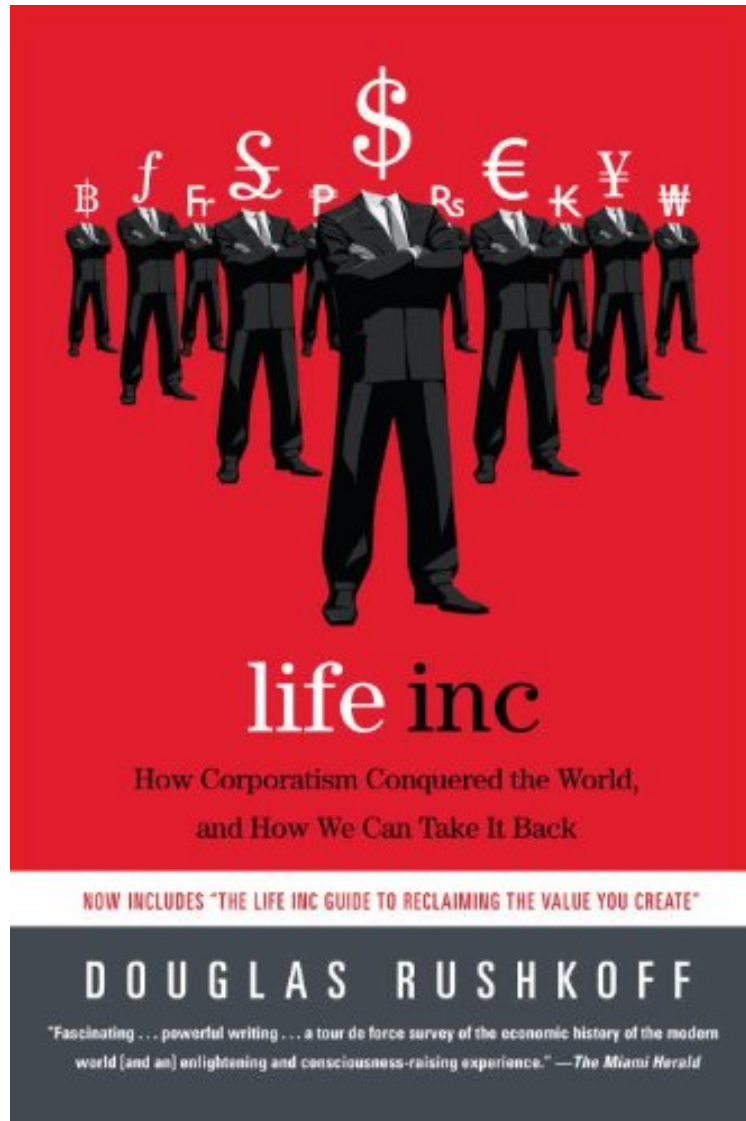


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Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back

Douglas Rushkoff

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Douglas Rushkoff : Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back:

127 of 132 people found the following review helpful. What can we possibly share with our peers in Life Inc.? By Marylene Delbourg-Delphis The book starts with a telling anecdote: the author, Douglas Rushkoff got mugged on Christmas Eve in from of his Brooklyn apartment, and instead of getting sympathy, he was basically urged to shut up

