the many ways in which Rushkoff brings in elements of larger culture (although he's heaviest on corporate culture). As he notes toward the end, "It is not you or I or the information that's so different, but the media and culture around us all." (p. 265) I would argue that we are changed by this culture, and so are different people than we would be in a different time and place, but perhaps that's a topic best left to another book.

Mark Dickson says

Going into this book, I expected something quite different. I think I was expecting something more succinct and cohesive, something that would help articulate why the increasing pace of life makes (many of) us increasingly uncomfortable, anxious, and unhappy.

What I found, though, was just as good. Rushkoff's interests and intellect span a number of fields--economics, technology, politics, philosophy, and history. And he handles each field cogently.

While I didn't have any specific sticking points, there were a few overarching issues that made that made this a *good* book, not a *great* one.

The whole thing wasn't sufficiently cohesive.
Admittedly, I seem to have this problem with most of the cultural criticism I read. This would have worked as a collection of articles just as well as an entire book. Perhaps better. At times, the connection seemed forced or weak, there for the sake of putting everything together. But the whole framework doesn't entirely work for me. I'll buy all the premises, but maybe not the broader conclusion. Still, the premises are well-reasoned, timely, and thought-provoking, so this is only a minor gripe.

The proposed terms/lexicon didn't work for me.
This is, perhaps, another throwback from my time in Philosophy. I love to invent terms and concepts, and thus am highly suspect of other frameworks or terms that don't fit with mine. I'm also pretty picky. "Fractalnoia", "Apocalypto", "Digiphrenia", and "Overwinding" all somehow failed to resonate with me. They're all valid conceptual frameworks, but all just slightly askance from how I'd approach these topics. Perhaps other readers won't be bothered. In a *great* book, you could expect a few terms that will stick, that will become part of the parlance when we talk about...well, whatever it is we're talking about here...I don't think the term is, or will be, "Present Shock".

At times, it's simply too conciliatory.
For a book with a bold premise, it's pretty hard to pin down where it stands on a lot of thorny issues. Rushkoff merely explicates the thorniness, but doesn't come down on either side. In many ways, this is probably a virtue. It's better to draw our own conclusions...but some part of me enjoys really agreeing or disagreeing with an author. I suspect that were I to have written this book, I'd have taken the same tack as Rushkoff.

So there you have it. Highly interesting read, but it won't leave you with a new vision of the world, a plan of attack, or even a broader understanding. But don't less this dissuade you--the smaller points in this book all make it a very worthwhile read.

Stan Feckless says

Ironically, Rushkoff’s expository style in Present Shock is often unfocused, fragmented, and seems to suffer from a diminished attention span just like the social phenomena that he is attempting to critique. Some of the arguments presented are intriguing at first blush, but end up disappointing because they are never fully explored or supported. The book ends up reading like a hyper-linked miscellany of conspicuous media and technology stories.

Mark says

Awesome. Classic Rushkoff ... this books argues that our Twitter-like, always-on behavior is altering the way our very minds work ... and our concept of time itself. Very fascinating stuff, highly recommended (I'm a huge Rushkoff fan already -- read nearly all of his books). If you like media analysis combined with ancient myths and technology, synthesized amazingly into a seamless braid, you've love this.

Andrew Ma says

Asks many interesting questions in situating our 'post-historical' technological present, within the wider historical and cultural context.

I struggled to find the first chapter convincing - regarding the abandonment of narrative in contemporary media (film, tv etc).

But the rest of it was super thought provoking. Even if it jumps around crazily from concept to concept, perhaps reflecting the vast scope of the issue Rushkoff is addressing -our multi nodal networked world - as well as admission that this took him years to write.

In one sentence?

'How do we live meaningful and engaging lives when our identity, relationships, cultural world view, art, are enmeshed in voluntary, pervasive, always on, global digital networks that are predominantly used to further the interests and objectives of capitalism? '

But also perhaps,

'It wasn't always like this and it doesn't have to be this way.

And put your fucking phone down when we are having a conversation.

Please

Thanks. Sorry, didn't meant to sound angry'.

Don Tapscott says

Back in the BlackBerry's heyday, a new habit in restaurants became known as the “BlackBerry prayer.” Those at the table would hold their BlackBerrys in their laps, trying to inconspicuously respond to a steady stream of e-mails and texts. No matter how engaging the table conversation, the BlackBerry offered the potential of a different and more interesting topic.

Today, the prayers still happen, but they now occur non-stop with iPhones and Android devices. Rather than savouring our current place and time, we are in constant quest for something better.

