

The Great Simplification

Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You're listening to The Great Simplification with Nate Hagens, that's me. On this show, we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together, where we go from here and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

Nate Hagens (00:00:33):

This week, we welcome Douglas Rushkoff to The Great Simplification. Douglas has spent nearly three decades studying and writing about technology and human behavior. He's the author of over 20 books. He's also created three documentaries and is professor of media theory and digital economics at CUNY, Queens College, where he founded the laboratory for digital humanism. Today, Douglas and I discuss how human behavior interacts with technology and how we've arrived at a place with enormous wealth, income, and inequality as society is also rapidly approaching biophysical limits. Douglas unpacks parts of his new book, *Survival of the Richest: Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires*, on the need for us to collectively break away from a top-down mindset in order to embrace circularity and resiliency. I'm pleased to welcome Douglas Rushkoff.

Nate Hagens (00:01:47):

I did read your recent book, which is coming out... *The Survival of the Richest*.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:01:55):

Yes. *Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires*. Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:01:59):

Yeah. We're going to get to that theme that is unspoken in there is we have to find a narrative about humanity and resilience in our time that transcends these meta techno utopia narratives and fantasies. Let's start there. How do you see that unfolding or give us a big overview of that and then we'll dive in.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:02:31):

Yeah, that's an interesting place to go. The narrative shape that most of us were raised with is the good old-fashioned Aristotelian narrative arc at crisis, climax, sleep. You have a character, they have a series of obstacles. They rise through the tension to a breaking point and then have some great recognition or reversal and they either win or lose, but the energy is expended and you're done. It's the narrative that's shaped Western civilization. It's colonialism, you borrow some money from the bank. You get your ship, you go to the West Indies or the East Indies. You fight a bunch of people. You take their stuff and you bring it back and the ship comes in. Today, you come up with a technology idea, you convince Sequoia Capital or Peter Thiel or someone to invest. You work and work and then have an IPO and you're done and you win.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:03:34):

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Look at life. You work really hard and save all this money so that you can then have a 401(k) plan and have retirement and go to the golf course. Or you were a good Christian and you do good things for people and all, and then you die and God judges you good, you go to heaven and the bad ones go to hell. It's that sort of narrative has shaped things for a long time. It's really the narrative of the Industrial Age, really the last 2,000 years, but certainly the industrial age and conquest and domination and win and all that. We've reached the end of the ability of that narrative to work. We ran out of places to go. If you're going to live like that, you got to go vanquish some people, take their stuff and then move on to the next one, and then move on to the next one.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:04:25):

We ran out of places. We reached the limits of those narratives and particularly business reached the limits of those narratives. What businesses do when they reach the limit of the ability to get money out of something, if they can't move on, is they go meta on what they have. If you've reached the limit of your stock to make money, you get a derivative on the stock. You go meta, one level of abstraction above the thing and you make money off the financialization. It's like what the Web2people were talking about when they said, "Don't have a web business, create a platform that aggregates everyone else's web business." That's the digital sensibility that we're in now, which is going meta on everything. Rising above and seeing the whole system at play, in some ways a useful thing.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:05:25):

It's like having this map of the territory that you can get above it and see it. Or you have a symbol system to represent reality. It's what postmodernists really were great at when they talked about, "Oh, there's the thing and then there's this word we used to represent the thing and then that makes a symbol and then the symbols can interact. Now we're working on the level of symbols. Then you could have meta symbols over that." The new narrative template that people are trying to use when the thing that they're doing runs out of blood. When we can't suck anymore out of it, like Facebook. What does Zuckerberg do? I'm going to go start Meta, not Facebook, but Meta. This is one level above, it's one step out. I think it's useful. It's fun. It's what Bertolt Brecht did with his plays.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:06:14):

We're not going to just have narratives. We're going to be watching the play. We are alienated from the play so we could see it from a distance and be rational and make better choices, not be sucked into the emotionality of it. It's not really working because right now this meta style of narrative is very dehumanizing. It's giving people the opportunity to see other human beings as cogs or as this problem, "Oh, then how do we get people to do this? How do we get people to do that?" People who are using that kind of language usually are people who've gone meta on the world and want to operate it more like a sysop of reality.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:06:56):

What I'm trying to do is to engender another set of narratives that don't have to do with the first set, which is all about winning and getting to the end and having an endgame and being the master or

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these newer ones, which are really the same thing, but winning means going meta, means going to Mars or getting above everybody else or uploading your psyche or being a meta wise ruler over things, but rather move into the moment to see everything that you're doing has an immediate impact on everybody around you to become a presentist, who's less concerned with cause and effect and a little bit more concerned with what are we doing for its own sake. It's a different narrative posture.

Nate Hagens (00:07:51):

I have 10 responses to your opening statement there. My first observation is that living in the moment in the now is the antidote to the meta framing. I see that, but in a way your book is critiquing the tech elite and the rationalists. What you just said there is almost critiquing my work and my efforts in a way, because what I've been trying to do, and I don't use the word meta, I'm trying to create a systemic overview of what humans face, how energy, anthropology, neuroscience, money, energy, debt, the environment, climate, social, and individual human behavior, all points to what I refer to as a great simplification. Am I scientifically also going meta? How would that fit into your critique? First question.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:08:49):

It's fine to be able to see things from above, but you don't live there then. Your solution set may not be executed from there. What you see is, "Oh, I've looked at all these systems the way they were all interacting. We're going to have to frigging simplify." The other approach that someone might go, if they go above it all and see it all from there think, "Oh, we're playing a God game like Civilization or SimCity. I think the solution here is going to be to erect some giant poles on the North Pole that somehow spit sulfur particles into the atmosphere, which will then through the fractal of atmospheric interaction, change the... Giant geothermal" or... "I've seen the way it is, now I need to convince humanity to take this drug or follow this principle, or go on this social network, or I'm going to build a network that binds together all of the social networks..."

Douglas Rushkoff (00:09:51):

What you've done is basically created scientific intellectual proof. You found the evidence through systems of what I'm saying. In other words, you're not going to live as a system, you're going to live in a system. The Great Simplification would ultimately mean meet your neighbors, share things, chop wood, make love, enjoy a sandwich with Joe. Every moment that you spend engaged in real time, making eye contact with another person is a moment that you're not contributing to climate change and environmental destruction and domination and exploitation.

Nate Hagens (00:10:32):

Okay. Two comments to that. Well, three. One, I totally agree with what you just said. Number two is using the medium of podcasting and the internet. I am actually reducing my own ability to live in the moment because my potato patch is completely consumed by Colorado potato beetles and weeds this year. As my girlfriend says, "I spend too much time worrying about the future and not enough time doing the chores around the farm." That's true. My third point to what you just said is, can a narrative of having a sandwich with Joe and making love with your partner and chopping wood and walking in

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nature, can a narrative of a simpler life compete with the TikTok hijacking of our brain that is accelerating by any month. Let me pose that to you.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:11:31):

Well, it's better and more fun.

