Why stop at one?

Slashdot
News for Nerds. Stuff that matters.

The Interview with Bruce Sterling

Posted by [Roblimo](#) on Friday October 08, @12:00PM EDT

from the it's-his-fault-that-we-use-the-word-"krewe"-a-lot dept.

We did the usual [Call for Questions](#) thing Monday. We didn't get quite as many as we've had for some other interview subjects here, but sometimes quality is more important than quantity, and we sent Bruce some beauts. His answers are of similar excellence, and are well worth reading even if you have never read any of his work or even if you despise science fiction. So click below, read, and enjoy!

Lemmy Caution asks:

A lot of your work recently has been on the Viridian project - a movement dedicated to innovative, practical, and far-reaching responses to environmental crisis. You've focused on the use of design and engineering to create a less destructive way of living on this planet.

You're doing so in a way that seeks to avoid politics - you'll name names, but seem unwilling to pitch battles. Is this fatalism, or an attempt to preserve consensus in a movement that includes both libertarians and communitarians?

*Mostly it's because I don't have 12 million dollars to get a Senator elected.

Do you believe that conscientious consumerism is going to be sufficient to avert continued environmental destruction?

*No, no, you're not getting it yet -- you've got to go deeper than that. If you have to be "conscientious" about it, that means that the system is malfunctioning. Being "conscientious" is just another term for letting morons with crap products steal your valuable attention. You are co-dependent with bad design when you're "conscientious." Piece-of-junk twentieth century technologies like coal-fired power plants shouldn't even *exist.*

Do you believe that "local minima" of the immediate benefits of good design will always win in the market?

Slashdot Login

Nickname:

Password:

userlogin

Don't have an account yet? [Go Create One](#). A user account will allow you to customize all these [nutty little boxes](#), tailor the stories you see, as well as remember your comment viewing preferences.

Related Links

- [Linux](#)
- [Slashdot](#)
- [Red Hat](#)
- [Wired](#)
- [Manifesto](#)
- [Call for Questions](#)
- [More on News](#)
- [Also by Roblimo](#)

*Well, it depends on how much the market sees fit to tell you about the reality of what you're buying. Suppose you had a Palm Pilot with a bar-scanner, and you ran it over a box of soap, and the readout said, "This stuff is dead cheap, but the factory gives your kid liver cancer." Suddenly it's an entirely different kind of marketing choice.

*"Making the invisible visible" is an important design principle. Everytime you hit a return key, there ought to be a puff of black coal smoke showing up on your monitor. That's the reality of today's energy market -- you're just never shown the truth about it.

Do you think lasting change will be possible without global regulation?

*Given the current political reality on the ground, global regulation is probably worse than useless. Global regulation is likely to set a bad situation into permanent legal concrete. I strongly suspect that as oil and coal companies start dying, and their oil suppliers start losing revenue, both oil governments and oil industry will try really, really hard to get a global regulatory board to throw a carbon-friendly Kyoto Convention, and write them into the industrial system forever.

And what do you think the most promising recent Viridian-positive developments have been?

*People do seem willing to buy clean energy, and not because they're scolded or regulated into it. They but it for the same reasons they buy decent plumbing, or maybe gourmet coffee. The rates of adaptation look really good. I got a brand-new solar panel system on my house right now, and it started pumping wattage into the city's grid yesterday.

Robert.Franklin asks:
I thought that The Difference Engine was one of the most offbeat and interesting takes on the cyberpunk (steampunk?) genre. Are you still in contact with William Gibson?

*Yeah, sometimes. Gibson's in Britain now, signing his new book.

Do you have plans to collaborate with him again?

*Nope, but ideas of the caliber of that Difference Engine thing don't come along very often. We discussed that concept for years on end before we started writing the novel.

G-Man asks:
I still remember early Cyberpunk, and then the early years of Wired, as times of being exposed to one "mind blowing" idea after another. The future, though far from Utopian, was going to be very interesting. Anymore, though, I see few ideas that make me sit back and say "Whoa...now *that* is cool."

Now, in a mundane world of spam and banner ads, the coming future doesn't seem nearly so thrilling. In trying to pinpoint the source of my apathy about new ideas, I can't quite decide if it's me, us, or you. That is, I can't decide if: (a) My personal perspective has changed, and I've learned enough that little suprises me anymore (b) We've all gotten better at predicting the future, so little surprises any of us, or (c) You folks (the SF writers and Futurists) blew out all the great ideas in the 80s and early 90s, and we'll just have to wait awhile for the next Big Thing.

So what I'm wondering is: Have you become at all jaded about technology and its effect on society? What do you think about our current state of predicting the future? Are there any ideas, authors, etc., that you've seen recently that make you say "Whoa..."?

Your answer is (a.) Except it's not just you that's getting older. The whole society is getting older, as a group. We're going to be living in cultures with more and more old people for as long as we live.

I don't "whoa" real easy these days, but there's (a) Dolly the cloned sheep, (b) Doogie the genius mouse, (c) MEMS microelectronic silicon engines on a chip, and (d) that weird crowd at Brandeis University, who are trying to evolve and grow artificial machines in a cyberspace, and then manufacture them as working gizmos in real life. They have little web-movies of those Karl Sims-style gimmicks just floppin' around in there. That's one of the most unspeakable things I've ever witnessed. Weirder yet, the thing they're doing in that lab is really close to the central gimmick of my Hugo-awarding-winning story "Taklamakan" (1998). That story came out just last year, and here they are trying to ship product already. Will wonders never cease!

boojumsnark asks:
Bruce: I remember reading an essay by you about Burning Man a while back; you hauled your daughter along. I thought this move, besides indicating that you were an incredibly cool dad, pretty much marked the end of Burning Man as a "dangerous"

underground phenomenom. Similarly, a number of different forces are transfroming the web-centric Internet into something increasingly bland. I know you're a long-time user of the Well, which is now owned by Salon, the Newsweek of the web.

Which leads me to my question. Do you think it's possible nowadays to create a sustained, independent, and transgressive community (a TAZ, if you will) without it being co-opted by society at large? Some of your old Catscan essays (particularly the one on Jules Verne) hint at what your response to this question would have been in the past, but I'm curious to hear what you have to say now.

*If you want a sustained, independent and transgressive community that can't be co-opted by society at large, you need to get out of the boho art scene, and right into organized crime. I mean, stop pretending that Burning Man is "dangerous." You're not fooling anybody. Mardi Gras in downtown New Orleans is more "dangerous" than Burning Man. There isn't a casino in Vegas that isn't ten times more dangerous than Burning Man. My kids went to Burning Man and had a better time than they would at Disneyworld.

*If you're way-into rebellious danger, I can especially recommend drug smuggling. It pays great, it's super-dangerous, and it's kind of the ne plus ultra of unacceptable outlaw subculture. Huge bureaucracies have been invented to try to make you stop existing. You get ritual handshakes, tattoos, slang, gangster molls, fast cars, the works! You may end up spending quite a lot of time in prison, but prison subcultures are the true havens of the congenitally un-cooptable.

*Going into exile in a country with a different ethnic base should also keep you happy. Kyoto, for instance, is full of cool Zen hipster guys who are white. There is zero chance that they will ever be "co-opted" by the Japanese. If you want the straights to pay no attention to you, just go to a place where your skin is a billboard for difference.

webmaven asks:
One of the things that I found most intrigueing about Islands In The Net was the corporate structure and culture of the Rizome corporation.

Recently we've seen companies with radical new business models (such as Redhat and VA Linux) hiring developers to work on whatever they want, and corporate HR departments focusing on 'recruiting from within' to minimize employee turnover. Both these trends may be extrapolated to lead to

Rizome type corporations.

So here's the question: What do you currently think future business entities will look like, and what can we do to make those future entities as human-friendly as possible?

*I think future business entities are gonna look like billboards for their shareholders. There will be business-entity churn, and corporations will appear on the shelf and disappear as rapidly as products. There's no sticking power left inside the "corporation." You'd be better off joining the cast of a Broadway road show, rather than imagining that a corporation is gonna look after you in the long term.

*I can't think of a single corporate entity that's truly likely to be around ten years from now. I mean, without being bought out, re-named, taken over, acquired, or re-engineered, or moving into a new net-based business model. It's over for corporate dominance, they blew it all in the downsizings. It's all about stockholder dominance now.

dmorin asks:
We're hearing lots about Neal Stephenson in the geek set these days. What's your opinion of the man, his writing style, and his choice of topics upon which to write?

*I think Neal Stephenson is a talent of the highest caliber. He's smart, he's ambitious, he's doggedly persistent, and he has got it going on in every single way that a science fiction writer should. The guy is the cat's fuckin' pyjamas.

tilly asks:
It is customary to ask people who their influences were. But I would like to turn that around. and ask a harder question...

Which new authors do you feel that you have most strongly influenced? What specifically makes you select them?

