

The Clock of The Long Now by Stewart Brand

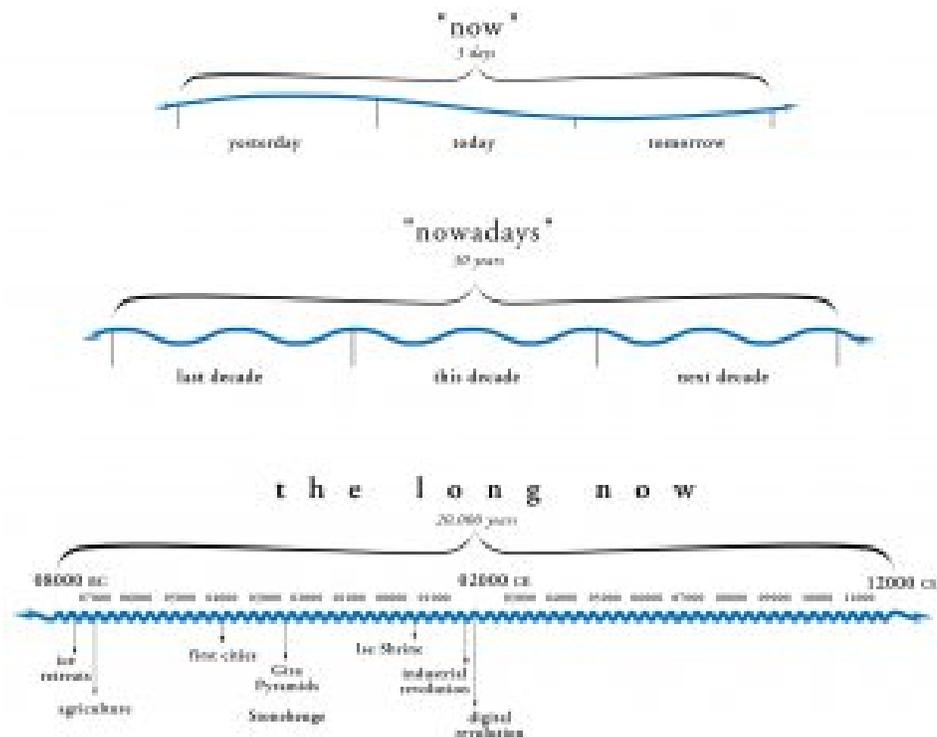


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Praise for The Clock of the Long Now

“All of the sudden everything in the world made sense to me – Phil Libin (CEO of Evernote) on [his experience](#) reading Chapter 7 of *The Clock of the Long Now*.”

Now vs. The Long Now



Books Notes and Summary

Civilization is revving itself into a pathologically short attention span. [2]

When I was a child, people used to talk about what would happen by the year 2000. Now, thirty years later they still talk about what will happen by the year 2000. The future has been shrinking by one year per year for my entire life. [3]

Who is “we” [The Long Now Foundation]? The Long Now Foundation was established in 1996 to foster long-term responsibility. The founding board is Daniel Hillis (co-chair), Stewart Brand (co-chair), Kevin Kelly, Douglas Carlston, Peter Schwartz, Brian Eno, Paul Saffo, Mitchell Kapor, and Esther Dyson. [4]

Nobody can save the world, but any of us can help set in motion a self-saving world. [05]

“The greatest good for the greatest number” means the longest good, because the majority of people affected is always yet to come. [08]

Zen Buddhists define their task as “infinite gratitude for the past. Infinite service to the present. Infinite responsibility to the future.” [09]

We are the first generation that influences global climate, and the last generation to escape the consequences. [09]

Kairos – opportunity or the propitious moment

Chronos – eternal or ongoing time

Moore’s Law – The observation made in 1965 by Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, that the number of transistors per square inch on integrated circuits had doubled every year since the integrated circuit was invented. Moore predicted that this trend would continue for the foreseeable future.

Any tenfold quantitative change is a qualitative change. [14]

Metcalfe’s Law states that the power of a network grows as the square of the number of users (people or devices) on the net. [14]

“What people mean by the word technology is anything invented since they were born.” – Alan Kay [16]

The Singularity metaphor answers the question, What happens if our technology just keeps accelerating? [20]

“At this singularity the laws of science and our ability to predict the future would break down.” – Stephen Hawking [20]

Among some enthusiasts there is even a consensus date for what they call the techno-rapture – 2035 C.E, give or take a few years. [21]

Access takes the waiting out of wanting [25]

I realized that the “here” she lived in stopped at her front door. This was a very strange thought to me. My “here” includes the neighborhood at lesat. After that, I noticed that young arty New Yorkers were just as local in their sense of “now.” “now” meant “this week.” Everyone had just got there, and was just going somewhere else. No one

had any investment in any kind of future except their own, conceived in the narrowest terms. – Brian Eno [28]

