Books

Excerpt: *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*

A professor at Columbia Law School, Tim Wu examines how industries increasingly vie for and commodify our attention.

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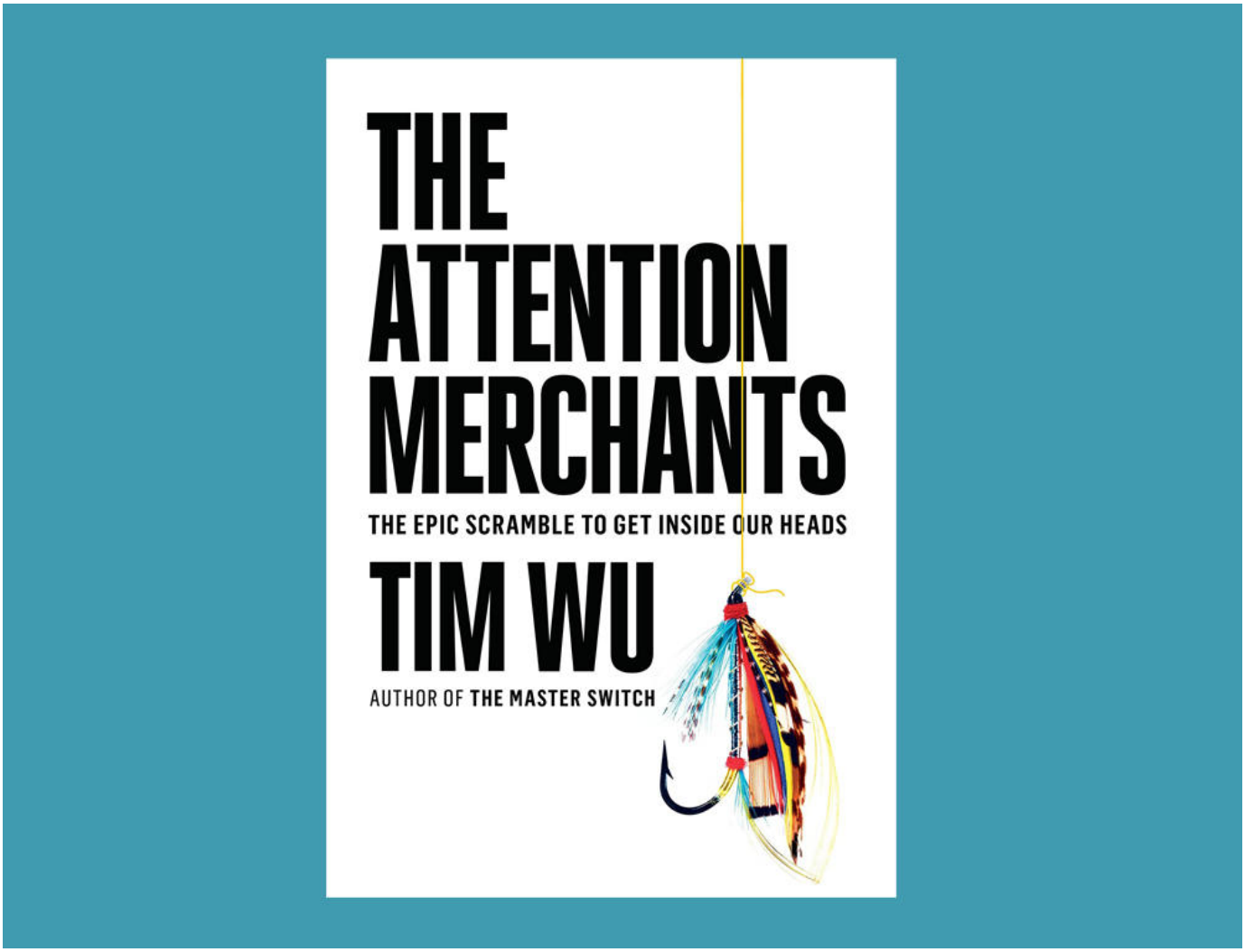

The past half century has been an age of unprecedented individualism, allowing us to live in all sorts of ways that were not possible before. The power we have been given to construct our attentional lives is an underappreciated example. Even while waiting for the dentist, we have the world at our finger tips: we can check mail, browse our favorite sites, play games, and watch movies, where once we had to content ourselves with a stack of old magazines. But with the new horizon of possibilities has also come the erosion of private life's perimeter. And so it is a bit of a paradox that in having so thoroughly individualized our attentional lives we should wind up being less ourselves and more in thrall to our various media and devices. Without express consent, most of us have passively opened ourselves up to the commercial exploitation of our attention just about anywhere and anytime. If there is to be some scheme of zoning to stem this sprawl, it will need to be mostly an act of will on the part of the individual.



Guide to school abbreviations

All categories >