by local residents, afraid as they were that the incident would damage the reputation of their neighborhood, i.e. reduce the value of their home. "When faced with a local mugging, the community of Park Slope first thought to protect its brand instead of its people," Rushkoff writes. The anecdote is Rushkoff's starting point to analyze how, since the Renaissance, "the market and its logic have insinuated themselves into every area of our lives." He argues that they mediate every single aspect of our existence, disconnecting us from everything that surrounds us. The book is quite expectedly somewhat controversial -- yet may also be one of the most inspiring recent books for entrepreneurs and innovative marketers. Chapter after chapter, the author recounts how charters disconnected us from commerce, how by mistaking the map for the territory, we got disconnected from place, how the real estate business disconnected us from home, public relations from one another, consumer empowerment from choice, a unified financial architecture from the meaning of currency, big business from the creation of value - and how many of our attempts to combat corporate power are likely to disconnect us even more. "Brands were invented to substitute for the real connections we had to people, places and values." The system that we have created for ourselves through a "six-hundred-year-old-business-deal" is a "progress" that translates into a loss. The book reads like an inexorable dispossession of connectedness to people and our environment, and like a sobering appendix to the five ages of man that Hesiod outlined in Works and Days in 700 BC. From one tectonic shift to the other, we have landed ourselves in the Age of Simulacra: "Step by step, place became property, property became a mortgage, and mortgages became derivative instruments;" we depend on brands and ad-agencies for our self-presentation and identity; our "positive thinking" and self-confidence result from intense packaging efforts and "corporate-enabled self-improvement." We can buy Disneyland souvenirs in any shopping mall without ever having been to LA. Spiritual centers, from Esalen to the Omega Institute, are well-oiled businesses, and our speculative economy has deprived us from the ability to perceive the value we create or to even create value. Even the buzz and word-of-mouth is now mediated: "In Apple's earlier days, Macintosh enthusiasts could be counted on to go into CompUSA stores when new products were released and demonstrate their benefits to consumers. But today's brand enthusiasts are paid spokespeople, faking their loyalty for money. It's big economy. New firms such as Buzz Marketing and industry groups like WOMMA, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association now conduct word-of-mouth campaigns on a scale unimaginable before." So much for our friendly social sites! The book is phenomenally well documented and provides fantastic insights into some of the roots of the current financial debacle. The way the story is recounted is fascinating -- even if you may have questions about the angle taken by Rushkoff. One can argue that while it may be true that local trade using local currencies did foster more interactions between people and a thriving economy between the eleventh and thirteenth century, and that "real people did the best when prosperity was a bottom-up approach," the idea that the corporatist economy initiated by the Renaissance also initiated a downward spiral that all subsequent innovations only enhanced feels somewhat simplistic at times -- along with the assumption that mankind has somehow strayed from a better stage to a worse one. In the end, the evaluation of what connected/disconnectedness may depend on the frame of reference. Plato/Socrates fought the Sophists's ability to brand anything as a result of their disconnectedness from the essential, the realm of Forms and Ideas. The book is also an insightful approach to the history of the United States, full of interesting reminders. Mirroring the techniques of the railroad barons of the century before, GM crafted the legislation that made highways federally funded and controlled - and idealized suburbs. Yes, Teddy Roosevelt, fighting corporations, may have been more progressive than FDR when the latter endorsed the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) that changed the perception of mortgages (from a stigma to a plus), but ended up empowering appraisers as they assessed the quality of neighborhoods (and this to the detriment of Jews and blacks). The magic of PRs in the country has a unique ability to reframe or gloss over history. PR artists such as George Creel and Edward Bernays enabled Woodrow Wilson, who had run for reelection in 1916 on the platform that "he kept us out of the war," to persuade everybody "to make the world safe for democracy" a year later. In the same fashion, it's stunning how fast we forgot that IBM sold punch-card tabulators to the Nazis, that GE partnered with Krupp (a German munition firm) and that GM and Ford, which already controlled 70 percent of the German automobile market, retooled their factories to supply Nazis with war vehicles. As I say that, I can only suggest that you read a few foundational books in the history of marketing persuasion (of which many currently successful marketing books are spin derivatives), mentioned by Rushkoff, especially Edward Bernays's Crystallizing Public Opinion, Public Relations or Propaganda. While at it, also read Larry Tye's book, The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and The Birth of Public Relations. Also consider another classic: Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders or The Status Seekers. Also, Douglas Rushkoff has written several other interesting books. One of them, MEDIA VIRUS - Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture, is the origin of the expression "viral marketing." The last chapter of the book, "Here and Now," subtitled "The Opportunity to Reconnect," is in fact better than any marketing book, and may give you great ideas of companies that can make a difference. As the author reminds us in the previous chapter, PayPal's original plan was to offer an alternative payment service. True, the business model changed as Paypal activity was perceived as a violation of the banking laws. But you may have other ideas... and it's when they read scouring, abrasive books that entrepreneurs invent new rules -- and eventually might pave the way towards a new economy, or creatively revisit Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations. "Like the founders of America, who may have differed on almost everything else but this," notes Rushkoff, "Smith saw economics as characterized by small, scaled, local

economies working in interaction with one another." 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. More Documentation of How Corporatism Has Trumped Democracy By Ethos In Freefall More documentation of how corporatism has trumped democracy and reduced the world's population to slavery to an unjust, hierarchical economic system. Our lives have literally become defined by our monetary productivity and our personhood has become secondary to the sociopathic culture of accumulation of corporatism which has become the global dominant religion. Mr. Rushkoff is an excellent author. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Save the World; Do Your Homework! By Shunka Witco This book should be required reading for all Americans, starting with Corporate Heads, Bank Presidents and all Government Officials. Rushkoff brilliantly traces the roots of our present monetary system back hundreds of years, and makes crystalline clear the reasons that our present way of doing business cannot help but fail. Lucid, engaging and informative, he also offers tips and suggestions to help us undo the trap we've all been building for ourselves for centuries, and helps remove a great deal of the polarizing demonization of individuals or groups of people that has become so commonplace. Read this book, so that we can get on with the business of reversing the death-slide of corporatism and return to a way of life that values all equally and enriches rather than impoverishes.

Now includes "The Life Inc. Guide to Reclaiming the Value You Create"; Life Inc., award-winning writer Douglas Rushkoff traces how corporations went from being convenient legal fictions to being the dominant fact of contemporary life. The resulting ideology, corporatism, has infiltrated all aspects of civics, commerce, and culture; from the founding of the first chartered monopoly to the branding of the self, from the invention of central currency to the privatization of banking, from the Victorian Great Exhibition to the solipsism of Facebook. Life Inc. explains why we see our homes as investments rather than places to live, our 401(k) plans as the ultimate measure of success, and the Internet as just another place to do business. Most important, Rushkoff illuminates both how we've become disconnected from our world and how we can reconnect to our towns, to the value we can create, and, mostly, to one another. As the speculative economy collapses under its own weight, Life Inc. shows us how to build a real and human-scaled society to take its place.