The obsession with “now” is the topic of Present Shock, the new book from well-known media theorist Douglas Rushkoff. He is no Luddite; rather, Rushkoff is an on-the-edge thinker, and sometimes his arguments are met with incredulity. His book, Present Shock, is a must-read rejoinder to Alvin Toffler's pioneering 1970 bestseller Future Shock. Toffler exhorted his readers to become adept at “how to predict.” Not having this skill amounted to “a form of functional illiteracy in the contemporary world.” We “all became futurists in one way or another,” Rushkoff writes, “peering around the corner for the next big thing, and the next one after that. But then we actually got there. Here. Now. We arrived in the future.” We are experiencing “our first true symptoms of present shock.”

While technology is the enabler, present shock occurs in all aspects of our life. He divides “presentism” into five categories, each one a typical Rushkoffian neologism:

Narrative Collapse: Immediacy trumps accuracy. Around-the-clock news channels force public figures to respond to every iteration of an issue. Simplistic solutions (like those offered by the Tea Party) are favoured because they are not bogged down with facts.

Digiphrenia: Technology allows us to be in a number of locations at the same time, often with stressful and unhealthy consequences. Rushkoff cites the extreme example of U.S. pilots in Nevada remotely flying armed drones in Afghanistan that fire air-to-ground missiles to kill insurgents and any civilians who have the bad luck to be nearby. These pilots then drive to their house to have dinner with the spouse and kids and help with homework.

Overwinding: We are under intense pressure to seize the advantage of the moment and act now. One of his many examples is the shopping frenzy of Black Friday in the United States following the Thursday Thanksgiving. Big retailers would open at 9 a.m. Friday, then 6 a.m., then 4 a.m., then midnight, and now late on Thursday evening. The creeping Black Friday has become a powerful symbol of the American mindset.

Fractalnoia: The now-rampant effort to impose an interpretation of one set of facts on another dissimilar set of facts. Dozens of websites and YouTube videos assert linkages and conspiracies from the use of weather balloons and the military, economy, natural disasters and jet emissions. These “make up just a tiny fraction of the so-called conspiracy theories gaining traction online and in other media, connecting a myriad of loose ends, from 9/11 and Barack Obama's birthplace to the Bilderberg Group and immunization.”

Apocalypto: The truly depressing American obsession with the notion of imminent doom, whether born-again Christians with visions of Rapture, advocates of Mayan calendar doom or followers of Kurzweil's concept of Singularity. Rushkoff asks us not to abandon all hope, but step back and discuss more rational approaches to what ails our society.

The pleasure of reading Present Shock is that so many of Rushkoff's examples ring true, and seem glaringly obvious once put to paper. The scope of the book is ambitious, and fortunately, he accompanies his observations with suggestions to help us all cope in the ever-present world.

I have long argued that, because of enormous leaps in technology, the values we hold are coming into question. More than ever before, we need to step back and consciously design our lives. We need to decide explicitly what we stand for and whether we are the slave or the master of the new technologies.

On the home front, most families muddle through this new networked and open world, stumbling from decision to decision or crisis to crisis without an overarching strategy. All of us should be applying principles of design to our family and life. Make conscious choices about how our families will function and what we believe in. Harness the power of new technologies and transparency for the good – design them rather than having them control you.

Artak Aleksanyan says

?????????? ???????? ???????? ?, ?????????? ?? ???? ???????????????? ????? ????????? ????? ??????? ??????? ??????? ???????????? ????? ????????????? ?? ???? ???? ? ????????? ??????, ?????????? ????? ???????????????? ???? ?? ? ????????? ????????????? ??? ???? «????? ????????» ????????, ??? ??? ????????? ???????????????????? ?????? ??????????? ? ??? ??? ????? ?????????????, ????? ?????????????, ??????????? ? ?????

«??????? ??????» ??? ?????????? ????? ?, ??? ?? ???? ? 2013 ????????? ???? ?????? ???? ??????? ??????? ?, ?????????? ?? ????? ???????? ?, ?? ??? ????? ??????? ??? ?????????? ??????? ???????? ?????? ????????? ?????????? ???????? ???????????????? ????? ????-????????????????