Nate Hagens (00:11:33):

It's better. I don't know that it's more fun.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:11:36):

Oh, I think it is. The entertainments available on our devices are like the television set in the common room of a prisoner in an insane asylum. I'd rather watch repeats of the Golden Girls than sit in my cinder block cell, just like I'd rather move or go on Twitter than sit alone in my room, worrying about monkeypox. They're compelling in their way. Even, what makes these technologies addictive when they are, as we all know from neuroscience is not that they satisfy any need, it's that they don't satisfy the need. You get addicted to things that don't actually fill that void. If people can have the alternative, then I think they'll have a good time, but the alternative is really hard in a world where we are so afraid of each other, or we look at other people as marks to manipulate and where the object of the game of life for so many young people now seems to get more followers on a platform and become famous rather than engage meaningfully with other humans.

Nate Hagens (00:12:50):

I still have at least two follow-up questions. I'll even precede my two comments with this question. You were known as being a rave expert and aficionado 20 some years ago. Were you this articulate and used this many colorful adjectives before your rave years? Or have you always been this way because you have nine points in your paragraphs that I have to follow up on.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:13:14):

I've always been this way. I'm something of a lateral thinker. I make connections between things horizontally and that's part of being non-narrative non beginning, middle, end. For me it's always been so reassuring to see the patterns and see the way things are so self-similar across different things. I keep doing that as a way of saying see it's almost calming to people to see, "Oh right. That's just the way it is. It's that way at the gym and the restaurant and the bedroom and the stock market, so I can rest." It's something like your systems theory except done more from my experience on the ground, seeing the things. I don't have the actual vision to see how it's all connected and all that, which is okay. It's an experiential presentist anthropology that I'm doing.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:14:11):

I find it reassuring to me and to other people because then they're like, "Oh, you mean there's nothing I have to do." No. There's nowhere to go. There's nothing to do. Look at all these guys, all the wealthy guys, everything for them is about an exit strategy, right? They need a frigging exit strategy. They're

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starting businesses with exit strategies because they've got to run. Their relationships have exit strategies and prenuptial agreements. Everything's got an exit strategy. When you're living and building with exit strategies in mind, you end up creating a world that requires an exit strategy, which is where we're at today and going, "Wait a minute. There's nowhere to go." I was raised by well-meaning wonderful immigrant American parents who lived in a really bad neighborhood growing up.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:15:02):

The object of the game for them... I do not blame them. I'm not criticizing them. You live in a bad neighborhood. What do you do? Make enough money to get out of the bad neighborhood and get somewhere better. That was good. I get it. It's beautiful. Now, I look at it and go, "Wait a minute. The whole world is becoming a bad neighborhood." You can't earn enough money to get out of this neighborhood. It's like, "No, we're finally at that place. Don't move." You can't move. You got to actually make the neighborhood a place that's livable.

Nate Hagens (00:15:34):

What you're saying is that to incorporate my worldview a little bit-

Douglas Rushkoff (00:15:39):

My worldview comes from your worldview. Your work really scared and then changed me. Before your work, I still half believed that if we just transition fast enough, faster to green, good, solar, electric, something, then it'll all be okay, we're just going too slow. Your work helped me see, "Oh wait a minute. If we go really fast, we're going to have to dig so much shit out of the ground, we're all going to die." You can't get that much molybdenum out of this planet to transition to whatever it is and I was like, "That was a relief in a way, because it was like the last gasp of techno solutionism was robbed from me. I could finally surrender to now. In the best of ways we get to make do. This is it. We're here. Stop using so much frigging energy. It's just that easy."

Nate Hagens (00:16:43):

You were already in the mind space that technology from a demand human behavior standpoint isn't going to solve things or improve our lives. My work made you realize that even from a supply side, it wouldn't be able to do that, so you've merged the two.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:17:01):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:17:03):

The energy surplus that we are drawing down our fossil mineral and energy bank account 10 million times faster than it was sequestered, has enabled this economic pulse of riches basically for our culture. What you are saying is that those riches created this accordion of hierarchy and incentive and ultimately a growth-based economic system that became transactional and became win versus lose as opposed to live in the moment and experience.

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Douglas Rushkoff (00:17:46):

Yeah, this stuff, this acceleration of extractive riches is not genuinely human demand for those things. It's market demand. People don't need these more energy expensive things. We don't. My dad had one transistor radio that he bought when he went to the army that he gave me when I joined the Boy Scouts that I still have. It works. It's fine, it's fine. He took care of it. It was expensive, I guess. It was fine. Having all these upgrades and all these things, it doesn't actually make things better. It feeds the market's need.

Nate Hagens (00:18:30):

We've become so many hundreds of millions of hungry ghosts, where we expect technology and monetary markers to satisfy our demand, but it's a treadmill. As evidenced in my own life, I used to have a house in North Carolina and I had one in Ohio and now I live in Wisconsin and I have a storage shed that I pay \$125 a month. It's 10' x 20' packed solid with stuff from my old house. I haven't opened it in seven years. All this stuff, so that's what? Eight grand I've paid to store stuff that gave me dopamine when I purchased it, has some economic value, so I haven't discarded it. It's a fricking trap that the wanting is stronger than the having in our culture. We need to buy more to get our short-term fixes. Part of that is because of the economic system and the momentum. Part of it is because of marketing and advertising, and part of it is because of our social natures that we look around and other people are doing the same thing, so we think it's normal.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:19:43):

I don't blame the people as much as the companies. If you buy an Epson printer, Epson printers have software in them that brick them after a certain number of pages. They justify it. They say, "Oh, well there's a sponge in the computer that will eventually get saturated and then it might leak on your thing." The people at Epson want you to get a new printer and are happy for you to throw this one in the landfill because they make more money.

Nate Hagens (00:20:11):

I would argue, I would take it a step further. I don't blame the corporations. I blame the system that was evolved that incentivizes them to do behaviors like that.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:20:21):

Right. Epson who comes up with that idea for them to make more money is listening to the shareholders. The shareholders are listening to the VCs. The VCs are listening to the banks. Again, we're back to an economic operating system that was invented by 13th-century monarchs. That's an interest-based central currency that makes money by lending it out and getting it back at interest. That's why we have to grow our economy and all these tech heads who think they understand operating systems and think they're going to disrupt this or disrupt that. The one thing they won't disrupt is venture capital. Marc Andreessen, Elon Musk, all of them, they become venture capitalists rather than undermining or disrupting daddy's real plan for people.