.com Jonathan Lethem on Life Inc. Jonathan Lethem is the author of seven novels. A recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, Lethem has also published his stories and essays in The New Yorker, Harper's, Rolling Stone, Esquire, and the New York Times, among others. I once sat astonished in the audience at a conference on business law and copyright and watched as Douglas Rushkoff stood on stage and patiently, even gently, explained to a group of record company executives, who'd paid for the privilege of hearing him speak, why it was simply time for them to stop trying to rescue their industry. "You don't make anything of value," I believe he told them, with a tone of humane explanation. Ever since that moment Douglas has been one of my personal heroes, and I've been a most attentive reader of anything he cares to put between covers, knowing that his combination of a cold eye and a warm heart is guaranteed to astonish and embolden my own thinking about what's possible in the world--about what's possible to enact in the space between one human being and another. I don't exaggerate when I say he takes the potentially dry notion of 'public advocacy' and shifts it into the realm of epiphany, and art. That puts him with few living writers--Lewis Hyde, perhaps, and the British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips. Yet Rushkoff is perhaps even braver, or anyway lighter on his feet, working without the protection of any sort of ivory tower. He occupies the ground of our most immediate perplexities, and his reports of what he finds are breaking news. Life Inc. is Rushkoff's best and most important book. Few texts stand any chance of truly changing your mind, let alone saving the world. This is one of them. Rushkoff's the first to put the economic crisis in its greater historical and cultural perspective, and doing so, he reveals the underlying biases and embedded agendas of institutions we take for granted, from banking and central currency to corporations and even the suburbs. Rushkoff really works the manner of a historical philosopher, but without any off-putting jargon or air of self-reference you'd fear encountering within the discipline--he's writing for his readers. His fundamental gesture here is to reexamine the very meaning and use of the world-concept "corporation." You'll never use it again unthinkingly, nor consent to its automatic use in any conversation that's meant to be halfway serious. In Life Inc. we're given a concise and acute history of corporatism, from its origins as a way for feudal lords of the Late Middle Ages to maintain their monopolies on power, to its present expression in finance industry bailouts--consistently revealing things we take for granted as inventions with purposes that may not be serving us today. In Rushkoff's persuasive account, our acceptance of corporatism as a given leads us to internalize the values of corporations as our own. We use metrics like the GNP to measure our health as a nation, treat people as competitors or marks to be exploited, and the planet as a resource to be extracted. Each Wal-Mart purchase further bankrupts the local community, alienates us from our neighbor merchants, and makes us less likely to attend the PTA meeting. Life Inc. is a book to give your uncle the disenchanting union organizer, and your other uncle, the soon-to-be-disenchanting Tea Party activist. Rushkoff goes beyond the left/right dialectic to show how both political parties suffer from a dependence on highly centralized solutions and an unhealthy marriage to corporate interests that know no national allegiances. I recently wrote about the great John Carpenter movie, They Live, which concerns itself with magic

sunglasses that translate the corporate signage all around us back into the raw propaganda it really is at its root: a set of commands to WORK, CONSUME, SLEEP, OBEY. This book is those glasses, a lens for seeing deeper into the world you occupy, the commitments you've chosen, the money in your wallet. Read *Life Inc.* and you'll want to start organizing a local currency in your neighborhood, I promise you. From Publishers Weekly

Rushkoff (*Nothing Sacred*) offers a shrill condemnation of how corporate culture has disconnected human beings from each other. An engaging history of commerce and corporatism devolves into an extended philippic on how increasing personal wealth and the rise of nuclear families constituted a failure of community whose services are now provided by products and professionals. While he makes some good points—for instance, about how some laws are now written to favor the rights of corporations above the rights of human beings, and the phenomenon of pro-wealth spirituality as espoused by The Secret, Creflo Dollar and Joel Osteen—he skews wildly off-course lamenting how basic human activity... has been systematically robbed of its naturally occurring support mechanisms by a landscape tilted toward the market's priorities. • His unsupported and flawed assumption that societal interdependence is a natural or even preferable state for all people, everywhere, his disdain for filthy lucre and joyless recasting of independence as selfishness • will leave readers weary long before the end. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist Since the Renaissance, the corporation has formed and controlled people, and Rushkoff describes how it has infiltrated all aspects of American life. In the twenty-first century, we continue to consider corporations as role models and saviors but engage other people as competitors to be beaten or resources to be exploited. The author bemoans extreme networking (called buzz marketing), which makes our personal, social interactions become promotional opportunities and the lines between fiction and reality and friends and market become blurred. Our lives are overextended, and there is no time, energy, or commitment to do anything but work and perhaps consider family. Rushkoff recommends that we fight back by “de-corporatizing” ourselves. His suggestions include thinking locally by participating directly with our neighbors in community activities and using various Internet sites that provide opportunities to contribute directly to a particular school or to extend a “micro loan” to a specific entrepreneur in the Third World. This is an excellent, thought-provoking book. --Mary Whaley