



# The Clock Of The Long Now: Time and Responsibility

By Stewart Brand

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Using the designing and building of the *Clock of the Long Now* as a framework, this is a book about the practical use of long time perspective: how to get it, how to use it, how to keep it in and out of sight. Here are the central questions it inspires: How do we make long-term thinking automatic and common instead of difficult and rare? Discipline in thought allows freedom. One needs the space and reliability to predict continuity to have the confidence not to be afraid of revolutions. Taking the time to think of the future is more essential now than ever, as culture accelerates beyond its ability to be measured. Probable things are vastly outnumbered by countless near-impossible eventualities. Reality is statistically forced to be extraordinary; fiction is not allowed this freedom. This is a potent book that combines the chronicling of fantastic technology with equally visionary philosophical inquiry.

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## **The Clock Of The Long Now: Time and Responsibility By Stewart Brand Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

The image of our planet on the cover of Brand's Whole Earth Catalog communicated a powerful symbol of the big picture. Brand's new, mind-stretching book challenges readers to get outside themselves and combat the short-term irresponsible thinking that has led to environmental destruction and social chaos. Brand also eloquently urges us to distill and preserve knowledge. Though we seem to live in an age of information overload (each new U.S. president leaves behind more papers than all the previous ones combined), Brand contends that we actually inhabit an age of rapid information loss. Because of changing storage media, as one researcher has quipped, "digital information lasts forever or five years, whichever comes first." Time capsules don't solve the problem, for 70% of them are lost almost immediately after being sealed. Brand envisages two monuments that will incorporate the long view into our common consciousness. The first is a giant, exquisitely slow clock. It would be big enough to walk around in, and it would display the year, positions of the sun and moon, generations and millennia. The second is the "Ten-Thousand Year Library," a vast underground labyrinth of books. Here we'd preserve enormous amounts of knowledge from history and other long-perspective disciplines. These ideas deserve more than 15 minutes of fame. Quotable quotes, plentiful paradoxes and humane values make this a book to be savored and discussed slowly. (June)

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#### From Library Journal

Touted as "the least recognized most influential thinker in America," Brand, creator of The Whole Earth Catalog, wears that mantle with aplomb in his latest offering. He takes on civilization's "pathologically short attention span" with a proposal to encourage us all to assume long-term responsibility for the continuation of the human species. How to do this? By creating both a myth and a mechanism with which to counter our short focus these days, which Brand names as the core of the problem. He spends the remainder of this rumination clarifying that thought and outlining the details of the myth and mechanism that he suggests as a catalyst: a clock that ticks once a year, bongs once a century, and cuckoos but once a millennium. The Clock of the Long Now is both fascinating and, yes, maybe just a bit revolutionary and is most likely to find a suitable home in academic and larger public libraries with readers who are fervent in the desire to see us go on. [See also Brand's "Escaping the Digital Age," LJ 2/1/99, p. 46-48.] Geoff Rotunno, "Valley Voice" Newspaper, Goleta, C.

-Geoff Rotunno, "Valley Voice" Newspaper, Goleta, CA

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#### Review

Zen master Taisen Deshimaru said that time is not a line, but a series of now-points. Stewart Brand challenges us to rethink the way we conceive of those now-points.

Brand cofounded Global Business Network, founded and edited the Whole Earth Catalog and has written several well received articles and books. His involvements in the Well and the Electronic Frontier Foundation are legendary, as is the company he keeps: Computer designer Danny Hillis, avant-garde musician Brian Eno, Institute of the Future spokesman Paul Saffo, *Release 1.0* creator Esther Dyson and Lotus founder Mitch Kapor are all involved in Brand's Long Now Foundation.

The book's chapters are disconnected explorations of the book's subtitle: *Time and Responsibility*. Brand borrows the Greek definition of two kinds of time. Kairos, opportunity or the propitious moment, is the time of cleverness. Chronos, eternal or ongoing time, is the time of wisdom. The Long Now Foundation seeks to promote slower, better thinking of the chronos variety.

Brand argues that our kairotic lives have grown increasingly complex and hurried in this century. In the amped-up rush of "Internet time," we often fail to consider anything beyond the immediate now and think of the present in terms of today, this week, this product cycle. Brand would like to extend our thinking to the next 10,000 years, and he even adopts a new calendaring convention, in which 1999 becomes 01999. The Long Now Foundation is building a physical clock (a prototype is pictured in the book) to reflect a measure of the 10,000-year now. This clock-library is meant to be a cultural institution, but details of the mechanical clock are sketchy at best. Brand never describes exactly what the clock will be; rather, he suggests what form such a mechanical clock could take and theorizes about the societal improvements such a device could inspire. Included in his broad wish list: time capsules, digital archives, letters to the future.

Beyond these vague hypotheticals, Brand practices what he preaches. He says he doesn't want a short-term revolution but rather infinite responsibility, which requires serious reflection and careful planning. He invites readers to contribute their own clock ideas at [www.longnow.org](http://www.longnow.org).

Thinking in terms of a 10,000-year now may pay off. Brand recounts how the Swedish Navy received a letter from the country's forestry department in 01980, informing the bureaucrats that the lumber they requested to build ships was ready. Apparently in 01829 the Swedish Parliament anticipated a future shortage of lumber, and, recognizing that it would take 150 years for oaks to mature, set about with long-range plans to deliver the wood. Although the Navy doesn't need many wooden ships these days, the new forests are good for the environment.

Of course, Brand is not alone in suggesting that we need to think about the future. But his call for sustained endeavor, long-term introspection and cultural dialogue is thought-provoking, even if his scattered musings aren't united by a common thread.

While the book's philosophical tone might not be the stuff best-sellers are made of, *The Clock of the Long Now* convincingly articulates the necessity of thinking about time in a new way and the importance of patience. After all, you can always improve things as long as you're prepared to wait.

– Diane Anderson Lehrer

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