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Nate Hagens (00:21:10):

I assume that you don't think that we can program our technology to solve the problems that tech has created.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:21:18):

No, but I think we can build technology with a very different premise in mind. I think right now we're building technology from the perspective of how can I get people to look more, buy more, click more whatever, right? We build technologies that act on people. I think we could think about, "Well, what if we build technologies that allow people to act?" I know it's heresy, but technologies that are tools that people could use to accomplish things they want to do or get done. That would just be interesting.

Nate Hagens (00:21:55):

Could you just give an example of that, even if it's hypothetical?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:21:59):

Well, like a shovel, right? It helps people dig holes. A telephone helps a person talk to another person far away. A television lets someone see something that's happening somewhere else. These are tools. Even the automobile to some extent was to help somebody get from one place to another, and that's fine. When we reshape the American landscape around the needs of the automobile company. When we decide, "Oh, in order to sell more cars, which is going to be good for America because they'll hire more employees, let's zone things so that people live at least car distance away from the place they work." That'll require them to buy cars. That'll be good for GM stockholders. It'll be good for GM employees and good for America. As long as you don't worry about any limits on our physical reality, you could keep going that way forever.

Nate Hagens (00:23:07):

We didn't have to worry about limits for the longest time, but now I think they're upon us. I don't know if you saw this Douglas, but French President Macron yesterday spoke the quiet part out loud. He said that the era of abundance is ending. I was shocked because I didn't think to hear words like that from a leader of one of the G7 nations. Europe is really in a pickle right now. Energy prices are 15 to 20 times what they were 18 months ago. Natural gas is \$90 an MCF. Whereas in the United States, it's seven.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:23:56):

Right. The thing is it's not genuine abundance. There's all sorts of abundance that we get if we stop understanding the burning of stuff as abundance.

Nate Hagens (00:24:09):

You're right. Well, the burning of stuff gives... Well, in my video, which you've seen, I have a sentence that, "We're turning billions of barrels of ancient sunlight into microliters of dopamine." It gives us fleeting experiences, but it's not real abundance because once it's gone, it's gone and what remains is

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the more acidified oceans and depleted ecosystems for other species. The energy can't be burned again for other generations or maybe some really important stuff that we might want to use it for.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:24:46):

It's the era of waste is over. We end up with something more abundant. We get more abundance of spirit, abundance of joy, abundance of connection, all those other abundances that we've surrendered to really the abundance of the market as executed through the extraction of fossil fuels from the planet.

Nate Hagens (00:25:10):

Well, if you look at the amount of GDP per capita in the United States over the last 70 years, it's this 45 degree angle, pretty much straight line up. If you look at the percentage of Americans that are happy or very happy, it's flat line to slightly declining. Right there it's evidence that material abundance does not equal spiritual, psychological, physical abundance. It's like we're in this treadmill, this rat race that we're being pulled forward by... We've outsourced our decision making to the financial system. I would argue, and I do argue that billionaires and politicians are enthralled to this dynamic. This dynamic is like we're fueling a runaway train until we run out of fuel and then it's going to hit a wall and we have to respond and prepare. Personally, that's what you said earlier. We're going to have to roll our sleeves up and do things in the now. I don't think there are any solutions to this dynamic. I think there are a million responses depending on who you are, what you care about, where you live, what you're doing, what your vocation is.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:26:29):

Right. The more of us who respond appropriately, the less disastrous and calamitous hitting the wall is going to be.

Nate Hagens (00:26:38):

That's where your work and mine intertwine. Given your lifelong research on technology and media. How is it possible for a human to make the phase shift in their mind and in their behaviors that they realize that these TikTok and these YouTube algorithms that are sucking them into being a hungry ghost with their online activities and maybe their consumption activities in real life. How does it happen that a human develops the discipline and maturity and control to move beyond that towards spirituality wellbeing, psychological maturity, and is able to turn that impulse off towards meeting the future halfway in the way that you're envisioning. It's possible. For sure, it's possible.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:27:37):

Yeah. First off, I don't want to suggest that most people are to blame.

Nate Hagens (00:27:45):

Yeah. I don't think anyone's to blame really. We're in a situation nobody's to blame, but we're all complicit in a way.

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Douglas Rushkoff (00:27:51):

When you've got 80 families that own half of the world's wealth or whatever it is. There's a little blame that we could start talking about. There are a few people with a whole lot of money. When the system reaches the endpoint that it's at, when it gets this brittle. The reason why it's this brittle is because the Gini number, the distribution of wealth is becoming absolute. There's a few people who have all of it and everyone else is really poor.

Nate Hagens (00:28:19):

I agree with that, but is it their fault though? Some of them are certainly sociopaths, but is it their fault? They're following the rules of this metabolic economic growth system that you just said started in the 13th century when interest bearing debt was invented.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:28:35):

Well, it's their fault because if they're that wealthy and they're affecting that much change through their actions, they should be more educated and informed about what they're doing. That aside, I don't want to suggest that the person addicted to Twitter is also responsible for all this stuff. Yes, each of us is a high leverage point, but the way I would engender a different society, it takes a while. I would think of school differently. I would be less results and job oriented in school and much more socially oriented. I have more kids show up each year in my college classes with a note from their psychiatrists saying, "Please excuse Johnny from classroom participation because he has social anxiety." That's not good and people are thinking that you go to school in order to get pumped as data from these teachers, which is why then they're happy to throw everybody on an iPad. For school, it's like, "No, no, no. You got to use whatever time we have." Certainly institutional time like that to have people engage live and learn to make eye contact, things like that.

Nate Hagens (00:29:52):

To be clear, I wasn't saying that the people that are addicted to Twitter are to blame.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:29:58):

No, I know you weren't. I just wanted to make sure they didn't feel blamed.

Nate Hagens (00:30:01):

Yeah. Okay. Thank you for that. I think a lot of people, especially with the attention to polarization and addiction and the algorithms and AI and all that, I think a lot of people recognize this is unhealthy for our society and unhealthy for themselves. What is the breakthrough as an individual to say, "I'm going to be in charge of my social media usage instead of the social media usage being in charge of me. I recognize there's a great simplification or post growth or end of growth or something different that's a less material consumption future in the distance. I'm going to live more in the moment than be hijacked by these technology." What is the path by which an individual human recognizes, takes ownership and makes behavior change in that realm?

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Douglas Rushkoff (00:31:03):

It's hard. I had a bunch of answers and I thought a lot of people were following them, whether it was the Burning Man, psychedelic kids, my friends in Portland and San Francisco who are doing free love and organic food and all. Then I've seen so many of them seduced by the blockchain. Now they're thinking, "Oh, well I've got a Web3 based eco solution. I'm like, "Wait a minute. What do you need that for? What are you doing?" Well, so that we can go global, so that we can scale the solution. You need to scale it. Why do you want to... I was saddened by how easily people believe in and want to contribute to that kind of funeral pyre called Bitcoin.