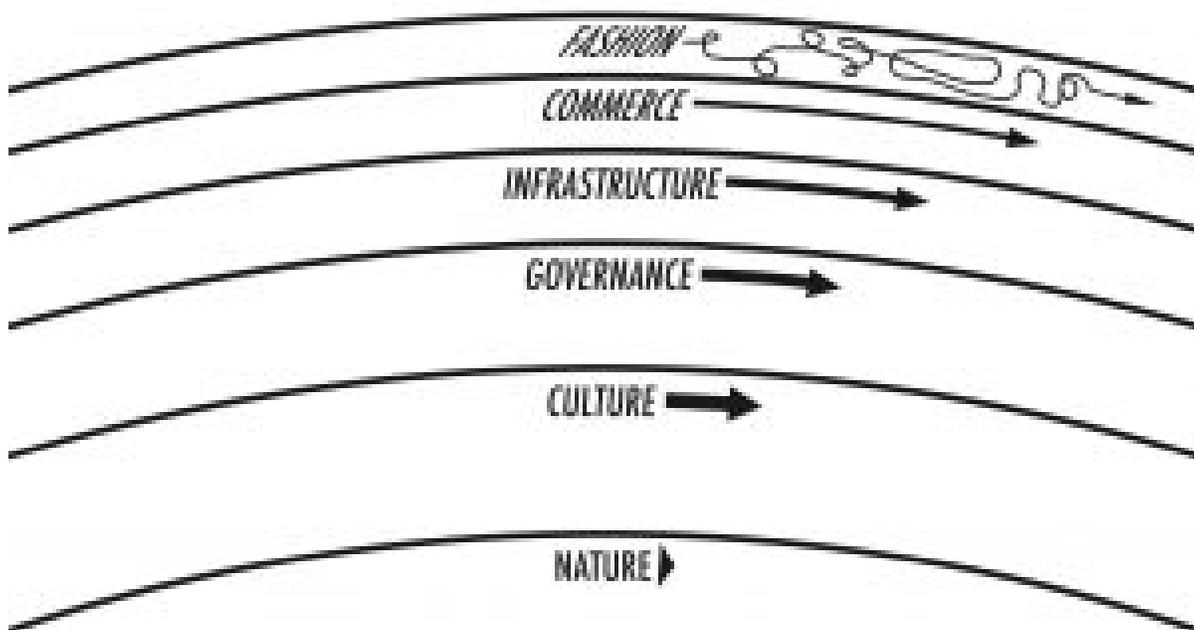
I wrote in my notebook that December, “more and more I find I want to be living in a big Here and a Long Now.” – Brian Eno [28]

For most of us most of the time I think Eno is right: “now” consists of this week, slightly haunted by the ghost of last week. This is the realm of immediate responsibility, one in which we feel we have volition, where the consequences of our actions are obvious and surprises limited. The weekend is a convenient boundary. [29]

The trick is learning how to treat the last ten thousand years as if it were last week, and the next ten thousand years as if it were next week. Such tricks confer advantage. [31]

The combination of fast and slow components makes the system resilient, along with the way the differently paced parts affect each other. Fast learns, slow remembers. [34]

The Six Distinct Time Scales



The destiny of our species is shaped by the imperatives of survival on six distinct time scales. To survive means to complete successfully on all six time scales. but he unit of survival is different at each of six time scales.

- Fashion / art
- Commerce
- Infrastructure
- Governance
- Culture
- Nature

Note that as people get older their interest tend to migrate to the slower parts of the continuum. [36]

Religion motivates people to step out of their immediate self-interest and serve a higher god. Through rituals at birth, marriage, and death, it helps people think in terms of whole lifetimes and generations. [42]

Eternity is the opposite of a long time. [43]

“A traditional clock depicts time in the context of our lives. This Clock depicts our lives in the context of time.” Dan Wolf [48]

The main characteristic of the Clock is its linearity. It treats one year absolutely like another, oblivious of Moore’s Law accelerations, national fates, wars, dark ages, or climate change. [49]

The Clock is Newtonian time, physical time-reversible, regular, steady. The Library is informational time. [51]

If you were going to design a clock to keep good time for 10,000 years, where would you be? [62]

From the very beginning clock were simulacra. [66]

Digitalized media do have some attributes of immortality... [in time people] discover that they cannot revisit their own word processor files or computerized financial records from ten years earlier [because file formats quickly become obsolete]. [82]

Loss of cultural memory becomes the price of staying perfectly current. [87]

“The default condition of paper is persistence, if not interrupted; the default condition of electronic signals is interruption, if not periodically renewed.” – Howard Besser [90]

What has been done, thought, written, or spoken is not culture; culture is only that fraction that is remembered. [94]

“The Net is supplied with so much computer power and is gaining so much massively parallel amplification of that power by its burgeoning connectivity that it might one day ‘wake on’” – Vernor Vinge [96]

“Boiling rocks” is what the novelist and provocateur Ken Kesey calls this kind of research. “If you don’t boil rocks and drink the water, how do you know it won’t make you drunk?” [104]

“What I really want to know is this: Are things getting better or are they getting worse?” – Laurie Anderson [106] ... Paul Saffo says that in the short term the pessimists are right, and in the long term the optimists are right. [109]

Much was decided before you were born. [107]

Fiction has to be plausible; reality doesn’t. [115]

Desire always misreads fate. [115]

“I personally like the certainty of death. It is amazingly relaxing to realize that one can’t do everything. If I knew I were going to live forever, I would feel obligated to fix all my imperfections. I would have to learn many more languages; I would worry about my teeth not holding out; I would have to make amends for all the mistakes I have

made.” – Esther Dyson [151]

“There are problems that are impossible if you think about them in two year terms – which everyone does – but they’re easy if you think in 50 year terms.” – Danny Hillis [157]

Music

- “I Zimbra” – Talking heads
- Music for Airports – Brian Eno
- “Push” – Birdstar

Bibliography:

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