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Book Review: Future Shock 2.0

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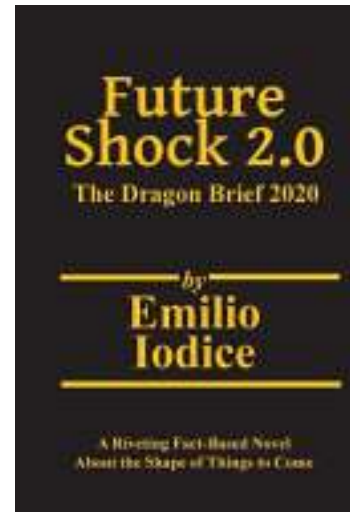
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Book Review and Summary

Title: Future Shock 2.0
Author: Emilio Iodice
Publisher: Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2014
ISBN: 0929652371, 9780929652375
Pages: 170
Release Date: 2014
Reviewer: Elizabeth F.R. Gingerich



It was the beginning of the 1970s when so many of us heard the phrase, “information overload,” for the first time. Coined by American writer and futurist, Alvin Toffler, in his popular book, *Future Shock*, Toffler focused upon the danger of modern technologies at that time, digital and communication processes that would impact global cultures for decades to come. *Future Shock* particularly refers to the rapid transference from an “industrial society” to a “super-industrial society” – prompting the reader to draw similarities with our current post-industrial digital age quickly transforming into a more individually-customized, momentary, “on demand,” market. Such changes, both then and now, have profound societal consequences, even perceived as disturbing as people become increasingly overwhelmed, confused, and isolated by such a rapid transition.

Emilio Iodice’s *Future Shock 2.0*, originally released in 2014, has been making a resurgence in today’s literary market, primarily due to its eerily prescient narratives – with most occurring in fictitious year 2020. The author hypothesizes what geopolitical and economic life will be like six years in the future. He determines that while modern economic growth occurring after the turn of the century – and primarily triggered by China – may have flourished to a certain degree, it wholly failed to address inequality in wealth generation. Significant income disparity ultimately stirs deep disconnection between citizens and their national leaders, ultimately undercutting democratic values in governance. In targeted year 2020, American political governance would become oligarchical, eschewing its quintessential American democratic principles that had previously been cherished and emulated throughout the world – especially after World War II. This oligarchical government emerges as the result of the rise and concentration of economic elites and organized business interests, rendering individual citizens largely impotent politically. Additionally, the author forecasts that China’s rise and emergence as an economic powerhouse would dominate developing nations, using them as infrastructure experiments that would reap very little of the financial rewards while shouldering disastrous environmental consequences. Such nations would submit to a succession of dictatorial regimes – without full public awareness and meaningful intervention.

The book parallels Alvin Toffler’s original work in proclaiming that “knowledge is the most democratic source of power,” but would be subverted in a growing dystopian environment. In Iodice’s accounting, nationwide martial law would be imposed with the suspension of First Amendment rights. Curfews would be put in place, and governments would entrust military forces to establish order by any means possible.

Iodice paints year 2020 as a spiraling devolution into a Wild West scenario – a dystopian nightmare. Several of the book’s 2014 predictions unfortunately have come true to a certain degree. For instance, unprecedented immigration struggles were predicted to occur at the Southern border of the United States to such an extent that mass murders would go unchecked and underreported. Immigration would accelerate as poorer, developing countries would fail to adequately address the loss of productive output, only offering inadequate social safety nets. Immigrant boats would be met either by unforgiving countries or by the lethal oppression of national border guards.

In Iodice’s 2020, a series of weather-related calamities would empty government coffers. Government officials would be under constant threat of assassination and nations would be pushed to the brink of bankruptcy. In fictional 2020, there would be a proliferation of unregistered lethal weapons and unchecked incendiary devices. Hunger would be prevalent. Consumers would lose their purchasing power and unemployment levels would skyrocket. Other bellwether characteristics would consist of:

- a downward spiral of consumption rates;
- sweeping trade restrictions with China;
- the imposition of austerity measures; and
- sovereign debt defaults – all of which would collectively deepen the global recession.

The precipitating event signaling such malaise and societal demise in *Future Shock 2.0* concerns the opening up of global economies to cheap Chinese goods and loan dependencies which result in the dual closure of the local and national manufacturing firms. China had firmly moved into African and Latin American countries, negotiated contracts for finished goods and mineral imports, and flooded those nations with its own skilled and menial workforces to build each nation’s infrastructure – but tailored to its own needs.