*I don't have any disciples. I see people pick gizmos and concepts and notions out of my works, every once in a while. That's a pretty standard thing in the SF field; we're always swapping notions, and I've thrown out my share. I think I probably had the most influence on people who were my contemporaries. If you take people seriously, and ask them to do their best, and suggest that new things and approaches are genuinely possible, it improves their morale. They do things they wouldn't have thought worth doing otherwise. And the world is a better place for it.

seesik asks:
First off, did Marianne Dyson get any NASA funding to help get your T1 trunk to Siberia? ;-)

Secondly, in your most recent book titled Distraction, you base a large part of the economic demise of America on the scenario of the Chinese government making all U.S. commercial software freely available on the net. While I am not deluded about the role and importance of many commercial products, how do you think the recent rise in availability and quality of free software would affect this scenario? How much consideration, if any, did you lend to the free software movement when writing Distraction?

*Well, I could tell you about that Dyson thing, but then I'd have to kill you.

*I have to confess the Chinese riff was kind of an ass-backward approach to economic collapse there. I wanted to write a book in which it was a given that America's economy had collapsed as badly as Russia's has. So I was looking for plausible excuses for that event to happen.

*So what happened to Russia? Communism collapsed, even though it had really brilliant rhetoric and a lot of pious justifications. Because, as a way of daily life it was hooey, and people just opted out. It didn't matter how many lectures you heard, at bottom there was always something fishy and unworkable about it.

*And you can say much the same about Microsoft and the Software Publishers Association, who really act and think a lot like righteous Marxist commissars trying to beat back "corruption." So if you're looking for a similar weakness in America, it's got to be the "New Economy." Frankly, I don't think the New Economy is any less sound by its nature than the Old Economy. After all, the Old Economy used to blow up and fall down all the time. Outside of the high-tech boom, America's Old Economy still looks about as sick as it did under Reagan.

*But it's easy for readers to imagine America getting really deeply invested into the "Information Economy," and then finding out that the whole shebang is built on sand. That may not be accurate, but it's plausible, and it works for readers. People felt the same kind of nervousness about abandoning the Gold Standard. "You mean I'm just supposed to *pretend* that this money is worth something? What are you, *crazy*?"

*I count myself as quite the fan of GNU/Linux antics. I don't program, and I don't have a GNOME box or anything, but I like the whole Free Software effort, just because it's a radically different industrial method. Society needs phenomena like GNU/Linux because it helps to prevent mental monoculture.

*Besides, I had Stallman in my house once, and he gave me this really wack Conlon Noncarrow CD. Noncarrow was this guy in Mexico who made insane experimental music by cutting holes in player piano spools. This generous act of Stallman's expanded my sense of possibility.

Robotech_Master asks:
I read, some time back, a [Manifesto](#) of yours dealing with dead (ie doomed or archaic or obsolete) media; it was a very interesting read.

If I'm not mistaken, the thrust of your manifesto was that a research tome on such media should be created, but since you were too swamped with projects, you hoped that people out there on the Internet who read it would come together and help to create the book themselves.

I was wondering if this has been very successful, and if so (or if not) what you have learned from the Manifesto and its consequences.

*Yeah. Well, Dead Media Project was kind of my Linux pitch there; "I got this cool idea, and here's the kernel, so why don't the rest of you guys do all the work?"

*I worked on it pretty steady for about three years, and I think we managed to discover pretty much every form of "dead media" extant. Now what's required is somebody to make sense of the whole phenomenon. And don't look at me, because even though I've probably thought about dead media more than anyone else, I don't have any solid conclusions to share.

Switch asks:
It seems that many modern science fiction authors see the future as a time when society gives up on "physical" community in favor of technology. (i.e ruined govt, city states, corporate martial powers, etc..) Do you see this as an amplification of the state of community in today's world, or is it simply a convenient literary device?

*I think the physical community was a "technology." Irrigation canals, harbors, army barracks, police stations, cathedrals,

factories, clocks, forks, running water, that's all "technology."

*There are a lot more ruined governments right now than there are sound ones. That's not a literary device. Go try living under a ruined government. Moscow right now -- it's about the most William-Gibsonian landscape you are ever likely to see.

yoshi asks:
Some authors consider collaborative writing projects to be rather painful and counterproductive. The Difference Engine , however, was a wonderful piece of writing and seemed to truly be a product of both your and Gibson's styles. My questions:

- *Did you enjoy the challenge of working with another author, especially one with such a distinct style?*
- *Do you think that sci-fi is, as a genre, particularly conducive to collaborative projects? If so, why, and if not, any opinion on why they are so common?*
- *Do you have any advice for aspiring collaborative writers (other than the key "don't kill your partner")?*

*Yeah, I do a lot of collaboration. I get a lot out of it. It never bothers me much.

*It depends on what you want out of writing. If you like to speculate and play with ideas, then collaboration is great. If you want to write some revelatory material which is deeply felt and reflective of your personal experience, write it in your diary first. Don't tell a soul.

*My advice in collaboration would be to try to put aside your tender ego boundaries, and really strive to understand how the other person thinks as an artist. Ideally, he's got something going-on mentally that you are unable to do, and would be of real use to you as a writer. Collaborative work often fails, and looks goofy even when it works, but it's worth the effort if you expand your composition process and pick up some new chops.

chromatic asks:
Rereading "Islands in the Net" recently, I was struck by the observation that the humble DVD rendered some of the early scenes almost obsolete (only in a speculative sense).

With that in mind, are there any technological or cultural developments in the past few years that have caused you to rethink your speculations/predictions/opinions about the near future? If so, what are they?

*I wouldn't be betting on the DVD being around very long.

*When the 2020s come around, I'd bet that ISLANDS looks a lot more like the reality on the ground than most other novels written in the 1980s. But Islands in the Net has got the *Soviet Union* in it.

*So what? I don't have to worry about "failed predictions." Selling predictions isn't my stock in trade. I don't have to migrate in a crystal ball in the year 2020 and look back; that's impossible, and not required to do the job. I don't have to read the future in tea leaves. I just have to stand a little closer to the trends than most of my readers do.

*The job of SF is not to reveal your destiny. It's to expand the spectrum of possibility and refresh your thinking.

sugarman asks:
We are starting to see parts of the future that you, Mr. Gibson, and others in the cyberpunk genre have predicted come true. Items such as the Mirrorshades are closer than ever to being a reality (the recent work by IBM on body portables being an example).

Are you surprised by how much what you forecasted has or has not come true? Is there anything you thought for sure was going to happen but didn't?

And though hindsight is often useless, in what ways would the current situation (cultural/political/technological) change the stories that you have written? Part of the trap with writing speculative fiction set in the near-future is that as the future date approaches, unless you are dead on with the predictions, the story will move into the realm of wild fantasy. John Carpenter's 'Escape from New York' serves as an example. In the end, it all comes down to the story. How well do you think your stories (and cyberpunk in general) will stand up in 20 years time?

*I'd have to refer you to my earlier answer. I can tell you that I expect the year 2000 to be a pretty lively time. It's a good opportunity to shed a bunch of the old approaches and to think science fiction through from first principles again. Next time I write a science fiction novel, I hope will be a book which could only have been written during the 21st century.

*The part about it "all coming down to the story in the end" is completely bogus. "Escape from New York" is a great piece of pop futurist cinema, but it has no "story" in it. A guy goes on a quest with a time-bomb in his neck. That's not a "story." It's just

a wind-up spring to get you through the ensemble cast and the set design. And the dialogue, which is great "Snake -- I heard you was dead." The movie works because it's a spectacular head-trip, not because of its so-called story-telling.

ucblockhead asks:
Would you reconsider revisting the world of systems crackers and the like "The Hacker Crackdown" was a damn good book.

*Aw, everybody and his sister knows about computer crime now. The world is full of journalists who can cover computer crime issues. Back in the Pleistocene when I was writing HACKER CRACKDOWN, the whole concept of "breaking into computers" was so out-there that it required a science fiction writer to do it. But turning science fiction writers into everyday reporters is a total waste of time. Let somebody else handle that now; I've got to be farther out-there.

Next week: John Carmack.

< This Email Will Self Destruct... | A Bold Essay From Tim O'Reilly >

This discussion has been archived. No new comments can be posted.

FWIW, you can read about Viridian here... (Score:1, Informative)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @12:12PM EDT (#2)
The Viridian Mailing List Archive

You can also gossip about Viridian on the unofficial and unmoderated **Viridian-d**

Solar House Follow up (Score:2, Interesting)
by Kintanon (**sleffer@hotmail.com**) on Friday October 08, @12:18PM EDT (#4)
(User Info)

I have a follow up question for this, I was looking at using a solar solution for my soon to be purchased home, but the startup cost seems to be well out of my range, also I tend to draw a LOT of power (Hence the reason for wanting to stop destroying the atmosphere) so I was wondering how well solar cells and batteries handle high yield nightime loads. Who did your solar setup? How much did it cost? How well does it perform?

Thanks!
Kintanon
Sign up for Alladvantage under EBS-939 and help me make money!! Sign up for UtopiAd under Valis and Help me make money! This Sig was Prematurely Ended.

