



Playing The Future

How Kids Culture Can Teach Us to Thrive in an Age of Chaos

Douglas Rushkoff. HarperCollins

I.D. Magazine

Narrative, like God, History, Theater and The Family is dead, Daniel Rushkoff reports in *Playing The Future*. The loss of logical linearity is a product, he says, of a growing technological organism as well as a general cultural fragmentation. It is in screenagers, however—kids in the mosh pits at raves, who watch TV shows like Barney the dinosaur and The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, play video and computer games like Dungeons and Dragons, skateboard across suburban malls and surf the World Wide Web—where the author sees the evolution of the species at work. Screenagers accept chaos and are more able to adapt to the irregularities of the contemporary landscape than their 'pre-chaotic' parents. Having little need for the hierarchical stories and linear traditions of narrative form, they opt for fractals over fairy tales. These survivors are natural inhabitants of the improvisational world of multiple endings and indeterminist forms created by new technologies. In the lives of screenagers, the author predicts, are the clues to future survival. But Rushkoff is no cultural Charles Darwin. He sounds more like a cross between a family values evangelist and a huckster for Viacom or Disney when he intones on behalf of 'our children' and their future in his often pretentious search for a unified theory of cultural chaos. All his hip posturing leaves him little energy to address issues like the effects of commercialism on young people and how their ironic defense mechanisms fit into his evolutionary equation. He makes few references to other authors or studies that would substantiate his ideas and his tedious prose seems to cover his intolerance of views other than his own. At the end of the book he angrily dismisses a woman caller on a talk-radio show who fails to see that the stories in the Bible are just not relevant anymore.

Like a freshman college paper with lots of promise and challenging issues, but little form or style, *Playing The Future* self-destructs into a pedantic and poorly argued essay on one of the most interesting questions of our time: how will culture be restructured by the powerful effects of digital media? If we're going to learn from our kids on how to cope with the digital future we're going to have to do better than Daniel Rushkoff's smug mind games.

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