

Arts Etc.

TROPHY ROOM

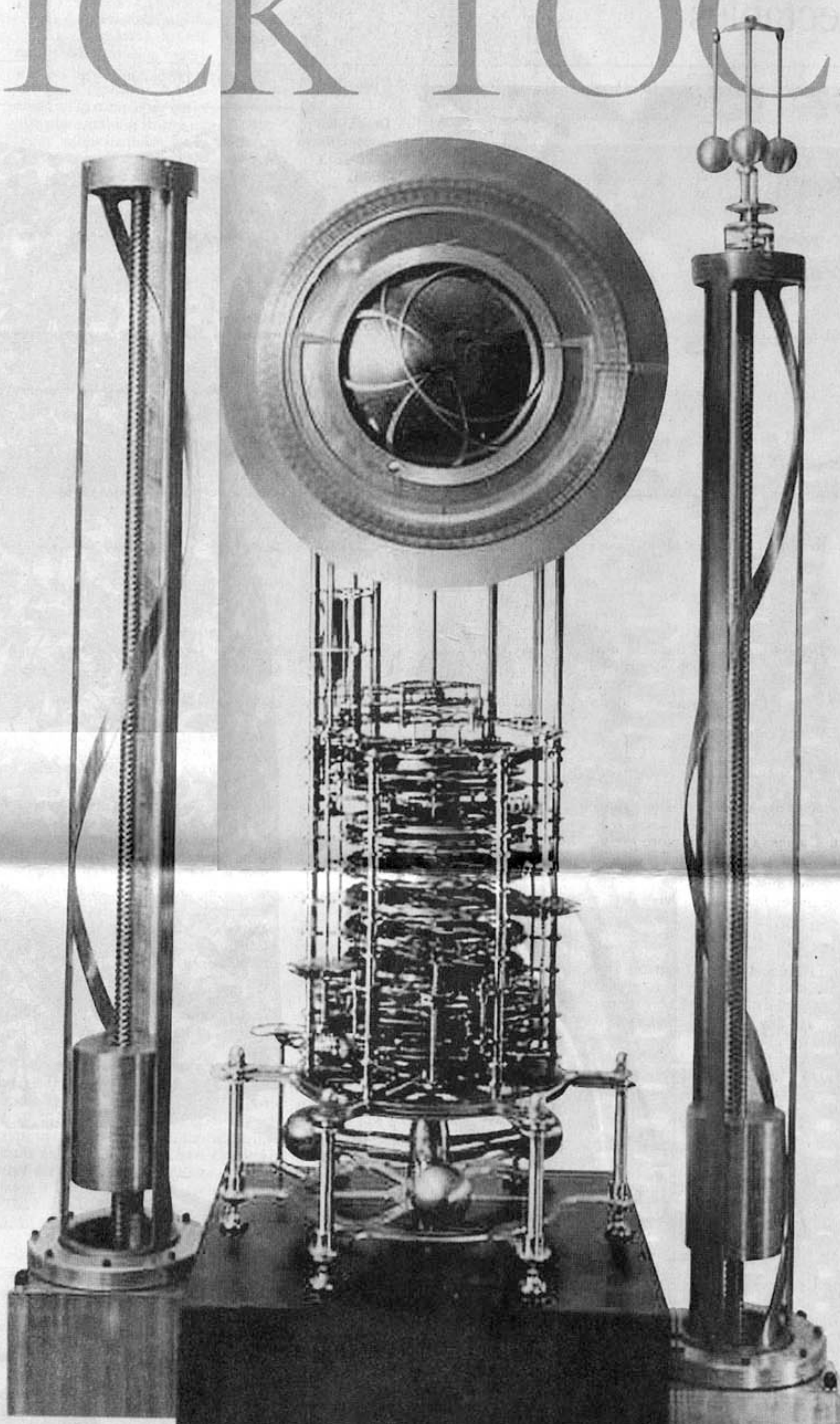
Nigel Coates battles with Trafalgar Square
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TAKE TWO

David Thomson on rewriting the ending
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TICK TOCK TICK TOCK



Counter culture: the Clock of the Long Now, main picture, is designed to run for 10,000 years; the Rosetta Project, below, aims to record all living languages; Brian Eno, above, co-founder of Long Now and composer of 'January 07003'

January 07003: Bell Studies for the clock of the Long Now, by Brian Eno, is available from www.enoshop.co.uk

In January 7003 this clock will chime with the sound of Brian Eno's 'bell' music. Phew, says **Michael Bracewell**. Is the end of Post-Modernism at last in sight? And what exactly is 'The Long Now'?

Evis in a bolero jacket goofs to one side as Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, dressed as ladies of the conservatoire, play sax and bass fiddle while Montgomery Clift lets fall a single tear as he sounds *The Last Post* while Harpo plays his harp. You just have time to recognise and register each iconic scene before they switch to another set - Maria Callas, Pete Townshend, Gregory Peck and Fred Astair - like a hand of cards in a game of video poker. They happen so fast, these successions of four simultaneous legendary images, to a jump-cut soundtrack which accelerates their impact, that the effect is one of continuous crescendo.

This is the four screen, 14 minute DVD presentation, *Video Quartet* (2003) by American artist Christian Marclay, which has just opened at White Cube gallery in London and might be said to represent a marker in the broader flow of contemporary culture. Like the vertiginous tornado of sound which closes the last track on *Sergeant Pepper*, but without the relief of its final extended chord, or like the wall of televisions across which the alien, Mr Newton, channel-surfs to a point of hysteria in the film *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, the effect of *Video Quartet* is an articulation of sound, vision and iconography reaching critical mass.