Re:Solar House Follow up (Score:3, Informative)
by Tau Zero (**spherethis@youknownottoincludethis.yahoo.com**) on Friday October 08, @01:30PM EDT (#31)
(User Info)

I can't answer for Bruce, but I have to ask you:

- Why are you drawing "a LOT of power"?
- Why are you asking how well *solar cells* handle nighttime loads? <g>

Seriously, you can cut out an amazing amount of your electric usage by using compact fluorescents everywhere you can and doing something about your refrigerator. (After I re-lamped some years ago my average electric consumption went from about 8 KWH/day to 6, and 4 of that seems to be the fridge. If I was going to be able to take advantage of the investment I would get something like a SunFrost.)
--
Deja Moo: The feeling that
you've heard this bull before.

Re:Solar House Follow up (Score:1)
by SpamapS on Friday October 08, @02:49PM EDT (#55)
(User Info) http://www.maverick-dbms.org

What do you mean when you say compact fluorescents?

I have several fluorescent lights that were installed with my house, and I'm removing them. They give me headaches with the buzzing and the flickering, and I hate turning on a light and watching it flash.

Some products out there use a different sort of technology though, maybe this is what you're talking about?

I personally would rather have a solar energy system than having all my lights behave so poorly.

I will agree with Bruce though... Coal Plants just suck!
-- Join the MaVerick Project! -- http://www.maverick-dbms.org

Re:Solar House Follow up (Score:4, Interesting)
by Tau Zero (spherethis@youknownottoincludethis.yahoo.com) on Friday October 08, @03:16PM EDT (#62)
(User Info)

> *What do you mean when you say compact fluorescents?*

A compact fluorescent light ("CF") has a circular or folded fluorescent tube, attached to a ballast with a screw base. It screws right into a standard lamp socket. You can get cheap, flicker-starting ones with the heavy magnetic ballasts for about $8, lightweight no-flicker electronic ballasts starting at maybe twice that. Over their lifespan they'll save several times their purchase price.

> *I have several fluorescent lights that were installed with my house, and I'm removing them. They give me headaches with the buzzing and the flickering, and I hate turning on a light and watching it flash.*

That's old technology. You have fixtures with magnetic ballasts (loose laminations is where the buzzing comes from) and probably bad starters. The state-of-the-art in fluorescents is high-frequency electronic ballasts (the flicker goes from 120 Hz up to 20

KHz or so) and smart starter circuits. You can probably get the same advantages by buying and installing electronic ballasts for your ceiling fixtures instead of ripping them out. You might want to try one and see if you like it.

> *I personally would rather have a solar energy system than having all my lights behave so poorly.*

Photovoltaic electricity is very expensive, so if you want to actually live on what you generate you are going to be using a lot more fluorescent lamps or spending a LOT of money on PV panels.

$5/peak watt. Maybe 8 hours of sun a day. $1000 will buy enough panels to run 2 100-watt bulbs for 8 hours a day, and that's before you look at the price of the battery bank. Solar-electric power is not a substitute for efficiency, it *forces* it.
--
Deja Moo: The feeling that
you've heard this bull before.

Re:Solar House Follow up (Score:1)
by Kintanon (**sleffer@hotmail.com**) on Monday October 11, @09:32AM EDT (#97)
(User Info)

I can't answer for Bruce, but I have to ask you:
Why are you drawing "a LOT of power"?
Why are you asking how well solar cells handle nighttime loads?
Seriously, you can cut out an amazing amount of your electric usage by using compact fluorescents everywhere you can and doing something about your refrigerator. (After I re-lamped some years ago my average electric consumption went from about 8 KWH/day to 6, and 4 of that seems to be the fridge. If I was going to be able to take advantage of the investment I would get something like a SunFrost.)

I draw a lot of power because I have 10 computers running 24/7 and 2 people are always awake in the house so other things are in use 24/7 as well.

I was asking about how well the cells + BATTERIES worked to handle heavy nighttime loads. As in, do the batteries collapse after 2 hours, does it take them 2 days to get recharged, etc...
We already use compact flourescents, we're getting a low power fridge as well. Now, if you hace anything informative to say I'd be glad to hear it.

Kintanon
Sign up for Alladvantage under EBS-939 and help me make money!! Sign up for UtopiAd under Valis and Help me make money! This Sig was Prematurely Ended.

Re:Solar House Follow up (Score:2)
by Tau Zero (**spherethis@youknownottoincludethis.yahoo.com**) on Monday October 11, @12:14PM EDT (#98)
(User Info)

You obviously didn't read Bruce's response carefully, or you would have seen this:

> I got a brand-new solar panel system on my house right now, *and it started*

pumping wattage into the city's grid yesterday.

This implies that he is not storing power, he is merely offsetting his own consumption; if he ever needs more than his panel supplies (which would be every night), he pulls it from the grid. If he ever has any excess, he feeds the grid. He makes no mention of batteries, and may not have any. This is consistent with a desire to reduce the use of fossil fuels without any need for independence from the grid; whatever he generates will get used by someone.

To see how much of a battery bank you need to exist off-grid, you have to:

1. Calculate or measure your power consumption (including losses in wiring, inverters, etc).
2. Determine how long you have to go without recharging.
3. Multiply power by time to get energy.
4. Get a battery bank which will store that much energy.

It's no more magic than calculating the operating time of your system on an UPS; if you draw 1 KW and your batteries store 2 KWH, they'll go flat in 2 hours. If you have 50 KWH squirrelled away, you can run for about 2 days. Your recharge rate depends on how much juice your charging sources give you over and above your immediate consumption. You can figure about 70% efficiency for storage in lead-acid batteries.

This is not rocket science, and I'm amazed that you asked the question without doing your homework. If you want more information, surf over to Home Power magazine for a good place to start.
--
Deja Moo: The feeling that
you've heard this bull before.

Thank you, Bruce (Score:1, Redundant)
by scumdamn **(scumbucket@my-deja.com)** on Friday October 08, @12:19PM EDT (#5)
(User Info)

Thanks for taking the time to answer the questions. I find your answers complete and quite insightful. Again, thanks.

Conlon Nancarrow (Score:3, Interesting)
by Frank Sullivan **(dave@spnz.disorg)** on Friday October 08, @12:21PM EDT (#7)
(User Info) http://www.spnz.org

RMS is into Nancarrow? Cool! The man composed some *amazing* music, for those daring enough to try to follow it. He used player pianos as programmable music machines, because human beings were not physically capable of playing the music in his head. One of the most mind-boggling things i have ever encountered was a Nancarrow piece that used all 88 keys with the sustain pedal down and the volume maxed out, with these blindingly fast melodies tearing up and down the keyboard. If you've heard the best Sonic Youth, you've only heard a fraction of what Nancarrow can do that way.

Some consider Nancarrow to be one of the fathers of electronic music. He doesn't understand this view. In his mind, he has never composed anything for electronic instruments, so he doesn't see the connection. But any programmer who has used computers to do things humans cannot do can appreciate his brilliance. :}

Maybe that's just the price you pay for the chains that you refuse.
- Richard Thompson, "Beeswing"

Got any recomendations? (Score:1)
by A nonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @03:10PM EDT (#59)
(User Info)

A sampler, so to speak? Something representative of all his work, not just certain phases or the best of?

--

Don't give your right name, no no no --- Fats Waller

Re:Got any recomendations? (Score:2)
by Frank Sullivan (dave@spnz.disorg) on Friday October 08, @05:09PM EDT (#77)
(User Info) http://www.spnz.org

Try his "Studies for Player Piano" series, which i believe are still in print. Check cdnow.com or somesuch.

Maybe that's just the price you pay for the chains that you refuse.
- Richard Thompson, "Beeswing"

Re:Conlon Nancarrow (Score:1)
by garyrich (mr-hat@brewtek.com) on Friday October 08, @06:34PM EDT (#81)
(User Info) http://www.smartlink.net/~garyrich/

>He used player pianos as programmable music
>machines, because human beings were not
>physically capable of playing the music in his
>head

Of course piano geeks the world over took this
as a challenge - a "crack this box" kind of thing.
I've actually heard a few interesting human
performances of the player piano music.

I recall an interview from 10-15 years ago
where he said he did see the connection between
his work and electronic music. He said that
if he had been 20-30 years younger he would have
certainly been drawn to computer music. It didn't
exist so he started chopping up player pianos (his
player piano music requires heavily modified
pianos or they tent to self destruct.

garyr

Conlon Noncarrow (Score:1)
by Lemmy Caution (lemmy@REMOVEzangME.org) on Friday October 08, @12:25PM
EDT (#8)
(User Info) http://localhost/

Coincidentally enough, I just saw an exhibit at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts of sound-based music installations, including a piece called Conloninpurple. It's a tribute to Noncarrow, and it consists of a series of hanging mallets and chimes controlled by a MIDI controller - it was an interesting take on digital music, because none of the music was itself synthesized. Truly electroacoustic music.