With the spread of worldwide pandemics, high unemployment rates, a global recession, elitist governments, and racial protests – all forecasted in *Future Shock 2.0* – the author’s spot-on clairvoyance embedded in each page transforms 2020 into a fictional dateline report of neo-colonist activity. Iodice craftily uses certain fictional characters within the book to demonstrate the impact of the scourge of modern colonialism throughout the world. Several of these characters include:

- A displaced Southern manufacturing plant owner who despairs over his loss of business conceded overseas;
- A Western seaboard ocean harvester whose hulls are poisoned by environmental factors;
- A Mexican immigrant and an African laborer – both struggling for better lives and livelihoods;
- A former factory worker in Southeast Asia, suffering from environmentally-related health ailments and made a victim of power politics; and
- A Chinese journalist who defies anti-sedition Chinese laws by attempting to publish stories about a growing pandemic emanating from sick pigs, whose carcasses now clog waterways and pollute fields [the reviewer draws parallels to China’s current anti-sedition law, activated on July 1, 2020, meant to target all criticism of the government – a legislative move that will inevitably undermine free speech in Hong Kong].

Iodice correctly predicts other world events that appear to have come true in real year 2020, including a devastating financial crisis in the euro zone, a rocked American economy, and worldwide environmental catastrophe. Other events predicted for 2020 in *Future Shock 2.0* that still may come to pass include:

- A major, pro-democratic, grass-roots uprising in China – unleashed to displace the nation’s one-party rule – largely resulting from environmental ruin marked by the complete contamination of the Yangzi River by deadly industrial pollutants, the creation of “cancer communities,” and years of unchecked corruption of government officials;
- A breakdown of the *rule of law* leading to the invocation of *marshal law* in the United States, and prompting the nation’s first female president to vacate the White House – a virtually unprecedented move; and
- A domino-like toppling of governments resulting from political factionalism, an expanding income gap, compromised international trade agreements, extreme famine and thirst, the growing presence of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, irreversible environmental damage, and general social turmoil.

Future Shock 2.0’s description of massive societal change is also depicted in what is commonly known as the “elephant graph.” The graph, which economist Branko Milanović popularized in 2013, is actually a chart that shows income growth by percentiles of the global income distribution in the two decades leading up to the 2008 global financial crisis. The graph, which mimics the shape of an elephant, indicates as its wide mid-section the emergence of rising incomes – especially as experienced in China, India, and other beneficiaries of globalization – whereas its rising trunk reflects the financial largesse of the world’s top one per cent. Against this backdrop of rising economic segregation lies the stagnant incomes of American and European working and middle-class families, creating growing support within their ranks for populist rebellions and the eventual jettisoning of democratic traditions seemingly rendered as obsolete.

Iodice’s forecasts are largely predicated upon circumstances where greed has overcome logic and sound investment policies have been entirely abandoned, leading to an overall bureaucratic nightmare and the cessation of regular essential services.

Sound hauntingly familiar?

In support of his fictional narrative, the author interjects selected quotes from world leaders, supporting his call to awareness and action. For example,

- Pope Francis warns that: *“In society and the world in which we live, selfishness has increased more than love for others, and that men [and women] of good will must work, each with his [/her] own strengths and expertise, to ensure that love for others increases until it is equal and possibly exceeds love for oneself.*
- Al Gore: *As I have said for many years throughout this land, we’re borrowing money from China to buy oil from the Persian Gulf to burn it in ways that destroy the future of human civilization. Every bit of that has to change.*
- And finally, Jane Goodall: *Change happens by listening and then starting a dialog with the people who are doing something you don’t believe is right.*

Like Alvin Toffler, Iodice expresses optimism by pointing out that we still have a degree of control of the future. Echoing his predecessor's words, Iodice warns that while change is essential to humankind, *rapid* change must not be unguided or accelerated. As Toffler originally explained:

...our first and most pressing need, therefore, before we can begin to gently guide our evolutionary destiny, before we can build a human future, is to halt the runaway acceleration that is subjecting multitudes to the threat of future shock while, at the very same moment, intensifying all the problems they must deal with long - war, ecological incursions, racism, the obscene contrast between rich and poor, the revolt of the young and the rise of potentially deadly mass irrationalism.

Control of the future is needed to counteract both the predicted and predictable: expansion of poverty rates, increasing reliance on social programs to ease the loss of manufacturing jobs, unquelled social uprisings, American and international stock markets plunging to record lows as a combination of economic and psychological fears change business-as-usual indelibly, and unabated environmental degradation. Without such meaningful and pervasive attention and action, discontent and misfortune may just translate into complete chaos – a forecast of sorts.

— Elizabeth F.R. Gingerich