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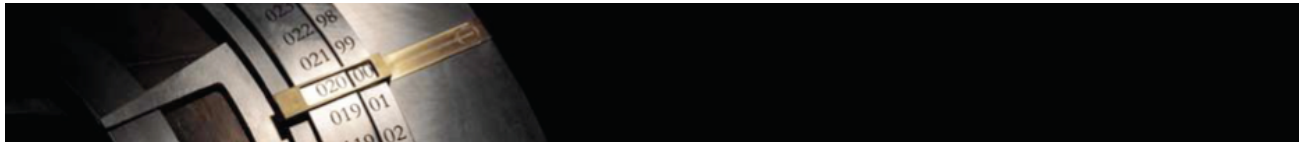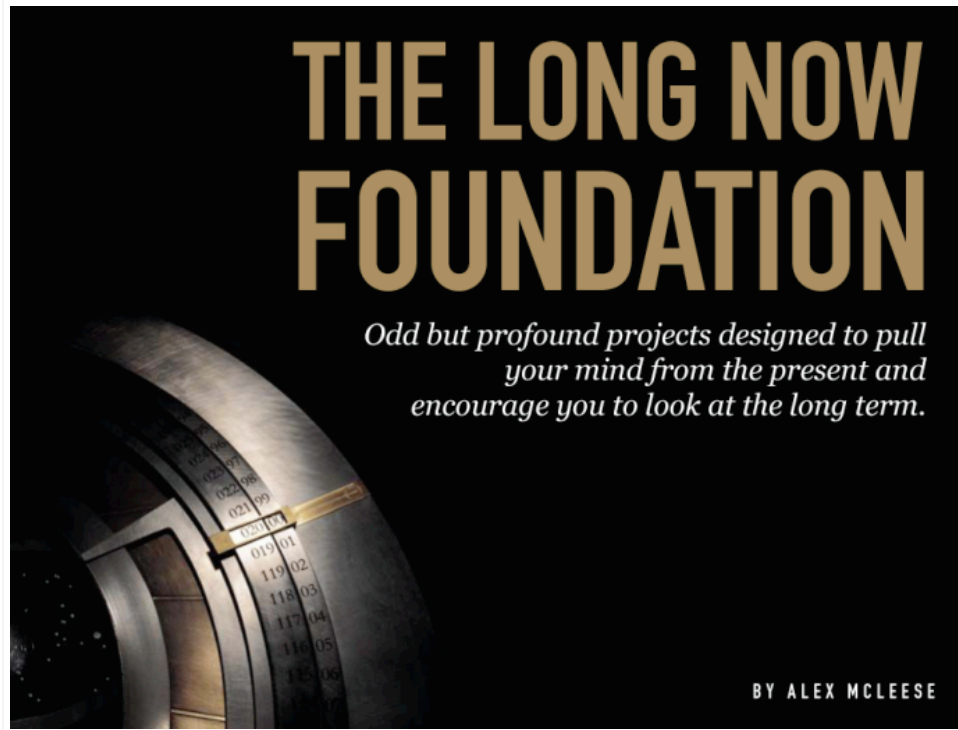
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The Long Now Foundation: Long Term Thinking, Now

November 18, 2011　　Alex McLeese

In the torrent of Internet videos, you may have missed acclaimed music producer Brian Eno, of U2 and Coldplay fame, appearing on the Colbert Report last week.

As Eno says in the video, he and his kindred spirits at The Long Now Foundation hope to broaden your perspective beyond short-lived YouTube clips. In 1996—or 01996, as the foundation would have it, in anticipation of a computer bug eight millenia into the future when the year gains a digit—Eno and other technological visionaries including Stewart Brand, Mitch Kapor, and Kevin Kelly launched a new project dedicated to the long term.

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Eno and company are working on a couple of odd but profound projects meant to pull your mind from the present. In the Colbert video, you can catch a glimpse of Eno's "77 Million Paintings," a computer program that generates video and music. The program slowly cycles through millions of images and sounds. None of us will live long enough to experience the same combination twice. In addition, Eno, who wrote the chime for Windows 95, has created a chime for a 10,000 Year Clock currently being installed inside a mountain in Texas. The clock will tick once a year and chime every once in a long while, never to the same melody twice. A cuckoo will appear once a millenium.

According to The Long Now Foundation's website, the group "hopes to provide a counterpoint to today's accelerating culture and help make long-term thinking more common" by working to "creatively foster responsibility in the framework of the next 10,000 years." Besides clocks, the organization is working to build a publicly accessible digital library of human languages (The Rosetta Project), and has created small Rosetta Disks covered with 13,000 microetched pages of language documentation, two of which have been sent into space.

The Internet has led us to Eno's work. But he and his comrades are right: it is liberating to spend a moment thinking beyond it.

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Interviews

The Crew

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