??? «??????? ?????» ?????? ?? ????? ????, ?? ??? ?????? ?????? ????? ?????? ?? ??? ?????, ?????, ???????????????? ?? ?? ???????? ??, ??? ?????? ??? ????? ??? ????????? ???? ??????? ???? ???????????, ????????, ??????? ??????? ?? ???????? ?????, ?????? ?????????? ?????????? ? ???????? ??????? ????, ??? ???? ???? ??????? ??? ??? ??????? ????, ????? ?? ?? ??????? ????? ? ??????, ??? ?????? ???????????????????? ???? ????? ??????? ????? ??????? ??. ???? ? ???????? ?????????, ?????? ????? ?????, ?????? ????? ??????? ????, ??? ????????? ???? ????? ???????

?????? ??? ????????. ???? ???? ??? ???? ? ???????? ???? ??? ?????, ????? ? ?????? ????????????? ??????, ???????? ??????? ??????? ?? ?????? ????????????? ?? ??????????, ???? ? ??? ???? ?????????????, ??????? ?????????, ????? «????????» ??? ????????? ?? ????????????? ?? ??? ????? ???? ??????????? ?????? ???, ??? ?????? ??? ? ?? ?????? ????????, ?? ????? ? ?? ????? ??????????????, ???? ?????? ??? «???????» ???????

Erika says

67 pages into this book and my mind is blown- Rushkoff draws clear connections between changing media practices, the loss of a narrative structure in society, an increase in fear within the media, the Occupy Wall street movement, and gaming culture. Seemingly unrelated issues come together in a panorama of understanding . Looking forward to the delights in the rest of the book.

Valentina says

I just heard about this book on NPR from an interview with the author himself, Douglas Rushkoff, and what he speaks about in this book really hit home to me. I've been having a problem dealing with how I relate to my friends online. I cannot perfectly transition between the past and present when there is no forward thinking and no certainty as to where relationships stand as of now, too. There seems to be no time online OR offline to enjoy "relating" to anyone. This symptom falls into what Rushkoff terms "Digiphrenia" = the experience of trying to exist in more than one incarnation of yourself at the same time" and it seems to be the disturbance of the digital age.

I look forward to reading further about what Mr. Rushkoff has to say, especially about how we can improve and move towards a future we can have time to enjoy with friends we can avoid blindsiding.

Gizem Kendik says

?nternete giydirdikleri:
Her ?ey ?u anda oluyor. Gün içinde Twitter feed'ini yakalamaya veya e-mailleri cevaplamaya çal???rken kayboluyoruz. ?nsan ritmiyle teknoloji ritmi birbirine uymuyor. Dijital teknolojilerin real time olmad???n? anlamam?z gerek. ?nsan ritmi ay?n hareketlerine göre ?ekillenen nöro-kimyasallarla çal???yor. ?nternette her ?ey ?imdi olurken biz gece-gündüz, mevsimler gibi döngülerle çal???yoruz. Presnet shock da insan?n do?al ritmine uymayan, bu her ?eyin ?imdi oldu?u hissine kar?? verdi?i bir tepki. Üzgünüm ama i?in içine ay hareketleri girince ben koptum.

Ya bi de diyor ki "zombilerden fark?m?z kalmad?. Ben "team human" kamp?nday?m. Bu gidi?le singularity'e insana benzemeyen, insan ritmine uymayan bir dijital iz b?rak?caz." Ulan umar?m ?u singularity i?i (singularity'den bir ihale i?iymi? gibi bahsetmeyi severim) olur da senin bu video konferanslarda itici itici ?akalar yap?p insanlar gülmeyince bozuldu?un mimiklerini görmek zorunda kalmay?z.

Megan says

I should like Douglas Rushkoff. I have a feeling that in fact we agree over a great many things, and share many of the same concerns. But every time I try to read him I fail, and often quit before the piece is even halfway through. With this book, I finally understand why: his ideas are interesting, but I don't think he knows how to structure an argument well. His writing is full of many of the tricks of rhetoric - the sentences sound as though they should be persuasive - but they're never implemented fully, the points never stacking up in a way that makes them memorable or lasting. (I find this inability/unwillingness to complete an argument in a linear fashion somewhat amusing in a book lamenting the alleged disappearance of linear narrative.)

H Wesselius says

An uneven read. His examples and stories are what kept me going despite the urge, several times, to return the book to the library. In some instances he repeats old concepts especially the collapse of the narrative and other times his theorizing is so off beat its doubtful anyone wrote of it before or will later. Narrative collapse, the first chapter, is the best in terms of writing and thought. The third, overwinding, is interesting and the last, apocalyptico, is fascinating but speculative. Very uneven and be prepared to skip through to the interesting parts if you wish to sustain yourself to the end. Interestingly he is somewhat critical of futurists yet he undoubtedly writes and acts like one.