Nate Hagens (00:32:00):

Let's talk about that real briefly, because that sounds like another example of win versus lose. They're not enthralled with blockchain because they see it necessarily as the social answer to our cultural problems, but because they want to get in earlier on a speculative trend and win so that they have a little bit bigger cushion for an exit strategy. There's that, right?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:32:30):

Yeah. It's always in the background. It's like, "Oh, this is good for the world, and if you get in now, you're going to get a token that I promise it's going to be worth a lot more really soon."

Nate Hagens (00:32:39):

Personally, I actually do think there's a 50% chance that Bitcoin goes to zero and a 50% chance it goes to 500,000 or a million or something like that. That's not because it's changing society, that's because we are headed for a time... Look at Japan and Europe as near term examples, where tightening our belts and recognizing that the year of abundance is over and we're going to have to consume less, is not going to be politically popular. We're going to have to forgive debt like Biden did yesterday and give more stimulus like we did in 2020 or guarantee Italian and Spanish bonds by the ECB or Japanese Central Bank buying 50% of Japanese stocks and a higher percentage of that are Japanese bonds. We're going to create more financial claims on reality than the biophysical reality supports. Therefore, things like Bitcoin will probably go up.

Nate Hagens (00:33:46):

I do question the efficacy of Ethereum and blockchain and some of these other things as social answers, because what's going to happen with more efficiency using web3 is, yes, it's true that you can create a mortgage contract using the smart blockchain technology that's totally proven and trusted. Therefore, the mortgage broker no longer needs to exist. You can do it for cheaper without him or her using the blockchain, but we still need the house and the house requires energy and materials and stuff. I do not think that cryptos gets us away from the biophysical requirements of our system. Number one, and number two is I think the whole thing accelerates our wealth and income inequality. I don't buy that blockchain is going to make us share the wealth because I think the people that get in first are going to own so many tokens that if crypto does manage to go up 10X from here or 20X or whatever, there will be some trillionaires and a lot of people will have nothing.

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Douglas Rushkoff (00:35:04):

Exactly, reducing the friction of an unjustly organized economy will just increase the division of wealth more rapidly.

Nate Hagens (00:35:13):

Exactly. I agree with that.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:35:15):

Right. Just as digital technology, the refusal of technology developers to challenge the underlying operating system of corporate capitalism really just means that their digital technologies are pumping steroids into capitalism as already practiced. Capitalism was dangerous enough and extractive enough in the coal mining era and to accelerate it to this extent, it's bringing these apocalyptic possibilities much more rapidly into the road ahead, which is why I wrote about these guys. The technologists are the ones who see it first. They see it coming. They know. They're the ones who are calling me for advice on their bunkers, on their Mars missions, on their domes. I'm not saying I blame them, but they're the ones, it's the Andreessen's and Thiel's and Musk's who have to be shown a better way. Who have to be taught the way through is way better than the way out.

Nate Hagens (00:36:22):

I have a quote that I'm going to read you from you. You wrote it, not in your book, but in your newsletter that you sent out this morning. I don't know what you would call that? Your Substack or whatever people will subscribe to, which I have since I met you, "We must recognize the tech billionaire who has enough money and sovereignty to build a private space program through which to secure his own safe passage away from the rest of us as the loser who has squandered his opportunity for community and solidarity, not the winner who doesn't need it." What do you think about that?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:37:00):

I agree with that. I was thinking about when I saw Jeff Bezos on MSNBC, when he did his launch of the Blue Origin thing. He comes back and Stephanie Ruhle, who I usually was weak-kneed like, "Oh my God, what you just did." What was the achievement there? We've been shooting people up into space since like John Glenn and Alan Shepard, right? It wasn't the achievement, but the achievement there was that a single dude was able to do this without NASA, without government, without collaborators, that he could do it himself. That's sort of sad.

Nate Hagens (00:37:45):

I have a lot of thoughts on this. First of all, I think the best thing to come out of that Bezos shot into space was William Shatner, Captain Kirk was aboard one of those and he came down and you could tell that he was so visibly moved as a human. Of course, we all remember him as Captain Kirk. There was this weird thing there, but he was crying. The earth is so profoundly beautiful from outer space and we're all bickering and fighting and polarized out here. We're this tiny blue marble floating in space

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and it took him to get that vantage point, which some people call the overview effect, to feel that. Let's talk about this compulsion.

Nate Hagens (00:38:33):

I think it's in a system that has an accordion of wealth aspiration is like the human compulsion of so many hundreds or thousands of people every year that climb Mount Everest, is there's another horizon. There's a mountain to climb and we're not satisfied with what we have here, which is why this whole let's go and grab resources from asteroids and let's colonize Mars, and we're going to science the shit out of it and grow potatoes even though there's no photosynthesis there. I think it's a real cultural carrot that even though people, if they really thought about it, there's eight billion of us. Well, not eight billion of us going to Mars. There might be 20 and Mars is going to be in the worst global thermonuclear war runaway 8.5 climate scenario Venus, hothouse Earth is going to be a paradise compared to Mars.

Nate Hagens (00:39:37):

This whole thing I think is this dopamine carrot that is completely not grounded in reality. I fully believe that we're headed for an Earth trek future, not this colonizing outer space because all of our prior sojourns into space were based on the economic and energy surplus of the day, which we're about to hit a wall and not have. I think the most insightful thing that I've thought while you're talking now is rather than have stories about The Great Simplification to the general public to prepare people for what's coming. It might be a better effort to persuade the Elon Musk's and Jeff Bezos's of the world, what the world really needs in the next 10 or 20 years and it ain't looking at the stars for the next dopamine conquest.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:40:31):

Right? Well, the one way to convince them that is to have us not worship them for thinking that way. Elon Musk has so many young fans who really believe that his way is the way that you get escape from the planet.

Nate Hagens (00:40:54):

We educate those young people about our biophysical and our neural realities on what really gives humans satisfaction and meaning and community, and then they-

Douglas Rushkoff (00:41:04):

Yeah, to the extent that educating them about it helps them pursue it. I think we just offer them different models of experience. These guys are role models for them right now, and they are terrible role models. Elon Musk believes it's okay to sacrifice the lives and experiences of the eight billion people now, in order to dedicate ourselves to the 10 trillion that he thinks are going to be star seeding the Universe.

Nate Hagens (00:41:36):

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This is Nick Bostrom's logic and McAllister just wrote a book, What We Owe The Future. Are you aware of that thinking?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:41:45):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:41:46):

Personally, I think that line of logic is ecocidal. It's ecology blind and ecocidal. What I've discovered in talking with people in Silicon Valley and talking with farmers and biophysical economists is that a lot of these tech bros and these wealthy Silicon Valley elites, some of them are really good people. They view the world from an ecology lens and not an ecology lens. Here's something that a lot of people forget. You're well aware in my story, that we use a 100 billion barrels of ancient sunlight per year, which works out to fossil labor force of around 500 billion human labor equivalents. Since you and I are around the same age, Douglas. Since you and I have been on this planet, every single year our culture has had a higher access to this energy subsidy than the year before, other than 2020, 2009 and a couple years in the '70s.