I suggest anyone in the Bay Area check it out (the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts slumbers under the long shadow cast by the new Sony Metreon/Temple of Doom.)

And thanks to Bruce for giving Good Interview.

Re:Conlon Noncarrow (Score:1)
by doom **(doom@kzsu.stanford.edu)** on Saturday October 09, @03:13AM EDT (#91)
(User Info) http://www.grin.net/~mirthless/index.html

Yes, that installation was by the sound artist
Trimpin, and it's probably the best thing I've
seen (heard?) by him to date.

A visitor to this installation is confronted by
a huge room full of dangling purple metal
tubes of different lengths. There's a small
set of controls in the center, with two knobs.
One changes the scale, the other allows you play glissendo's on the selected scale. When you spin
this knob back and forth, you can easily get
sounds out of it that are reminiscent of the
"impossible piano" sounds that appear in Conlon
Nancarrow's work.

Playing with this thing was worth the $5 price of
admission alone. Don't miss the other interactive
stuff though (upstairs, hidden in one corner,
is a set of homebuilt intruments that you're
allowed to play with, including a "Bat" by Tom
Nunn).

> I suggest anyone in the Bay Area check it out
> (the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts slumbers
> under the long shadow cast by the new Sony
> Metreon/Temple of Doom.)

(Temple of what?) Doesn't this place have the
first Microsoft only software retail outlet?
I tend to call it the Merde-on.

ObGeek: This Saturday I'm going to check out the
exhibit of the Apollo photos over in the SFMOMA
across the street.

Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:4, Insightful)

by GFD on Friday October 08, @12:32PM EDT (#9)
(User Info)

It's over for corporate dominance, they blew it all inthe downsizings. It's all about stockholder dominance now.

I think Sterling has hit the nail on this one. This is something I have been thinking about on and off for years now - essentially ever since the beginning of "stockholder value" and downsizing.

At the end of the day I think the only way companies that focus on intellectual property (private or community) can thrive is by being private. That is, no publically traded stock, no shareholder lawsuits, no terror of screwing up quarterly results. This is the only way they can take the "long view" required to build people (and their loyalty).

Many of these companies could wind up providing services to publically traded lottery tickets - much like caterers for a big party. I think Sterling is right about corporate entities not lasting 10 years in the current environment. Think of a publically traded company becoming like a burning man event.

A good for instance of this is Alan Cox becoming a consultant (private company) to a publically traded company Red Hat (multi media finacial fantasy event).

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:2)
by Analog **(analog@webwidgets.net)** on Friday October 08, @01:06PM EDT (#23)
(User Info)

At the end of the day I think the only way companies that focus on intellectual property (private or community) can thrive is by being private...

Many of these companies could wind up providing services to publically traded lottery tickets

Interesting comments. Puts me in mind of two things. One is a company that I used to work for that pretty much dominates their field. Their primary business is licensing their intellectual property, and they are privately held. Although it appears to be changing somewhat, their business model depends on the fact that they have noone but themselves to answer to; right before I left, they cancelled a project that had cost millions because the result they got wasn't up to their standards. The point was made that in a publically held corp, they almost certainly would have had to release the product, because the shareholders would have demanded a return on that investment, despite the fact that it might have seriously damaged the reputation that was their main selling point.

It's your second comment, though, that I find most interesting. If you look back on the California gold rush (startling how it parallels the current rush to get in on internet stocks in some ways), you'll find that it did indeed make many people very rich. However, the vast majority of these were not prospectors (most of these finished with nothing); they were the people who provided goods and services to the prospectors. Perhaps a lesson for the (near) future there?

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by mal3 on Friday October 08, @03:36PM EDT (#66)

(User Info)

If you look back on the California gold rush (startling how it parallels the current rush to get in on internet stocks in some ways), you'll find that it did indeed make many people very rich. However, the vast majority of these were not prospectors (most of these finished with nothing); they were the people who provided goods and services to the prospectors. Perhaps a lesson for the (near) future there?

Does this mean we should invest in Ebay, and Ameritrade. Or does that defeat the point, my brain hurts. :-)
"I would've tried conformity, but everyone else was doing it"

Golden Lesson (Score:1)
by GFD on Friday October 08, @11:08PM EDT (#87)
(User Info)

This may indeed be the lesson. The trick will be to make sure your bills are paid in real money and try to get options as well. Don't know what the issues are for 3 parties and stock option payments but this would be the ideal play.

As long as you realize the fantasy game is what it is and are careful about cashing in your chips vs buying more chips on your credit card one can do quite well.

To complete the circle IMVVHO you may also want to take currency risk into account if you are American. The US$ has had a very good run but nothing lasts forever.

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1, Interesting)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @01:07PM EDT (#24)

At the end of the day I think the only way companies that focus on intellectual property (private or community) can thrive is by being private. That is, no publically traded stock, no shareholder lawsuits, no terror of screwing up quarterly results. This is the only way they can take the "long view" required to build people (and their loyalty).

Ha-Ha-Only-Serious: 10 years down the road is 40 quarters end-to-end.

There are a *lot* of people who talk about the long view, and I think they're all wrong. It's almost always better to focus on immediately productive things because you can get immediate feedback on whether what you're doing works. And if it doesn't work, you can change it with little cost, whether the cost is political, monetary, or time.

Time-servers and morons love grandiose gigantic plans, because there's never any way to accurately monitor whether any useful progress is being made, since there's no payoff for another 5 years. Plus, there's the good-money-after-bad phenomenon: "We spent 50 million dollars already, so we've got to do whatever it takes to make the project succeeed. Double the budget!"

Having shareholders breathing down your neck for quarterly results is kind of scary, but it's an amazingly useful way of squashing that sort of nonsense. (Unfortunately, it doesn't work that well on the sort of huge companies that are big enough to have managers who are completely insulated from the shareholders.)

You see this in software, too. There are two kinds of large software systems: those that evolved from small systems and those that don't work.

It's useful to throw a little money at long-term research, but only because it keeps your brightest minds happy and productive. It's a human resources expenditure, like a company picnic or a 401(K) plan. Any discoveries that come out of long-term research are purely serendipitous.

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by GFD on Friday October 08, @01:36PM EDT (#33)
(User Info)

I think it depends on the context. Yes there are still mastadons wandering out there with bureaucratic 5 year plans. However, they are getting fewer and fewer as time goes on.

My concern is how do you develop knowledge assets. I suspect that the big winners in the future of knowledge intensive industries will be companies that can keep and develop people resources.

I seriously wonder whether "quarterly companies" can do that in the intensifying multi media financial fantasy malestrom they are all caught up in. In the world of shareholder dominance only one thing counts - the quote on the stock ticker.

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:2)
by georgeha on Friday October 08, @01:15PM EDT (#28)
(User Info) http://www.frontiernet.net/~ghaberbe/george2.htm

Respectfully, I disagree. I think there will be large publicly traded companies for some time, particularly capital intensive ones.

What private company is going to challenge GM, or Ford, or DaimlerChrysler? How do you make an open source challenge to GM, do you have one gal running a lathe in her basement making one camshaft a week, a guy laying up one fiberglass body a month in his garage? For the near future, the only entities that can make affordable automobiles will be large publicly held companies,or even government sponsored companies, and even these will get fewer and fewer.

Take the commercial aircraft industry. There's only three major contenders that I can think of, Boeing, Airbus and McDonnell-Douglas-whomever-else-they-merged-with. Airbus requires a whole continent for financial backing, Bill Gates would be sorely pressed to consider buying Boeing. Is some stealthy private company going to rise up in the next 10 years to challenge them?

Maybe Sterling's hypothesis makes sense in knowledge intensive industries, where the only barrier to entry is a $2000 PC. But in the world of making and moving material things, I don't think things are going to change that much.

One caveat, if nanotechnology were to really take off, it probably would be the end of massive publicly held companies. And electricity would be so cheap, there would be no need to meter it.

George

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by GFD on Friday October 08, @01:21PM EDT (#29)
(User Info)

I completely agree. I should have been more clear that my comments were about knowledge intensive industries. Metal bending, etc. will always require big (and getting bigger) capital.

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:2)
by georgeha on Friday October 08, @01:52PM EDT (#38)
(User Info) http://www.frontiernet.net/~ghaberbe/george2.htm

I should have read more clearly, you were talking about companies that focused on intellectual property.

I was responding more to Sterling's thesis.

George

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by Delicon (robwrht@io.com) on Friday October 08, @01:54PM EDT (#39)
(User Info) http://www.io.com/~robwrht/

Good Comment and all but just one point of clarification

>There's only three major contenders that I can
>think of, Boeing, Airbus and
>McDonnell-Douglas-whomever-else-they-merged-with.

That would be Boeing that bought McDonnel-Douglas. Only two major commercial aircraft builders these days.

Robert Wright

Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:2)
by georgeha on Friday October 08, @03:19PM EDT (#63)
(User Info) http://www.frontiernet.net/~ghaberbe/george2.htm

That would be Boeing that bought McDonnel-Douglas. Only two major commercial aircraft builders these days.