Casey says

A word of warning: if you read this book, you're going to have to accept that media theorists do not have to

present empirical evidence to argue a point. Examples here are cherry-picked from a vast landscape of television shows and websites and films, without mention of base rates, variance, statistical significance, and other figures that scientific types (such as myself) rely on to make sense of data. Of course, lack of any real evidence doesn't stop Rushkoff from making claims about causality. If only doing science were so easy.

Bottom line: there's no science in this book, despite what goodreads might lead to you believe. Indeed, the library of congress shelved it under "technology - social aspects" and "technology - philosophy." (If the library of congress had a heading for "curmudgeony polemics against kids these days" it might go under that too, although Rushkoff loves technology enough that no LOC librarian worth his or her salt would file this under "luddite.")

Anyway, it's best to get over the lack of data, because Rushkoff compellingly argues that our post-narrative, post-structuralist, post-everything, post-nothing world is always going on in the present, even as none of us really live in the moment.

An aside (in a post-narrative world, my writing is not required to be linear, or even informative: the most important thing is to capture attention): I'm often impressed by my own facility with pop-culture references in popular media. I don't have cable, I spend most of my summer actively avoiding invitations to inane sequels to even more inane blockbusters, and I couldn't pick of-the-moment pop hacks like Justin Bieber or Adele out of a lineup. But, "meta" shows like Community seem to be aimed at me, because I do know a Goodfellas reference or a parody of a narrative trope when I see one. In creating a corps of viewers who won't bother with the history of cinema (or music, or art, or anything), who stare blankly when they hear names like "Ingmar Bergman" or "David O. Selznick" or "Laura Palmer," popular satirical television shows have, ironically, selected for exactly the audience that won't get the jokes.

Back to the book. Rushkoff's argument is presented in a few broad strokes, which resemble the colorful, self-contained rectangles of a Mondrian painting. He jumps all over the place, talking about investment banking, post-narrative collapse, digiphrenia (being more than one digital being at once), Facebook, conspiracy theorists, and the apocalypse. I was surprised to hear about the benefits of barter economies and alternative currencies, although I'm not sure how that fits in with anything. The book is about as rambling as this review, albeit more successful at conveying actual information.

What's the solution to present shock? Perhaps the 21st century version of Walden consists of simply unplugging the modem, switching the iPhone to "do not disturb," cracking open a book, and listening to Highway 61 Revisited on vinyl. Maybe reconnecting with nature means strolling along Clark street without listening to music through headphones. Just typing that makes the future seem bleak, not least because I know few people would deign to exist apart from the electronic crutch of Facebook profiles and Twitter feeds. The only solution I can offer is a personal refusal to become a blankly-buzzing drone.

If you're interested in this book, you may want to check out this interview with the author on the Joe Rogan Experience, which I found rather enjoyable.

Craig Jaquish says

It's hard to say what *Present Shock* is exactly, both in the flattering way that it packs a lot in and in the negative sense that it’s lacking a lot of precision. It's not quite a polemic, but it’s more provocational than Alvin Toffler's drier *Future Shock*. In the '90s, Ruskoff says, we were all leaning forward into the future, wanting to know what was next, but when Y2k passed and planes didn't fall from the sky and elevators didn't stop between floors we realized we were here, we had made it into the future. So we have the futurism-

presentism divide. Where future shock is something more like an escalating exasperation or dread (fairly clearly defined by Toffler as rate of change increasing at a speed that threatens to surpass our physiological capacities to process it) present shock is less of *shock* and more of a continual low-level unease. Rushkoff points out that in the midst of streams and feeds the Twitter, Facebook and email pings our cell phones deliver are not really the present but continuous notifications of what happened a few minutes ago, something peripheral.

But shouldn't a book cut up into syndromes of presentism (overwinding, digiphrenia, fractalnoia) be fairly precise in its terminology? Rushkoff never defines what the present is. And I'm not being purposely obtuse. I sympathize with that sort of here-but-never-here brand of unease that most people didn't have five or ten years ago. But after a while there's the sense that he isn't advocating a return to the present as much as a return to the mythic present. What does it mean to be present in the way he advocates? After all, isn't planning what you're going to do five minutes from now a ping from the future?