Nate Hagens (00:42:55):

All of our technological plans, all of the technology of today and our aspirations and narratives about the future are subsidized by this invisible energy surplus that has been getting bigger globally every single year and that is going to start to decline in the next decade. Then what does technology do for us?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:43:18):

Right. Well, aren't we supposed to have, what's his name? Hubbert's peak or something?

Nate Hagens (00:43:22):

Do we want to go there? That's a really complicated story.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:43:25):

I don't know. That's the thing, it's complicated, but I was thinking originally that as we run out of energy and it becomes really expensive, then people will naturally start changing their behavior. You know what I mean? If gas costs 10 or \$20 a gallon, even if you elect Trump that doesn't change and you stop using it.

Nate Hagens (00:43:46):

Natural gas right now is the equivalent of \$20 a gallon in Europe. If you price natural gas in oil terms today it's \$550 a barrel in Europe. This is starting to happen. I have two things. Let me briefly say about Hubbert's peak. He was right that the United States peaked in 1970. He thought the world would peak in the year 2000. He was wrong about that. Part of the reason was because of debt and credit

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and globalization. What we've done is we've used debt to pull energy forward in time. I would argue that 2018, November probably was the peak in global oil production. The decline rate is now going to be sharper because we've used all this shale and other things. I think the peak is upon us now.

Nate Hagens (00:44:38):

The second point I would make, this is an open anthropological question for you, Douglas. When things get worse and when our economic times get tougher and when energy gets less affordable and less available, will we on mass acknowledge that reality and make behavior change like you just suggested? Or will we paradoxically swing for these tech narratives even more because they give us the dopamine and the comfort of some fantasy. Even though we subconsciously don't think it might happen, it offers us a mental escape route. What do you think about that?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:45:25):

No, I think a third thing is what happens and it's not cheery. The shortest way of saying it is, we'll blame the Jews. That's what we do.

Nate Hagens (00:45:35):

We'll create an out-group and it's someone else's fault that brought us here.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:45:38):

Right, then that will keep us occupied. The more we attack them and kill them and isolate them the greater our mythological superstitious belief that there're secret ones somewhere else that are still doing this thing. It's how we've done it before. The difference though is that these are extinction level problems. Rather than it just being widespread poverty in the villages of Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. Let's blame these Jews and make people feel better for a while about it. Now these sort of existential problems, that, again, we'll still blame on an outgroup of some kind, because the most logical scenario is we put some authoritarian leaders in place. Then when the authoritarian leaders can't solve our problems, because they're just really kleptocrats taking wealth from the system.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:46:43):

Those leaders then will blame the out-group and people will be so angry and hungry and poor that they will be pretty easily convinced to attack the out-group. That sort of scenario I'm feeling will be there first, which is why we need to do things that will engender solidarity among people. If we can move towards commons based management of resources, even on a small local level, that these experiences will change people's understanding of the others in their neighborhoods and in their world.

Nate Hagens (00:47:22):

Well, we're doing it already with Putin and Ukraine and Russia. We're blaming them for what's going on. How do we do that? How do we engender solidarity locally? Do you have any examples or models?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:47:36):

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Worker-owned businesses are a great start, then all of a sudden there's no boss, we're the boss. What is that? It's not long distance shareholders that own your company or even a local CEO. We're seeing a lot of that. A lot of boomer-owned businesses. The boomers kids don't want to take them over. They're letting the employees buy the business and then it's changing the way those businesses operate and it's changing the neighborhoods where those businesses are because all of a sudden now the business is concerned, "Well, we live here. What do we want from this business? We want it to contribute to the schools? We want it to not pollute our area? We want it to create jobs for our kids? We want it to build residences for older people?" All of a sudden, business has become more integrated with our communities rather than extractive of them.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:48:23):

There are examples for better or for worse. Some of the local schools movements are interesting. The chartered school movements with parents coming. Usually, white parents who want to say they're sending their kids to public school, but don't want them in with those other kids from over there, so they create an elitist little school. There's still mechanisms for people regaining control of their local utilities. The rebirth of public libraries. Public libraries are something I could not imagine us having the courage or fortitude to start today, but the fact that they still exist, we're starting to see them as cultural hubs. Again, a public library models what a commons is. What do you mean our town owns these books and I can just take one anytime I want and read it, as long as I can bring it back. I can't tear it up or I'm going to lose my card. There's enforcement, it's like, "Oh, that's how it works." I think we are starting to see that. It's just they're in places that are more subtle and more local than most of us are usually willing to look.

Nate Hagens (00:49:28):

I don't know if Josh Farley. He was my PhD advisor and he runs... He's a professor of community development applied economics at the University of Vermont. His research shows that humans that cooperate, it's like lifting weights for your muscles, that the act of cooperating itself becomes additive. That then you want to do more cooperation. If we could have models of that in communities... I don't know what to do with what's coming, but if I had one thing, it would be to build social capital and social networks ahead of the economic upheaval that's coming. I know you from prior conversations, you agree with that. Question is how do we scale that? A question I would pose you is how do we scale that in the face of all these tech narratives that capture people's attention and clicks and dollars. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Douglas Rushkoff (00:50:34):

We can't scale it. We can replicate it. We can model it. What we're talking about, doesn't happen at scale. It sounds like I'm critiquing it, but I'm not. That's the danger of the systems thinking is we've made the analysis on that level, but I don't believe we can find the solution set on that level. I think then it will help us confidently return to our villages and neighborhoods and do the things that we need to do without worrying about them scaling. Instead, we can come up with great ideas and do them and then let other people replicate them. If workers buy a window making factory and have great success doing

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that. We write about it. We post it and let other people try to do it too. That in a sense that's scaling, but it's not scaling in the way that we think of scale. It's more distributing the knowledge.

Nate Hagens (00:51:36):

To summarize the systems ecology overview of the human predicament is important to know. Then once you know it, you have to discard it and start building from the ground up in your community.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:51:50):

I think you may. In Judaism, we have the beth midrash and the synagogue. The synagogue is where you pray and you get all the great spiritual feelings and stuff. The beth midrash is where you actually argue out the law. The rabbis used to say, "If you get to a new town, you find out where the synagogue is, walk to the synagogue. You find out where the beth midrash is, run to the beth midrash." I feel like the knowledge that we're gaining, the systems knowledge, is in a way like the synagogue. It helps us see the big picture. It's James Kirk going or William Shatner going into space and seeing, "Oh, I get it." Humane technology friends going to Burning Man and doing a lot of acid and seeing, "Oh, these social networks are really fucked up for people." Or Peter Thiel go into the Amazon and doing a bunch of ayahuasca and seeing, "Oh," Then what do you do when you come back? It's so much more local and immediate and moment to moment.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:52:57):

That unfolds the big thing. We've got access to the system. That's the beauty of systems. We are the butterflies flapping our wings. You don't need to be running the New York Stock Exchange to deflate the entire economy.

