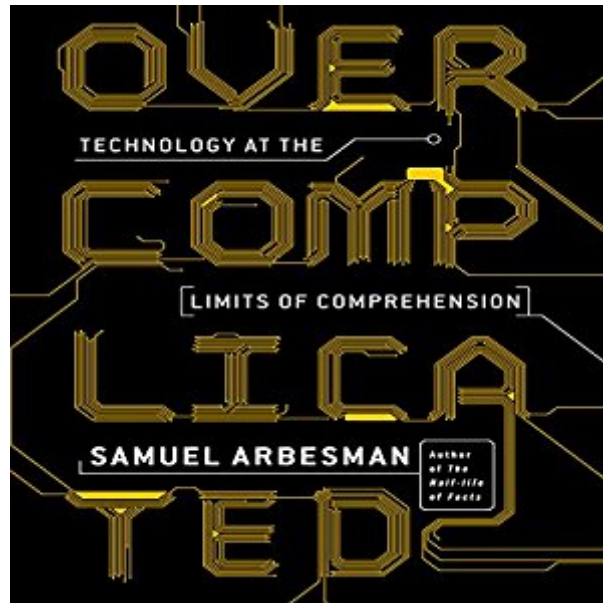# Overcomplicated: Technology At The Limits Of Comprehension

Synopsis

Why did the New York Stock Exchange suspend trading without warning on July 8, 2015? Why did certain Toyota vehicles accelerate uncontrollably against the will of their drivers? Why does the programming inside our airplanes occasionally surprise its creators? After a thorough analysis by the top experts, the answers still elude us. You don't understand the software running your car or your iPhone. But here's a secret: Neither do the geniuses at Apple or the PhDs at Toyota - not perfectly, anyway. No one - not lawyers, doctors, accountants, or policy makers - fully grasps the rules governing your tax return, your retirement account, or your hospital's medical machinery. The same technological advances that have simplified our lives have made the systems governing our lives incomprehensible, unpredictable, and overcomplicated. In Overcomplicated, complexity scientist Samuel Arbesman offers a fresh, insightful field guide to living with complex technologies that defy human comprehension. As technology grows more complex, Arbesman argues, its behavior mimics the vagaries of the natural world more than it conforms to a mathematical model. If we are to survive and thrive in this new age, we must abandon our need for governing principles and rules and accept the chaos. By embracing and observing the freak accidents and flukes that disrupt our lives, we can gain valuable clues about how our algorithms really work. What's more, we will become better thinkers, scientists, and innovators as a result. Lucid and energizing, this audiobook is a vital new analysis of the world heralded as "modern" for anyone who wants to live wisely.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a well written book on an important topic. Arbesman swims against the tide of tech pundits who point to a glorious future of seamless technology which solves all our problems. He shows in detail how as technologies get more complicated they create complexity which is more and more beyond our ability to understand. We are headed to a future where bugs and glitches and crashes are inevitable and unpredictable. He says we need to look at technology like a biologist might look at an new animal species, the inner workings of which we cannot fully understand, but we need to learn to live with.If there is a shortcoming to the book it is that I think he does not take the argument far enough. I run a cabinet shop in Toronto, and my experience is that with the advent of new technologies such as the internet, not only does the technology itself become more and more complex, but that everything becomes more complex. Essentially what I do is cut particle board into rectangles, screw them into boxes, paint them, stand them up in peopleâ ™s houses and put some doors on them. How simple is that? And yet with globalization of trade, the explosion of online information available to clients, and the market driven race to add ever expanding new features to all aspects of kitchen design and technology, my job seems to get more and more complex every day, in spite of my never ending efforts to standardize processes. Every week is some new combination of organic materials, high tech appliances, European hardware, Indian or African sculpture, high modernist design, and not uncommonly some features that defy the laws of physics.

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