A consistent feature of present shock is narrative collapse: the end of narrative as a coordinating force. Presentism displaces us from the old linear continuum with beginning, middle and end, and gives us only a succession of moments. The *shock* is not that we're always in the middle, but that there is no middle. This loss of context is our contemporary baseline anxiety. The Twitter stream is not like a book where you pick up where you left off; you can close your browser and turn off your phone, and it just keeps going in your absence. It's in vain to try to catch up on a feed when you come back; you just have to give up and start at whatever's most current. There's a certain intuitive appeal to Rushkoff's claims here, but then again narrative seems to be everywhere. NPR doesn't do news anymore, they tell people's stories. Narrative probably has collapsed, but more so under its own weight: it didn't evaporate, it imploded. More precisely maybe, narrative is alive and well but no longer functions as a vehicle for meaning. Narrative is a means of compression. Information that is too complex to be incorporated as a whole—or in a timely way—is compressed into something easier to wield and transmit. But a particular story is not the only one to be pulled from the data; hearing everyone's story is too numbing. Context and meaning share a good bit of overlap, but I'm more comfortable saying we haven't lost context as Rushkoff claims we have. It's more that it's been carved into micro-units and resides more often in metaphor, framing, gesture and is still strung together too in narratives, although it survives less in the narratives of culture than of subculture.

It's grand narrative that Rushkoff seems to be pining after which is sort of strange because of how clearly opposed he is to oppression of the masses. It's as easy to call to mind historic cases of narrative coordinating good as evil. So it's not apparent what he wants here—to resurrect grand or "universal" narrative somehow stripped of its capacity to be imposed on us for purposes of oppression? Narrative is something more ad-hoc than it used to be. It's more specific and less sweeping. It's mostly for more local and limited coordination. In a certain sense it's not a problem of narrative collapse, but that our belief in grand narrative has *not yet* collapsed. Rushkoff's complaints and reluctance to drop this belief in *Present Shock* takes on that your-narrative-is-not-my-narrative kind of flavor.

Rushkoff makes a nice assessment of how misaligned corporate use of social networking is to the way individuals on social networks communicate. People on social networks swap facts—often "facts"—about brands (quality aspects, manufacturing practices, ethical issues) while the corporate tweets revolve not around anything factual or even counterfactual, but around the lore of the brand—an increasingly absurd narrative in an age of narrative collapse. He advises not just corporations but institutions in general should be "abandoning communications as a separate task, and instead just *doing* all the right things that you want talked about."

Narrative collapse also leads to what Rushkoff calls fractalnoia, something like pattern recognition in unhealthy overdrive: "While we may blame the Internet for the ease with which conspiracy theories proliferate, the net is really much more culpable for the way it connects everything to almost everything else…Of course, once everyone is connected to everyone and everything else, nothing matters anymore."

Fortunately there's an implicit economy even in connection and everything is *not* connected to everything else. It’s really sort of a strange claim to say that it is. Imagine a brain where every neuron was connected to every other neuron. It would be completely nonfunctional as a computational system. In the mean time an entire chapter of *Present Shock*'s total five is based on this false premise. Sorting conspiracy theory from the plausible is probably not too taxing for this book's audience. There's plenty of it out there, but it seems to be pretty well spontaneously segregated—i.e. it is not connected to everything else.

But maybe there's still some use in "Fractalnoia." Ruskoff points out how we have news agencies “chasing their own tails” to pin ex poste narrative to every stock market fluctuation. He offers the reader some helpful advice: “The trick is to see the shapes of the patterns rather than the content within them.” The next paragraph demonstrates how it’s done: “Charlie Sheen did not rise to Twitter popularity merely by being fired from his sitcom and posting outlandish things; he was filling an existential vacuum created in the wake of the Arab Spring story immediately preceding him.”

A lot of the book's interesting points are subsumed by an evil corporate narrative before they're allowed to get interesting. He takes a brief look at grain based medieval economies where the fact that the grain could rot and steadily devalue made for a different circulation dynamic, giving no incentive to hoard. But he quickly works this into a centuries-spanning narrative, making sure always to first personify corporations in order to vilify them properly. That we’re a preyed-upon consumer culture is a really stale point to be making in a book that's ostensibly about the present. Feudalism for Ruskoff is more than a metaphor for the current economic reality but is italicized and underlined in the charters of each of our corporate overlords. Unfortunately it's a narrative that works its way in and out of a good part of the book—like I can’t advise you “skip this section to avoid the whole Masons bit” (don't worry, he doesn't actually go as far as tying in the Masons). It doesn't really contribute anything to the present shock phenomenon, and disentangling his cranky prerogatives from the substantive material can get confusing.