Nate Hagens (00:53:12):

You are a firm believer in bottom-up response to what's coming.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:53:16):

I'm a firm hoper in a bottom-up response to what's coming. I just feel each of us will do so much less damage with our errors if we enact our plans for a just and environmentally friendly world, as individuals seeing what catches on rather than as great reset policy and actors doing stuff on a global or cosmic level.

Nate Hagens (00:53:49):

I don't disagree with that.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:53:51):

I just want to be informed. That's why I need you, right? I need people like you is so that when I call you and say, "Dude, do I buy a Tesla or do I buy a car that's like this?" And you say, "Doug, if your car works, keep the car you have and try to use it as little as possible, okay?" Yeah, "Okay, Nate, I got it."

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You've done the research, you know. There's people out there who really believe that they should trade in their car and buy a Tesla in order to do less damage, even though their car has another 10 years in it.

Nate Hagens (00:54:25):

Well, that's a clear answer on that example. Yeah.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:54:29):

My local things are stupid unless they're informed by smarter people.

Nate Hagens (00:54:35):

Or not necessarily smarter people, but more systemically aware people.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:54:39):

Yeah, just who understand what's going on. Who can tell me, "Look, all right. If you are going to do solar, that's cool. There's all these other things you got to know about solar before you..." I'm going to transition my whole town to solar by the end of Thursday.

Nate Hagens (00:54:54):

Well, the other challenge with solar in addition to the things that you and I have talked about on your podcast and our private calls is I had someone come recently to do an estimate on my office here to install solar. I just wanted a certain amount of kilowatt-hour potential and they were like, "No, in case you add more appliances, you want to overbuild." It's like, we haven't gotten away from the more is better dynamic in our culture. They couldn't sell me just enough for what I have now and just a portion of what I have. They wanted to outfit the whole thing in a 1.5X way. That's not going to change until our cultural balance sheet changes. I don't think. Like you say it starts from people in their communities recognizing, "You know what? The best choice for me is to keep my car, because it has 10 years more." Then those individual's decisions, other people see them and it makes sense.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:56:00):

The level at which I'm trying to work it now using my skills, what I do and not to keep bringing it back to this frigging book. I thought, what if I write a book that gets people laughing rather than crying. Let's laugh. Here's five billionaires asking me for bunker strategies. Here's Richard Dawkins and his scientism friends telling me that I'm a silly moralist and then ending up on Jeffrey Epstein's plane, right? Hang in the Lolita Express and catering to his eugenic understandings of the world. If we can laugh at these guys, at these billionaires. If we can see the pathos in their winning and realize, "The last thing I would want to do is be one of these frightened little billionaires spending all of their energy and staying up at night, worrying about whether they're bunker is hermetically sealed against monkeypox.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:57:05):

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It's like, "Oh, I don't want to be like Musk. I don't want to buy Dogecoin because he tweeted it. I don't want to become the next Jeff Bezos with a forest inside my company or an Apple with a frigging fortress with a giant moat around it or whatever. I'm not afraid of girls. I'm going to talk to one."

Douglas Rushkoff (00:57:33):

I think old people are cool and wise. I don't want to shut them up. I'm happy, if they don't have a retirement plan and need to come over and hang out with me. I'm going to get this 90 year old's wisdom. It's just like, to be able to laugh at this. It's not a tragedy what we're living through. It's a black comedy. We've elevated the silliest people. We've elevated people who stopped thinking when they were children. Who stopped going to school at 19. Who believe that people should be encouraged not to go to college, so they could just do stupid things sooner. It's like, "This is laughable." If we laugh at it, then it's not a tragedy, then it's a comedy because these people are smaller than us, not bigger than us. We can go about our lives and have so much more fun and meaning and play together if we're not worried about trying to become the next one of them.

Nate Hagens (00:58:30):

We just need more people to recognize the truths and what you just said and walk away from the narrative.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:58:38):

Rather than me, I wouldn't say we need more people to get what I'm saying, because I feel it's a little hubristic, but I would say I am very interested to see that if more people are laughing at the aspirations of our billionaire class, if that might just help trigger a less extractive selfish individual understanding of success.

Nate Hagens (00:59:11):

Maybe a movie or a Netflix show to that extent.

Douglas Rushkoff (00:59:16):

Yeah, but something dilemma. It's funny, if I was going to do a manifesto now, I did Team Human, was my manifesto to say just find the others. I feel like I may do the most good by signing off by doing a mic drop of a real kind because what I'm doing now by having a podcast and writing books, modeling the idea that, "Oh, you should have ideas and then spread them as far and get famous and listen to the sound of your voice." I think everyone should have their turn, but then maybe the smartest thing I do is disappear. Continue being a public school teacher at college in my neighborhood. Be available if people have questions or want know something, but sign off and go extremely local as a way, "What did Rushkoff do? Where Rushkoff go?" Oh, Rushkoff, he hung up the phone. He's living. He like, "Oh." Maybe that's the answer.

Nate Hagens (01:00:21):

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I see the appeal of that, but at the same time, I also tell my students that now is the time to maximize our impact, not minimize it. If you consider AI and YouTube and Spotify and all the tools we use as the tools of the devil, at least we can use them to do God's work metaphorically. I forgot who told me that analogy. I hear you. There are a lot of times that I don't want to do this and I don't like the rules of the game, but we're in the game and to make an impact on other humans. I think at least for now we have to continue to spell out why being happier and healthier does not require billions and why we could laugh at some of the idiosyncrasies and flawed logic of these tech elite. I think you have to explain that to more people before they're able to laugh at it because the marketing and advertising and AI driven algorithms are so freaking powerful in our current world.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:01:31):

If we do it then, we have to do it in a way that doesn't employ their dastardly tactics at the very least. In other words, you don't push this post. There's a difference between the kinds of cultural expression we're doing and the manipulative propaganda of the others.

Nate Hagens (01:01:58):

You're far more of an expert on this than I am, but I could argue that both in your book and on this podcast, the content there're in, there will be some algorithms that will downregulate this conversation.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:02:13):

Yeah, that's what the algorithms are for.

Nate Hagens (01:02:16):

Yeah. It's happened to me on a couple of my podcasts. I'm like, "How could no one have liked that?" It's a very uncomfortable thing that was talked about. I have a few more questions that are of the personal nature that I ask all my guests, if you have a few more minutes?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:02:34):

Sure, especially if they're personal.