Thanks, I no longer read the trade mags, and don't have too many contacts in the aero world.

Would that make it BoMcGrumDoug?

George

Corporate Reengineering in a Net World (Score:1)
by WillAffleck on Friday October 08, @02:40PM EDT (#53)
(User Info)

Interesting viewpoint, but I'll bet $1000 that many of my stock holdings in companies will survive. Johnson&Johnson, Disney, AT&T will survive. They may alter their form for the Net - Disney is 1/3 Net nowadays, AT&T is 1/2 Net nowadays, but they'll be

doing mostly the same things, only in different delivery mechanisms.

We confuse the transmigration of the delivery mechanism with the alteration of the corporate culture. Disney movies are still the same, even if you get them on your flat-screen HDTV and your cell phone screen with web-enabled story change points. The mode of presentation and mechanism of delivering the experience change, but it's still Entertainment.

I think that possibly 1/5th of all corporations in twenty years will be radically different from those that are so 1995 - Red Hat for example. But people still need to eat and drink Pepsi.

Will in Seattle
Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by webmaven **(webmavenSPAMLESS@lvcm.com)** on Friday October 08, @03:52PM EDT (#69)
(User Info) http://www.fiawol.com
You don't need nanotechnology to see that things like desktop CNC mills, and desktop stereolithography will soon cross over from prototyping services into custom self retooling factories in your garage.

(by soon, I mean within the next twenty years)

When that happens, I think you'll find manufacturing corporations outsourcing their core business even more than they are now, or face extiction. In the end, all that GM will really have is it's brand and it's IP.

While it's true that no-one is going to build a 767 in their garage, most manufactured goods are much smaller.
--
FIAWOL, because **F**andom **I**s **A** **W**ay **O**f **L**ife.
I'm not so sure about this... (Score:1)
by torpor **(jay2teklab.com)** on Friday October 08, @03:58PM EDT (#70)
(User Info)
I agree with you, sort of.

Frankly, I look forward to the day where, instead of going to a jewellry store and buying a physical object, I simply click on a web page, purchase the design for that object, squirt the design to my kitchen/workshop, and pop! out comes my own fabricated product.

I think that day will come, sooner than we think. It may not be Feed-like a la "Diamond Age", and it may not involve nano-tech at all, but one of these days soon we'll be able to make our own consumer products in the comfort of our living room. Heck, we're already building our own computers - this process has just gotta get simpler and simpler, because there's a huge cottage-industry driving it down to that level.

As computers have become personal, so will all other forms of industry.

So I'm not so sure that market domination of mega-corps in other forms of industry is as black and white as you think.

By way of simple example, the custom "experimental" aircraft industry is a huge one, and neither of those big-3(2) air companies are involved in it on an industry-dominating level. Yet every year, more and more people are buying designer aircraft.

Sure, the custom aircraft industry may be 'cottage' in nature right now due to the cost of entry, but don't forget that the Internet was a 'cottage' industry a few years back as well for the same cost-of-entry problem as well, and since the Internet is now the Grand Facilitator, things will change - pair the Internet with some of these other atom-based cottage industries, and all of a sudden you've got something that *can* challenge the Goliaths.

Granted, this challenge will on the face of it be in terms other than economic i.e. Someone posting a message like 'here is my open source design for an ultralight that'll get you anywhere in a radius of 1000 miles, feel free to improve on it just let me know of any modifications' == a great threat to the design ethic of Boeing but it may not necessarily be a revenue threat...

Also, just because some Goliath company has squintillions of capital to invest in squashing David doesn't mean anything any more - David Corp can always squirt itself out onto the 'net in the form of open projects, and there's nothing that Big Corp can do about it but sit back and watch people evolve their own tech.

Maybe you're right in terms of time - certainly we won't see the big corps come crashing down in the next 20 or so years. But what we *will* see is more and more people sharing more and more information about the design of things, the technology of things, and more and more industry resulting from that process, which is not directly under the control of the large corps that filled the gap pre-Internet.

Jay Vaughan, SlashDot-Addicted Developer (SAD)
Re:Businesses Of The Future Will Be Private (Score:1)
by Mija Cat **(acat@despammed.com)** on Friday October 08, @05:48PM EDT (#79)
(User Info)
Automotive will be radically different in 20 years.

CAE/CAD/CAM (Computer Aided Engineering, Drafting, and Manufacturing) currently allows feeding an automated assembly line nothing but parts. No workers to manage, and if you want to go from making cable boxes to making game stations, just point-and-click.
Many suppliers to the automotive industry already use early versions of these automated lines, but (GM especially) can't get out of union contracts, and can't do enough with robots yet.
Wait 10 years, and the robots will be able to replace *enough* of the unions. Hell, Chrysler bought 2 automated lines that will put together entire cars from components without human involvement 3 years ago!

Want a '67 Mustang? Log onto ford.com and request that they fab you one. The

blueprints are available, or will be. It's just a matter of programming the body panels into the stamping press, and you'll get that body over the current drive train. And with a built-in AM/FM/MP3 stereo, too!

The database and automated assembly line will be there inside of 20 years, probably inside of 10.

Ditto a '24 Dusenberg.

Ditto a '74 firebird.

Ditto a '78 Reliant, if you must, any body that's ever been built can be rebuilt.

Yes, that's really my e-mail. Don't change a thing.

Damn. (Score:1)
by CdotZinger (**milleplateaux@public-enemy.commacommadowndoobydoo**) on Friday October 08, @12:39PM EDT (#11)
(User Info) http://home.earthlink.net/~dotzinger

I'll have to scoop out that burnout/Deadhead/typical-Berkeley-guy image of Stallman I've had in my head until now, and reread his manifestiiiiii as products of the mind of a Conlon Nancarrow fan, a.k.a. a great mind. It was such fun pretending everything he said had "One Tin Soldier" playing in the background. Damn.

And since I couldn't come up with a decent question --

Hey Bruce: You might be interested in Melt-Banana's *Charlie* cd; they mangle punk rock as frighteningly/inspiringly/virtuosically as Nancarrow does ragtime -- like what Shudder to Think does to cock rock, if you've heard that. (Also they're from Japan, which I think gives them an automatic jack-up on the cyber-coolness scale.)

Thanks for stopping by.

Your mouth is like Columbus Day.

Holy Fire, memetics and the human genome (Score:3, Interesting)
by jw3 (**jw3@gyral.com**) on Friday October 08, @12:39PM EDT (#12)
(User Info)

Hm... As a biologist, I admired the "Holy Fire" (it had a very good polish translation), and I wanted to post some questions... but I had not much time the last week (microbes, you understand). However, I thought that they might be an interesting point to discuss with anyone who knows the books of Bruce Sterling.

The first thing consideres gene therapy, cloning and such. Although I personally believe that human cloning - say, human cloning from somatic cells, as opposed to cloning the embryo - will remain fiction for a long time, not due to ethical or technical reasons, but because it's not useful - I also think that the further evolution of medicine and biology will go in the direction depicted by Mr. Sterling in "Holy Fire". In a few years the human genome *will* be sequenced - either by the Humane Genome Project or Craigg Venter from The Institute for Genomic Research, and this will provide the basis for an extensive research on the functioning of a human cell. Sooner or later the gene therapy becomes something widespread, and I'm not even talking about super-human beings or creating

superintelligent kids, but just mending all the small defects a person inherited from his parents. You would be amazed if you knew how many of such little defects you have :) I wonder what do
you think, realistically, about future of medicine - will it be something like what was described in "Holy Fire"?

Another thing I wanted to ask Mr. Sterling (my esprit d'escalier be damned) is, what does he think about the Internet as an experimental field for memetics. A meme is a term coined by Richard Dawkins (the samed who first used the expression "selfish gene") back in the 80s, and it described what is also know as a "virus of the mind" - a small portion of information, which spreads from one human to another, replicating and evolving, using the human brain as a host, but not providing any advantage to the person who spreads it (rather a disadvatage). The first time I started getting the "Good Times" message to my mailbox, I told myself - well, here you have a perfect virus of the mind, spreading and evolving, and relatively easy to trace. Right now there are plenty of ideas on the Internet, which spread like a virus, and it could be possible to design some memetical experiments.

What do you think about memetics? Do you think it is worth using it to examine the cultural evolution?

Regards,

January

----)-\//-///----------------------------------January-Weiner-3----- All things considered, insanity may be the only reasonable alternative.

Re:Holy Fire, memetics and the human genome (Score:1)
by StrawberryFrog on Friday October 08, @02:11PM EDT (#43)
(User Info)

> human cloning ... will remain fiction for a long time, not due to ethical or technical reasons, but because it's not useful

D you honestly think that Americans do things because they are *useful*? (I've visited America, and they are all weirdos there) I vote for human cloning happening real soon now.

ribbit StrawberryFrog

Re:Holy Fire, memetics and the human genome (Score:1)
by jw3 (jw3@gyral.com) on Friday October 08, @05:13PM EDT (#78)
(User Info)

:-))

Answer 1: Human beings are in general not very fit in doing useful things, otherwise -

how do you explain WWW, Windows and me, sitting here and writing to /., instead of finishing my northern blot and going home?