The most enjoyable chapter was “Overwinding.” If you're the type that can read chapters or sections of books alone—I’m usually not—I recommend this chapter even if you don't plan on reading the rest of the book. He talks about the differences between time-keeping and timing (what the ancient Greeks called *chronos* and *kairos*) and distinguishes between ponds and streams, RAM and hard drive, storage and flow (although like signal and noise, all of these probably depend at some level on viewing perspective and Rushkoff doesn't really explore that). It's pseudo-metaphysical in the good way where it's not laden with a lot of philosophical jargon, and it's vague, but that's OK because it's sort of feeling out new conceptual metaphors. I would have liked to see this part expanded. (A good book along similar lines centered on decision making is Venkatesh Rao's *Tempo* .)

You could say that this isn't a book about solutions. If criticism is visionary solutions are implicitly indicated from it. That is, it points to a space that's being inadequately mined for solutions. I won't actually claim that *Present Shock* is radical in that way, but let's say it fits that format. The main shortcoming is that it's meant to be criticism but is moralizing instead—the difference being maybe that criticism stipulates that people move forward; moralizing stipulates that they revert, that they forego some pleasure or subdue some drive that is already taken for granted. Moralizing is basically annoying (because the moralizer, for whatever background reason, does not have to put in the same effort to restrain himself as the audience does). So we end up with “If we are kissing someone on the lips, then we are not poking anyone through our Facebook accounts.”—i.e. you use Facebook too much. And people who illegally share music are “music stealers.” We're left wondering whether Twitter feeds are hazardous because people stop thinking, or because *other* people stop thinking.

If you're coming to the book for something theoretical-ish, you're a good skimmer and your expectations are not too grand, *Present Shock* does cover some good ground and might be worth looking into. If you want a prescriptive approach to that overwhelmed feeling that the digital age has now long been famous for something like Howard Rheingold’s *Net Smart* would be a lot more satisfying.

Kevin O'Donnell says

Gave up on this midway through the second chapter, which is actually more than a third through the whole thing. I almost never quit books. (Perhaps because I am too selective up front?) This one, however, I gladly spurn.

First 100 pages were okay but rambling, disjointed, speculative, grabbag, etc.

Eventually though I couldn't stomach how much attention was being paid to pseudoscientific blather. And all of it sort of glossed over with an air of respectability. I lost the trust I had in the author. With it went any remnants of goodwill.

Here's a brief test instead of me dissecting a handful of pages: go to somaspace.org, read through some of the materials if you want (make sure to note that the friendly doctor—read chiropractor, a detail Rushkoff brazenly skips over—will, "if you really want," share his resume if you contact him), then think about how you would describe the website's owner, author, and subject: In what light? With respect to what authorities? As evidence/support of what broader argument/theory that you're making? (Btw you're a "media theorist" in this scenario.) How might you position him in the landscape of evidence-based medicine if not science writ large?

Now think about how you would want someone to describe him to you if they were given the privilege to opine freely, without interruption, and with only scattershot attempts at a thesis for the two-plus hours you've so far given them. When the subject is already pretty far afield from what you expected and its treatment less than rigorous. Remember, this is the first firsthand pseudo-expert you've brought in to make a point.

Done? Rushkoff introduces Filippi with nary a trace of irony as the "founder" of that site. (I founded my personal homepage, too!) He describes him as "putting... together... a comprehensive approach to the brain over time." As "building on his predecessors' work" by "analyzing the biochemical impact of seasonal and lunar rhythms." Etc.

Of course, given just a minute of sleuthing, you find that this man isn't a biochemist, nor a researcher, nor a scientist, nor even a doctor as we might commonly refer to one. He's certainly not a doctor in the fashion you're led to believe. Probably never took an introductory course in biochemistry. Probably couldn't pass one. When you turn to the endnote and see that the next few pages concerning the man and his study are all based on personal conversations over a couple of months last year, you begin to doubt either the sincerity of the author or his ability to discern between legitimate endeavorers and cranks, between what matters and what doesn't.

Then you return the book to the library.

(To partially change the subject: In order to gird myself for quitting, I tried to find what I'd previously heard about Tyler Cowen's prodigious and ruthless reading habits, particularly how bluntly he dismisses books he doesn't like. See:

When to Stop Reading a Book

As well as:

"Cowen's first rule of reading is as follows: You need not finish. He takes up books with great hope and no mercy, and when he is done—sometimes after five minutes—he abandons them in public, an act he calls ‘liberation.’"

Tyler Cowen, America's Hottest Economist

I vaguely recall him also destroying a book or two as well.)
