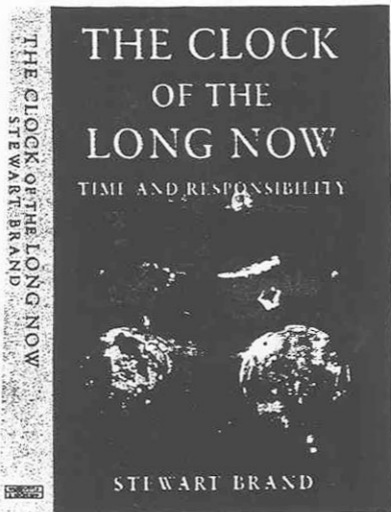


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BOOKS

The Clock Of The Long Now: Time And Responsibility

Author: Stewart Brand

We're going to Hell on the back of a speedy animal called short-termism. What can we do when the world is changing from 'big eat small' to a 'fast eat slow', asks Brand, who's worried about everything, from global warming to the loss of biodiversity.

It's impossible not to share his concerns, and wonder if we might already have overshot the point of no return; that our disruption of nature is so great we may not have a viable future. This is where the Clock and Library of the Long Now come in. These are Long Now Foundation projects to build a clock in a remote mountainside which marks time in centuries and millennia; and, with the Library, to create a repository for preserving knowledge. Their aim is to prolong the 'now' into the 'Long Now... the 200-year-long present'; to override our soundbite-driven attention span.

The Clock will be designed to last 10,000 years, using the Sun's position to maintain accuracy. And it must be simple enough for future generations to maintain. As such, it will be the world's slowest computer – ironic given that it's being built by Danny Hillis, who designed the massively parallel architecture for the world's fastest computers.

While the Long Now projects may be worthy, their delineation in the book takes too many undistilled forms: brain dumps of ideas, discussion notes and dialogue. It's hardly going to fire up those who aren't yet heated up for the debate.

It's easy to dismiss the hope that one big clock will change the world. And no doubt the gasket-heads who visit its remote site and marvel at it will then drive away in their cars, pumping the air full of the very pollutants that, as the clock is designed to remind us, might help destroy us.

Stuart Price

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