Answer 2: There is no *Big Money* (TM) or anything of a special scientific interest in human cloning, at least not in cloning from stem cells. (Cloning embryos might have some medical aspects, like curing the unfertility and such). Everything I heard about possible uses for human clones was: (i) living organ transplants :-) - absurd, *in vitro* growing of organs will be much faster, and will arrive sooner,
(ii) Hussain cloning super-soldiers: absurd, it's easier to train normal people, the phenotypic influence on a human being is in this respect much greater (iii) I wanna clone myself and carry the baby! - well, how much weirdos like that do you think you'll find, and how much will they be willing to pay? Ten years of funding a very expensive area of research?

Of course, there *will* be researchers or companies willing to do this just to show that it is possible or to make the headlines, but - you know, you cannot do science alone. Wilmut was not a newcomer, you have to have contacts to other scientists in the field to achieve something, you cannot just start a company named "Transgeneta" and clone a human without uttering a word on what you are doing, even if you have money enough to buy Wilmut or another one of the few scientists in this field.

I don't think we will hear about a human clone during the next, say, fifteen years - in fact, I don't think, I will live long enough to see it (according to theDeath Test, I will die in 2036.

Regards,

January

----)-\//-///----------------------------------January-Weiner-3----- All things considered, insanity may be the only reasonable alternative.
to boojumsnark (Score:1)
by Q*bert (**Don'tSpamqweaver@vovida.com**) on Friday October 08, @12:43PM EDT (#14) (User Info) http://www.vovida.com/
Gretchen, is that you?

--Quinn
Beer recipe: free! #Source
Cold pints: $2 #Product
Safe rides home, any hour: $25 #Support

Vovida, OS VoIP
Re:to boojumsnark (Score:1)

by boojumsnark on Friday October 08, @03:10PM EDT (#60)
(User Info)
Err. No. Sorry.

I didn't know what a meme was, so I asked five friends. They didn't know what a meme was, so they asked five friends.

This week, Bruce Sterling, next week, John Carmack (Score:5, Funny)
by Paul Crowley **(slashdot-paul@hedonism.demon.co.uk)** on Friday October 08, @12:44PM EDT (#15)
(User Info) http://www.hedonism.demon.co.uk/paul/

Boggle. So, is /. just about the coolest thing possible, or what? And when do we get Alan Cox, RMS, Neal Stevenson, or Linus himself?

I wouldn't take the relatively short list of questions as an indicator of any problem. I came to the article wanting to post a question and saw that many questions had already been set far better than anything I could think of. I think it all went very well and certainly the answers are fun and enlightening.

And will the phrase "the cat's fuckin' pyjamas" be appearing on the front of the next Neal Stephenson book?
--
John M - personal message for you on my Web page.

Re:This week, Bruce Sterling, next week, John Carm (Score:1)
by tomblackwell **(tomb@switchboardmail.com)** on Friday October 08, @12:54PM EDT (#18)
(User Info) http://www.musicinsight.com

I thought we already got Alan Cox a while back...

Re:This week, Bruce Sterling, next week, John Carm (Score:2, Interesting)
by roblimo **(roblimo.nojunk@slashdot.org)** on Friday October 08, @01:50PM EDT (#36)
(User Info) http://andovernews.com/bio_miller.html

Yes, we've already had Alan Cox (check the "interviews" section read what he had to say. Great stuff!) RMS will be here before long - he's already agreed to do it. We just need to set a date. And plenty of other excellent people will be along in due course.

I (sigh) suppose we'll be forced to do a Linus interview at some point. I hesitate only because *everybody* does Linus interviews, and most of them get posted on Slashdot and we all read them. Can't we let the poor man alone to write code and have some time with his family and do whatever it is he does at Transmeta? ;-)

Make sure you check our special "surprise" interview guest(s) the week after next. You will be shocked and amazed and delighted. I know I was when they offered themselves up to us. It's going to be one of the most fun, most crazy, but also most meaningful and on-topic (for Slashdot, at least) pieces we've ever done.

- Robin
Mystery Guest: Al Gore (Score:3, Funny)
by A Big Gnu Thrush on Friday October 08, @02:06PM EDT (#41)

(User Info)

You shouldn't have given it away, but I am shocked and amazed and delighted.

Mr. Gore, do you have any plans to invent an intRAnet to go with this fabulous internet of yours? My company sure could use one!

why a linus interview would be good (Score:1)
by lbergstr on Friday October 08, @02:49PM EDT (#56)
(User Info) http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~lbergstr

I hesitate only because *everybody* does Linus interviews, and most of them get posted on Slashdot and we all read them.

Yeahbut most of those interviews are targeted at a general audience, and written by journalists who aren't as well-informed as the Slashdot hive-mind. So hopefully people will ask more revealing questions here.

No Transmeta questions, please.

The "surprise" interview guest(s) (Score:1)
by ajf (afitzpat@mail.usyd.edu.au) on Friday October 08, @03:24PM EDT (#65)
(User Info) http://www-personal.usyd.edu.au/~afitzpat/

Interviewing the whole Slashdot team, eh?

This is funny on the scale of 5? (Score:1, Interesting)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @10:48PM EDT (#85)

looking up this guy Crowley's user info, it's pretty obvious he's a moderator favorite, despite his often terse, incomplete posts. 80 karma points? Makes you wonder about the moderation process here, and how it artifically guides these conversations. Looking through older threads, some of best *gems* are often left unread because they've been buried under a mountain of garbage like the above post. Perhaps it's time to revaluate the moderation process.

Personally, I think moderator accountability *to the slashdot community* should be introduced. Meaning, that no more anon moderators. If you moderate a comment up or down, your nic should appear in reference to this action, so that we can see who is making these often arbitrary decisions.

Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1, Interesting)
by R. Anthony (flame_ranthony@hotmail.com) on Friday October 08, @12:44PM EDT (#16)
(User Info)

*I wouldn't be betting on the DVD being around very long."

Hrmmm. Once Japan decides on a standard for DVD-R, the technology will perpetuate itself especially when you take into account the fact that the DVD encryption algorythm has already been broken, according to . So, perhaps theory of American's economic collapse due to Chinese software piracy would have been lent a higher degree of credibility had you included DVD movie piracy in the mix...

..however, IMHO, the American economy will collapse for entirely different reasons that intellectual property rights abuses. However, this isn't the time for grim analyses.

On second thought (Collapse of the US economy) (Score:1)
by R. Anthony (**flame_ranthony@hotmail.com**) on Friday October 08, @01:46PM EDT
(#35)
(User Info)

getting moderated down in from 2 back to one in the space of 5 minutes has given me some impetus to continue:

Ahrm, where was I. Ah. The collapse of the American economy:

1) P/E ratios: the ratio between the valuation of a stock, or variable "P" price, and the variable "E" earnings. Economists believe that P/E ratios over 16 increase the probability of a stock market crash exponentially. The current P/E ratio for the American Stock markets is over **30**.

2) Leveraging. Most US corporations are up to their eyeballs in debt. They operate under the same conglomerate ITT type model that became common practice in the 1980s. The philosophy behind this model can be likened to primitive species evolutionary behavior, specifically pack animals/fish schools travelling in larger numbers so as to be less pervious to predators. Or in this instance, acquire enough companies so that you are less susceptible to hostile takeovers. The end result of this process is massive debt, and very little actual capitol, as it takes enormous sums of money to buy another company/corporation (e.g. MCI buying Sprint for **100 Billion Dollars** this week.

3) The mysterious Federal Reserve Note: Contrary to popular belief, only 8%, or so of the US currency is *actually* in the form of dollars. The other 92% of the US currency is in the form of electronic cash and IOUs to various foreign powers. Should there be a run on the banks due to a highly likely stock market crash, there would be a printed currency shortage, much the same as there was in the 1930s.

So there you have it.

Re:On second thought (Collapse of the US economy) (Score:1)
by RachaelAnne (**raludwic@REMOVEu.arizona.edu**) on Friday October 08, @07:51PM
EDT (#83)
(User Info) http://www.u.arizona.edu/~raludwic

"3) The mysterious Federal Reserve Note: Contrary to popular belief, only 8%, or so of the US currency is *actually* in the form of dollars. The other 92% of the US currency is in the form of electronic cash and IOUs to various foreign powers."

Which is one good reason a gold standard (or some other thing that can't be easily replicated/mined) should be money ... it's way too easy for those printing the money (i.e. the US gov't) to inflate the money. At least with a physical thing like gold prices are not tied to money supply that can be changed by fiat--some one actually has to dig more gold!