Nate Hagens (01:02:38):

You are a college teacher? What's the name of your class that you teach?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:02:43):

It depends on the semester. Right now I'm teaching propaganda to undergraduates and I'm teaching a course called interactive storytelling, which looks at how do you tell stories in interactive media where you no longer have total authorial control over your story?

Nate Hagens (01:03:01):

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In the propaganda, is it to teach students what it is and how to avoid it or how to be adept at creating it?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:03:09):

A little of both. It's more to come to recognize when propaganda is being used and the ethical arguments that its practitioners have made over time for why it's appropriate. There are people like Walter Lippmann, who's a great progressive through much of his life, came to believe that people are going to believe whatever the pictures are in their heads. It may as well be us putting those pictures there than Hitler or someone else.

Nate Hagens (01:03:42):

There are certain pictures that can't spread, like the pictures that I'm creating with my stories. They're at a disadvantage because truth of this sort that is unpleasant and complex and in the future, and there are no easy answers. Those pictures can't easily become propaganda. Is that a fair statement?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:04:03):

Yeah. Those don't necessarily have to be what spread in order to engender the behaviors and attitudes that those ideas require.

Nate Hagens (01:04:16):

It's laughter and having a sandwich with Joe and making love with your partner and walks in the woods and playing with your dog and those things.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:04:23):

I think so. I think those things that have been so undervalued, the things that we've been told... I remember there was once a commercial, I believe it was for Amazon, that had this old lady knitting something and making it for a Christmas present for somebody, and they were like, "Don't do that. You could actually pick this thing somebody wants on Amazon." I'm like, "Oh wow, they've actually successfully reversed Christmas."

Nate Hagens (01:04:53):

Yeah. Well, this whole process of learning about the human predicament and overshoot and everything is both a tragedy and a comedy at the same time, because I can now just wistfully understand the humor and the sadness in that story that you just said. Maybe over time, I'm learning to be a lateral thinker like you. Back to your class, at the end of the class, I don't know how much of all this energy and resources and climate you talk to. Generally what specific recommendations do you have for young humans who come across this giant story of environment and resources and technology for their futures as 20, 21 year olds?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:05:37):

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A lot of the people who came before you wanted to solve these problems in a biggest splashiest way possible. Usually, by creating like, "I want to create the website that aggregates all of the efforts around the world and serves as a knowledge base for all the environmental things." In reality, there's way more websites aggregating everything than we will ever need. You actually consider just doing the thing first. Consider doing the actual thing, rather than making a video about the thing or a website about the thing. Media is cool, but media is secondary to the thing. Think about, do you want to live on a porn site or do you want to make love? Do you want to publicize environmentalism or do you want to just do it? There's a whole lot of competition in this space to make the videos and the tweets and the things about what's happening in the world. There's very, very few people actually doing stuff. You will do better and be noticed and have more fun if you engaged directly.

Nate Hagens (01:07:02):

I asked what you would advise young people, not what you would advise me.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:07:12):

No, I am talking to young people. You know what I mean?

Nate Hagens (01:07:14):

No, I know what you mean.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:07:18):

I would say one out of every 1,000 or 10,000 of those young people should be making media about this stuff rather than doing it. We don't need that many people behind the camera. When I go to a show and I see everybody holding up their phones to capture that frigging thing. Why? There's this one film, this one. Even the Grateful Dead, I was always happy when I'd go to a show that there was a section of people over there with their microphones up on crutches, getting the show and one of them, I knew I'd be able to get a tape from, so I didn't have to sit there myself recording it. Those 40 people recording it is enough.

Nate Hagens (01:07:56):

Well, right there is a microcosm of living in the meta narrative versus living in the moment. We're worried about the filming the experience of the thing rather than experiencing the thing.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:08:06):

Yeah. Sometimes it's beautiful. It's great. Some people, that's the way they enjoyed Europe. They went with their Kodachrome and came back with the slides. That's what they do. That's how they knew they were there. There's an extreme form of that and certainly when it comes to what we actually do to make our world a better place, there's something really rewarding about actually doing it.

Nate Hagens (01:08:27):

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I hear you. What do you care most about in the world, Douglas?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:08:33):

I would normally say either climate and the destruction of our climate is the thing I care most about, but I'm learning to see the climate as figure rather than ground. Climate as a subject on TV, as a thing, as a problem, climate, education, disease, poverty. There are these things. What I'm caring more about is what I would call the ground rather than the figure. The ground itself, the environment in which this is all taking place. I'm most concerned that we've distracted ourselves with the spectacle of figures, and we've lost reality that we've disengaged from this and that there are these answers here in the soma, in the lived experience that is so ineffable. I've listened to a lot of the guys and women who are trying to express it. It's not linguistic. It's so experiential, the ground. It's what Marshall McLuhan was trying to say. The medium is the message, the ecology of our experience. I genuinely believe that centering that, restoring that, opening our nervous systems to that will change everything about how we live.

Nate Hagens (01:10:14):

Instead of just seeing climate and poverty and economic malaise, there's visceral embodied recognition of these issues that are in a real personal on the ground level, that's where we have to engage with it rather than these themes we see and think about in our brains.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:10:36):

Right. They're not subjects. There's this landscape, we're here right now in this landscape. I feel like our feet are not on the ground. We're looking at the screens and seeing the pictures of what's going wrong. It's like, "No, wait a minute. Take the goggles off. Put your feet on the ground. We're here. Now what?"

Nate Hagens (01:11:01):

Of all the issues, some of which we may have mentioned on this call, what are you most personally concerned about in the coming 10 years or so in our world?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:11:11):

It's hard to have a most. I'm concerned about climate refugees. I think they're already here. They're already around. Each climate refugee is a whole person, as much as you or me or any... You know what I mean? They're a whole frigging person and there's not just dozens or hundreds. There's like thousands, millions of them without homes.

Nate Hagens (01:11:37):

To be tens of millions before long.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:11:41):

They're the most immediate for me and I know that there's species that we're wiping out at the same time. I don't think as much about the little bird that's all gone or whatever, but I'm a person. I'm still

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anthropocentric in the way I think about the world. I'm thinking about the people below who are too close to sea level in Bangladesh. Where are they going to go?

Nate Hagens (01:12:05):

In contrast, what issue or thing have you observed that you're most hopeful about in the coming decade or so?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:12:13):

I am hopeful about young girls, these tweens, even on their little social media things, they are drawn or being drawn to solidarity. Two things, they're all into solidarity and mutual support and go girl and power to you. There was that awful shooting that happened at Ariana Grande's concert in Manchester a few years ago. The TikTok and Instagram became alive with young girls offering support to each other and Ariana. It was like, "Oh my God." What came forth was so moving between that and manifesting, they're manifesting. It's a magical worldview. Someone will say, "Oh, I want this and that." You can manifest that. It's not a reaching, it's not a goal orientation. It's the idea of manifesting and manifesting through solidarity is something that's coming out of that little girl's community, that makes me realize, "Oh, there is a sweet, sweet hope." Just like you see plants grow through the cracks in the cement sidewalk. I'm seeing the greatest qualities of the human spirit emerge from the most commercial online services. I see the human spirit in them and coming out of them.