Confronted by Marclay's high-speed Hollywood parade, you begin to get a sense of popular culture becoming terminally bulimic on the rich diet of its own archive: that here is a last, colossal binge of Post-Modernism, in which the sheer amount of meticulously sourced and edited iconic imagery - "so much of everything" as Peter York once defined contemporary consumerism - becomes queasy on the G-force of its own accumulated gorgefulness.

Mesmeric and monolithic, *Video Quartet* describes a plausible destination of accelerated culture - pushing the envelope of the contemporary attention span (to borrow Tom Wolfe's term) straight through the back seam. These days we are all Mr Newton, as we zap through our 800 domestically available TV channels, or select a CD from the availability of everything ever recorded, or find that we can read a magazine in six minutes flat. Acceleration is both our servant and our ruler. Caught in the gum-trap of urban gridlock, we tend to measure our working days in minutes of delay; swinging between the short-term gratifications of lifestyle culture's compensatory pleasures, the horizons of time become a blur in the far distance. And as a consequence of such acceleration, we tend to expect the continuous enlargement of social and cultural superlatives; evolved to multi-task, we're bored faster.

Faced with the rising side effects of such a high speed culture, an organisation and charity called The Long Now Foundation was established in San Francisco in 1996 in order to introduce what might be termed a temporal counter-balance. And in his book, *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility*, the Foundation's President, Stewart Brand, sets out what he has described as the mission statement of the Long Now Foundation: "Civilization is revving itself into a pathologically short attention span. The trend might be coming from the acceleration of technology, the short-horizon perspective of market-driven economics, the next-election perspective of democracies, or the distractions of personal multi-tasking. All are on the increase. Some sort of balancing corrective to the short-sightedness is needed - some mechanism or myth which encourages the long view and the taking of long-term responsibility, where 'the long term' is measured at least in centuries."

With regard to the "mechanism or myth" which defines the aims of the Long Now Foundation, these have been described by The Clock of the Long Now - a 10,000 year clock, designed by Danny Hillis, the prototype of which can be seen in London's Science Museum, and the

monumental, finished version of which is due to be housed inside a mountain in eastern Nevada. The "soundtrack" to this clock has been composed by Brian Eno - who is one of the co-founders of the Long Now Foundation - in a series of pieces entitled *January 07003, Bell Studies for The Clock of The Long Now*. Exploring not simply the physics of bells, but the potential physics of conceptual bells, Eno's *January 07003* combines the haunting beauty of his classic "ambient" pieces - "Discreet Music" and "On Land" for example - with the mathematical brilliance of the "generative" music which he has developed for his large-scale installation pieces.

As an artist, musician and ideologue, Eno possesses a genius for converting broad intellectual concepts into highly refined works of almost minimalist purity. Vitality, much of Eno's "ambient" work is rooted in a social philosophy which becomes, ultimately, political in its sense of thinking globally while acting locally. The stillness and meditational quality of his sound installations, for example, enables the listener to simply "be", and might be seen as a secular interpretation of the aims of Buddhist meditation - to train oneself to live in the present, rather than in restless and neurotic shufflings between the recent past and the immediate future.

It is a founding principle of Eno's art that his work addresses the re-arrangement of accepted aesthetic practices or cultural conventions. And in many ways the very idea of the Long Now Foundation - as a means of striking a balance between the seductions and dysfunctions of an accelerated culture - owes much to one of Eno's socio-philosophi-

cal observations. "The expression Long Now came from something that happened to me in New York, actually, when I moved there in 1978," he says. "I became aware that it was a very, very tightly geared city, in the sense that people could become famous, have careers and disappear within a few weeks, practically. People talked about what they were working on in very short terms; you know: 'I'm working on this, and then I'm having an exhibition of it at the end of next week, and then I'm going to work on something else.' It was a very Short Now, so to speak. And so in many respects the city was full of people who were just passing through, and had no investment, really, in the city as a long term project. It was undeniably lively, but the downside was that it seemed selfish, irresponsible and randomly dangerous. 'The Short Now' suggested the possibility of its opposite, 'The Long Now.'"

Eno defines his concept of "The Long

Now" as "the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future". As a cultural principle, this also touches on, say, the Buddhist notion of conditionality - everything affects everything. But there is also a sense in which the consideration of longevity enables us to audit the consequences and boundaries of Modernism - and that "the Long Now" might represent and authorise a shift in cultural practice: an alternative to the vertiginous tensions of Post-Modernism.

The history of western culture in the 20th and 21st centuries has been in many ways, primarily, the history of acceleration. This notion is neatly symbolised in Saint Andrew's church in the village of Coniston in the Lake District. It's a strangely quiet and isolated place for such a pairing of iconic figures, but there in the churchyard stands a Celtic cross to mark the grave of the great Victorian critic and moralist, John Ruskin, who died in 1900. And just down the road, in the little adjoining cemetery, is the plaque to Donald Campbell - a martyr to the pursuit of speed, whose jet-powered boat, on 4 January 1967, hit a patch of turbulence on the neighbouring lake at 320 mph, killing him instantly. Between them, Ruskin and Campbell, we can see the trajectory of culture in the 20th century, and the exchange of one notion of the Sublime for another.

Ruskin's passing on the turn of the century seems to mark the beginnings of Modernism. His particular embodiment of cultural purpose, his discourse on the edifying capacity of art, and his near religion of the beautiful - three tenets of Victorian romanticism - would be replaced by a new concern with speed: with