Rachael

(Please no flaming...it's just those kinds of ratios of "real money" versus debt money makes one want to scream: "why the *#$! did we get of the gold standard?")
"Go Forth Ye Lemmings and Propagate"

The problem with gold... (Score:1)
by [delmoi](#) **(delmoi at hot mail dot com)** on Saturday October 09, @05:48PM EDT ([#95](#))
([User Info](#))

The thing is, 'gold' is an artifical currency as well, the only reason people want it is beacuse it's 'worth' somthing. sure, it makes a good conductor, but it costs about 600 times as much as silver for that purpose.

also, using gold instaid of paper wouldn't negate all the 'lending' going on. instaid of 92% virtual dolars, we would have 92% of the economy being virtual gold.

I'd like to see the economy survive loosing 92% of itself...

"Subtle mind control? Why do all these HTML buttons say **Submit**' ?"
Chad Okere, self apointed *Unquestioned Lord of the internet(TM)*

Re:On second thought (Collapse of the US economy) (Score:1)
by [Rombuu](#) **(rombuu@surfree.com)** on Friday October 08, @11:00PM EDT ([#86](#))
([User Info](#))

1) P/E ratios: the ratio between the valuation of a stock, or variable "P" price, and the variable "E" earnings. Economists believe that P/E ratios over 16 increase the probability of a stock market crash exponentially. The current P/E ratio for the American Stock markets is over 30.

Well, actually if you look at the numbers the are a few companies with very high P/E, and most of the market is pretty much in the 14-18 P/E range this has been close to the historical average. Worst case, a few of the high flyers will be shot down and life will go on, maybe a minor recession in there. You have to keep in mind the last 3 years have been exceptional with the markets returning 20-30% when the average return is around 8%. Sure there is going to be a correction sometime, but I wouldn't short a bunch of stock at this point.

2) Leveraging. Most US corporations are up to their eyeballs in debt. They operate under the same conglomerate ITT type model that became common practice in the 1980s. The philosophy behind this model can be likened to primitive species evolutionary behavior, specifically pack animals/fish schools travelling in larger numbers so as to be less pervious to predators. Or in this instance, acquire enough companies so that you are less susceptible to hostile takeovers. The end result of this process is massive debt, and very little actual capitol, as it takes enormous sums of money to buy another company/corporation (e.g. MCI buying Sprint for 100 Billion Dollars this week

a) Well actually US companies are leveraged less than their international counterparts. Debt is not a bad thing for a corportation, it is merely a transfer of risk to another entity in return for up front cash flows.
b) Conglomeration really isn't in vogue these days with a few notable exceptions (GE comes to mind). Even ITT the poster child for conglomeration has spun off a large

number of its units and I belive only holds its Gaming / Hotel business these days.
c) Most of the big combinations of companies recently have been mergers which involve little if any additional debt. Equity in the companys is used to make the payment for the other company. Sprint/MCIWorldCom is a perfect example of this. MCI's outlay in cash is debt is very small, and Sprint shareholders will be "paid" in MCIWorldcom stock.

3) The mysterious Federal Reserve Note: Contrary to popular belief, only 8%, or so of the US currency is *actually* in the form of dollars. The other 92% of the US currency is in the form of electronic cash and IOUs to various foreign powers. Should there be a run on the banks due to a highly likely stock market crash, there would be a printed currency shortage, much the same as there was in the 1930s

Well, this is again technically true, but there are several measures of how much money is out there, and I'm not sure which one you are using. M1 is cash out there, M2 is things that can be converted to cash quickly and easily (checking accounts, etc..), M3 is everything that could conceivably be turned into currency (Savings accounts, etc...) By definition you can't run out of M1, M3 is hard to turn into cash, so its unlikely people will knee jerk out of these investments. You could possibly have a run on banks these days, but why would people bother? Bank accounts are insured up to $100,000 which was not the case during the depression, so you really don't have much to worry about if your bank goes under, and access to quick and easy credit (Credit cards) that did not exist at that time will get you though any short term liquidity problems an individual will have.

If despite this you still think the economy is going to collapse, would you like to give me those useless pieces of paper with dead presidents on them that you have?

Re:On second thought (Collapse of the US economy) (Score:1)

by R. Anthony (**flame_ranthony@hotmail.com**) on Saturday October 09, @02:28AM EDT (#90)
(User Info)

I think when you take Internet stocks, the overall P/E ratio is inflated past 14-18. For instance, the Yahoo IPO injected massive amounts of capital into a company with no real revenues, besides what they generate from banner adds. Banner adds do not pay in the billions.

...markets returning 20-30% when the average return is around 8%...

It wasn't too long ago that the stock market was at 6,000, now it's pushing 10,000. What this 20-30% return equates to is a speculative bubble, which will eventually burst.

If the stock market were to drop back down to 6,000 a lot of capitol would vanish over night, and a lot of companies will be forced to lay people off. In turn these people will no longer be able to pay off their own debt, and as a result, the bankruptcy rate will rise exponentially. Commercial banks, already stretched thin by lending and their own stock market speculation (and the smug assurance that the Fed will bail them out, as it did with the trillion dollar hedge fund fiasco earlier this year), will not be prepaired to lose this major soruce of revenue (consumer loans) while simultaneously suffering massive losses

in the stock market. The fed will have to step in, but IMHO, the Fed is full of IOUs, not real cash, so who knows how it's supposed to bail out hundreds of banks?

What is missing in my previous analysis is a triggering mechanisim. Unfortunately, Y2K, a huge FUD **catalyst** is only a couple months away, and should people decide to panic, they will pull out of the stock market in droves in December. And as Bruce Sterling pointed out in one of his repsponses above, *"... It's all about stockholder dominance now."*

" Well actually US companies are leveraged less than their international counterparts. Debt is not a bad thing for a corportation."

How many 10-Ks have you looked at recently? I've read over dozen this month alone. Blue chip companies. And all of them are in debt. They still post profits, but these profits pale in comparison to how much debt **all** of them are carrying. In good financial times this isn't an unhealthy thing, but my projection isn't based on good times.

"Well, this is again technically true, but there are several measures of how much money is out there, and I'm not sure which one you are using. M1 is cash out there, M2 is things that can be converted to cash quickly and easily (checking accounts, etc..)"

I was speaking of M1. Conversion of checking/savings to cash is easy when an average number of people are making the same withdrawl. However, should there be a run on the banks after a crash, there wouldn't be enough currency to convert all the checking and savings accounts, as M1 is only around 8% of the federal reserve. And, as I mentioned above, the Fed won't be able to bail out the banks, as they don't have the actual capitol to do so.

"If despite this you still think the economy is going to collapse, would you like to give me those useless pieces of paper with dead presidents on them that you have? "

Heh!

The Crash of the Millennium by Ravi Batra, is a useful reference, if you're interested in exploring this subject further.

Re:Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1)
by StrawberryFrog on Friday October 08, @01:59PM EDT (#40)
(User Info)

> Hrmmm. Once Japan decides on a standard for DVD-R, the technology will perpetuate

What's that got to do with it? DVD is suplanting CDrom because it's bigger and faster. You think that won't happen again? Oh wait, it's already happening (http://slashdot.org/articles/99/07/30/1612205.shtml)
ribbit StrawberryFrog

Re:Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1)
by R. Anthony (**flame_ranthony@hotmail.com**) on Friday October 08, @02:16PM EDT (#47)
(User Info)

Oh? It's already happened eh? Do me a favor and go to pricewatch and do a search on **DVD recorder** and then tell me how DVD is already supplanting CD-R/RW as a storage solution.

Re:Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1)
by semiriot on Friday October 08, @02:35PM EDT (#52)
(User Info)

don't much care for dvd..since I don't even own a VCR..or a tv for that matter. Can't really rationalize buyinga dvd player so I can watch movies on my pc. Seems almost unnatural..like eating dinner in the shower.

Re:Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1)
by R. Anthony (**flame_ranthony@hotmail.com**) on Saturday October 09, @11:12PM EDT (#96)
(User Info)

"Can't really rationalize buying a dvd player so I can watch movies on my pc."

Neither can I at this juncture, however, I will buy a DVD-RW & a DVD/CD drive (*optimized for DVD ripping) when the technology is cheap and available in the US.

Also. I've heard of DVD-R/RW drives in Japan (*sold only in Japan, Grrrr) getting up to 18 Gigs of storage on a double sided disk. Compare this to 650 MB w/ CD-R/RW.

For now thou, the only people using DVD-R in the US is the Film Industry (to burn prior disks prior to sending them to the factory). There's really no other market (*that I know of) who's willing to pay $5000-7000 for a DVD writer, at least in America.

As far as buying a stand alone, play only player. Why bother when a lot of the new 3D cards have TV outs installed? Just buy a DVD/mpeg2 encoder card and a cable and no need to spend another couple hundred on a VCR-like DVD *unless you have your TV far away from your computer*.

Re:Bruce: Regarding your prediction on DVD... (Score:1)
by StrawberryFrog on Tuesday October 12, @06:26AM EDT (#99)
(User Info)

> Oh? It's already happened eh?