Nate Hagens (01:13:53):

That's beautiful. I have to ask why young girls and not young men? Do you have an explanation for why that might be?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:14:03):

I'm not saying it's not young men, I haven't just seen it. I saw it in young girls. I think young men right now without getting into the whole intellectual dark web understanding of things. Young men right now are having a really hard time as our civilization goes through, what will likely be a century long hangover from male domination. It's a hard thing. You see a lot of young male culture online tend towards more gamer "gamey" stuff, because they're going through a hell of a lot. It's there, I see it in Minecraft and in the building communities online and the hacker community. I see it on GitHub where people put up their code for free. Use this, take this. I see the original spirit of the net that the tech billionaires try to destroy. I see that coming back as people just want to make stuff and feel good about it. Go to the 3D printing lab at the public library and look at these 14-year old kids.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:15:17):

Most of them boys making weird stuff with each other and sharing code. I see it too, but I have a daughter, so I witnessed the Ariana thing up close and it gave me hope.

Nate Hagens (01:15:30):

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That's beautiful. Thank you. Last question, my friend. If you were benevolent dictator and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing that you would enact to improve our human and planetary futures?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:15:47):

I feel the need to push back against that envisioning thought experiment because even in the best sense, imagining that Stewart Brand is right and that we are as God's and may as well get used to it, starts a fantasy pattern of Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos. I am a master of the Universe. I am above and I can do this. I guess what I would do if I were a benevolent dictator of the world is erase the concept of benevolent dictator of the world. Surrender that ability and make it so that is not even something one aspires to. The benevolent dictator... It's like the question I ask in the book where one of these tech bros is talking to another during the January 6 riots and said, "If you could press a button and make those guys disappear, would you do it?"

Douglas Rushkoff (01:17:04):

No. If I could press a button and have all those guys think differently, would I do it? No. No, because how dare I? Yes. I don't want people to die there. I don't want that to happen, but the answer is not to press a button and make them think differently. It's too easy and it refuses to acknowledge that to everything there is a season. There is a time for every purpose under heaven and how dare I interfere. If I'm going to intervene, I'm going to intervene on the local-est level possible. If I can get to that place, Bezos place, that God place, whatever it is, I'm going to speak really softly and move really slowly. I'm going to move slow and fix things.

Nate Hagens (01:17:54):

I understand that. Just to articulate why I ask my guests that, I think there's zero chance of a benevolent dictator. I think that everyone has a different expertise. I have endocrine-disrupting chemical experts and financial experts and evolutionary biologists and to weigh in from their lens and their expertise and you're a technology historian and systems architect. To weigh in on their one thing, to educate the listeners on... What's one thing they would do that would be a lever point, even though it's a fantastical thought experiment.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:18:34):

Right? Well, I would just want to do it from lesser. If I were governor of my state, right?

Nate Hagens (01:18:42):

Or mayor of your town?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:18:43):

Yeah, governor of the state is at least, it's scaled, right? It's upscale from mayor of my town. I would want to distribute Commons In A Box, a kit for any town to easily implement a commons around whatever their shared resource might be. A plug and play Commons In A Box, because people don't

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quite understand how commons work. An easy kit, a PDF or a set of cards. She's like, "Okay, pick the resource. Okay. Decide how much of it could be used. Okay. Decide what the penalty is?" They go, "Oh, and now we have a commons." Yeah. I think if people experienced commons, it would help a lot of things. Yeah, I could do that one without worrying about setting off a disaster. I just don't want to do that bad thing where you scale something because you're God and then everybody turns gray or something.

Nate Hagens (01:19:41):

Okay. Good answer. Commons In A Box and the reduced scale benevolent dictator and a Governor of New York. Thank you, my friend. Any other closing words of wisdom?

Douglas Rushkoff (01:19:53):

No, I do love you. I want you to be more confident. I think that's my word of wisdom. You more than almost anyone I know have the actual goods. You have the actual goods and I don't think you need to worry about anything other than sharing the actual goods. You speak truth and don't let anybody tell you, you need a better story, a better this, a better that, you don't, you did the work. You did the work. It's up to other people to tell your frigging story and to take what you're doing. You are my hero already. You just keep on keeping on and don't you ever worry that there's anything deficient in what you're doing and have done.

Nate Hagens (01:20:42):

Thank you. I hope it doesn't come across that I'm insecure about all this. I think the insecurity is that I'm a people pleaser and I don't want to let people down who first come across this story and they're freaking shell-shocked and it's too much to bear because I feel an empathy for others. That's why I'm doing this podcast is to send out a signal to those who want to take a deeper dive in how all those fits together and how to make change in their own lives.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:21:12):

You're doing it and you're doing it appropriately, successfully.

Nate Hagens (01:21:16):

Little by little.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:21:17):

I just don't want you to ever think... I hear through that humility sometimes that maybe you're thinking you're not doing this right. You are, but not only are you doing this right, but you've already done the heavy lift. You went in, you found, now you brought it out. Now, I would argue that the bad news is good news. I used to say the problem with those Jews is we're not spreading the good news. Like the Christians have Christ. We're spreading the bad news. Hey, it's just us. It's us. We got to take care of each other. There's such a relief in hearing, "Oh my God. You mean, really it's that fucked?" Okay. It's

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almost like it's a relief in that. That means the answers are so much simpler then. We really, really, really got to just use less energy. This is going to stop. It's just, we have proof. This must stop.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:22:11):

We cannot keep going this way. No, there's no work around other than stop it for God, just stop it. That's a relief, right? Isn't it a relief? It's so simple. Like you say, it's just so much easier. Oh, we stop that, and when we stop that life gets better to boot. It's all good. It's a win-win.

Nate Hagens (01:22:30):

Yeah. It's clear to me. Now you have emboldened me to go shout across the rooftops for another few months.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:22:39):

All right. Go open the storage unit. Take out the stuff.

Nate Hagens (01:22:42):

I'm going to go in there this weekend. I have some time.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:22:44):

Send me something, send it to friends, give it away. There's probably cool stuff. Maybe there's like a little red truck or something for me in there. A little toy.

Nate Hagens (01:22:54):

I will find something for you in there, Douglas.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:22:56):

All right.

Nate Hagens (01:22:59):

Thanks for your time.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:23:00):

Okay, I love you a lot.

Nate Hagens (01:23:01):

I'm sure we'll talk soon.

Douglas Rushkoff (01:23:02):

Thank you.

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Nate Hagens (01:23:03):

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