Ug. point taken. However, CD will eventually go the way of all obsolete media, as will DVD. Why should they be any different to all other media?

ribbit StrawberryFrog

the problem with the 'software piracy' idea... (Score:1)
by delmoi (**delmoi at hot mail dot com**) on Saturday October 09, @05:44PM EDT (#94)
(User Info)

is that you can *already* get all the software you want off the internet, just hang out on IRC. Its a little time consuming, but it's not hard at all.

People pay software beacuse they can afford it, and they ether don't know, or don't care about downloading it

"Subtle mind control? Why do all these HTML buttons say **Submit**' ?"
Chad Okere, self apointed *Unquestioned Lord of the internet(TM)*

Great interview (Score:2)
by ajs (**ajs@ajs.com**) on Friday October 08, @12:53PM EDT (#17)
(User Info) http://www.ajs.com/~ajs/

I loved the organized crime comment. It's woefully true that there's an awful lot of us early adopters that keep getting shocked that our "universal, cool, quantum doohickies" keep getting picked up by the mainstream (which is really just us, 10 years later). I've uttered the "when did the advertizers steal MY Internet" line more than once, but that WAS what I asked for when I said I wanted the Net to be everywhere, wasn't it? What was I thinking? Can I take it back? ;-)

"We are all of us, living in the shadow of Manhatten." I keep wishing that that phrase (from Watchmen) wasn't so descriptive of the way we buil(d|t) our society.

-- Aaron Sherman (ajs@ajs.com) Perl Guy and Executive Glue Sniffer

Re:Great interview (Score:1)
by boojumsnark on Friday October 08, @02:14PM EDT (#46)
(User Info)

It was a pretty good line about the mob, wasn't it? That's why Bruce is a professional writer and I'm not (and more power to him--he's a damn good one). But my concern isn't entirely that I'm no longer hip for being online or using BSD or listening to Godspeed You Black Emperor or what have you. I'd be lying if I told you that wasn't part of it, but that's not the only thing. One of my friends just sent me a snippet from Viridian note #1:

> Feature Number Seven. Our movement has no street credibility. We are not
> hip, underground, bohemian or alternative in any way. If anyone asks you,
> tell them you are engaged in corporate futurism and product development.

Fine. Viridian's not dangerous. No art movement in this modern age is. I agree with Bruce on that. But if the goal is to be corporate futurists and get coopted, as something else I was sent suggests, why assume that anything substantive will survive the digestion? And if being an art movement won't do it, being a mainstream political movement won't do it, being an online cultural movement won't do it, and it's not profitable like crime, how's it going to happen?

I may yet subscribe to Viridian-D, just to hear what consensus is among people actually involved in this.

I didn't know what a meme was, so I asked five friends. They didn't know what a meme was, so they asked five friends.

Re:Great interview (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @04:06PM EDT (#71)
Fine. Viridian's not dangerous. No art movement in this modern age is. I agree with Bruce on that. But if the goal is to be corporate futurists and get coopted, as something

else I was sent suggests, why assume that anything substantive will survive the digestion?

Because, basically, viridian design isn't just **good** design, it's **better** design. A viridian product should be able to go up against the best in it's class and win on pure feature comparison, _and_ you get to help save the earth by shopping.

Compact fluorescent bulbs are an excellent case in point: while I won't say that they're definitively Viridian, they certainly have many viridian features and they're going mainstream at an amazing rate of knots. That's a viridian success: pragmatic, practical reductions in CO_2 emissions by skillfully employing better technology and competing efficiently in the marketplace.

You don't need a philosophy or a movement to survive to do that, you just need to inspire enough engineers and designers to ask the right questions when they walk into work in the morning and start figuring out how to make stuff.

viridian-d-subscribe@egroups.com
by the way.

Yours,

A. Viridian.

Anyone got a link to Brandeis University (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @12:56PM EDT (#19)

Hey, I'd like to see some of those web-films he mentioned -- about the work at Brandeis University. Anyone have links to that? j-emmons@sjca.edu

Art, community, Viridian (Score:1)
by boojumsnark on Friday October 08, @12:57PM EDT (#20)
(User Info)

Mmm. Well, rather than just bitch to my friends in email about not being able to get an actual dialogue going with Sterling, I'll throw something up here and other people can take a poke at it.

Bruce's reply to my question was very clever (it was a good interview) and neatly dismissive, but it lends itself to a followup. I realize that art isn't "dangerous" in the way that, say, arming thirteen year-old Afghani boys with machine guns is "dangerous" (or even in the way that, say, setting up a strange religious movement in Waco, TX is "dangerous"), but if there's no way to keep an artistic sensibility from getting swallowed up and regurgitated in Nike ads, what's the point of phrasing Viridian as a design movement?

Is it just because art is a good way to transmit memes? From the point of view of a non-coder, the aesthetic sensibility--elegance of the architecture--seems to be slightly behind politics as the main reason for the success of the open source/free software movement, but I'd love to hear what fellow /.-ers have to say.

I didn't know what a meme was, so I asked five friends. They didn't know what a meme was, so they asked five friends.

Re:Art, community, Viridian (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @01:11PM EDT (#25)
So come on over and join us on **Viridian-D**.

Personally, I think that BruceS picked a design movement because of the _leverage_ it produces in the physical world. Inspired Writer => Curious, interested, creative designers => different products => marketplace.

It's a bloody good plan if you ask me.

Re:Art, community, Viridian (Score:2)
by Frank Sullivan (dave@spnz.disorg) on Friday October 08, @02:25PM EDT (#51)
(User Info) http://www.spnz.org

It seems to me that the point of the Viridian aesthetic IS to get swallowed up into Nike ads. With message intact... environmentally conscious is beautiful. Using art to manipulate politics and society has a long and glorious history. Consider the upper-class socialist circles of George Bernard Shaw (can't remember the name of that group now), or the Situationists in the late 1960s, who almost managed to convince the French people that government was an unnecessary illusion.

If the Viridians can get as far as the Situationists did, i'll be pleased. :}

Maybe that's just the price you pay for the chains that you refuse.
- Richard Thompson, "Beeswing"

Re:Art, community, Viridian (Score:1)
by boojumsnark on Friday October 08, @04:16PM EDT (#73)
(User Info)

Soldiers and cops and artists might all have been Leninists, but it wasn't socialist realism that produced or maintained the Soviet empire.

How much did the Fabian Society and the eventual Shavian wing of the Labor Party actually get accomplished? I'm not a student of British labor history. I don't know, myself. I love the S.I., but I think that saying they were solely, or even largely, responsible for Mai '68 is a misreading of history.

I guess I'm worried about the "with message intact" part of the "swallowed up into Nike ads" step.

Intelligent discussion on ./ is our friend!

I didn't know what a meme was, so I asked five friends. They didn't know what a meme was, so they asked five friends.

Re:Art, community, Viridian (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @04:28PM EDT (#74)

Soldiers and cops and artists might all have been Leninists, but it wasn't socialist realism that produced or maintained the Soviet empire. How much did the Fabian Society and the eventual Shavian wing of the Labor Party actually get accomplished?

This is precisely the reason that Viridian isn't a political or an art movement.

I guess I'm worried about the "with message intact" part of the "swallowed up into Nike ads" step.

Part of the long term goal of Viridian, as far as I can see, is to try and subtly sway the _content_ of the hypothetical Nike ads.

In a successful Viridian Imagining, the next generation will grow up with Nike ads that stress how their trainers disintigrate when interred in a landfill and use 55% less oil-based materials than their nearest competitor. "The best shoes for a blue planet".

This seems like a reasonable and achieveable goal for a design movement: to sway the concept of cool just enough to result in a tangible drop in carbon output is not insane.

I'm sure that co-option is a risk (new, leaner-burning SUVs touted as an environmental revolution, say). But I think it's a managable risk, and one which can be brought into line by engineering realities (CF bulbs got developed because when you buy 40000 of them for a school district they save you tens of thousands of dollars, not because Joe Schmoe wanted greener light fittings) and scathing, viscious criticism of products which try and co-opt the ideal without substance.

If anybody can be relied on to deliver excoriating critique of the crap, it's the Pope Emperor himself, Bruce Sterling.

Intelligent discussion on ./ is our friend!

Indeed. And quite a rarity!

Yours,

A. Viridian

Re:Art, community, Viridian, cooption, open source (Score:1)
by Crazy Bob on Friday October 08, @03:11PM EDT (#61)
(User Info) http://home.earthlink.net/~robertwchapman

Spiraling off into another topic (though I hope not too off-topic), if any underground movement will inevitably be co-opted by the mainstream (and in the process made harmless to entrenched interests): What would be the scenario where commercial software companies (M$, as the most obvious example) co-opt open source software?
------- St Crazy Bob (Cannonized by Wholly Ordinance of the SubGenius Church)

Re:Art, community, Viridian (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @03:44PM EDT (#67)

I think the whole point of the Viridian movement is to hack the "culture industry." The idea being that what most people would consider "real art" has been relegated to the province of a rich, intellectually elite minority. What "real art" passed for in previous historical periods is now what we generally refer to as "popular culture" and is increasingly dominated by the huge corporate culture conglomerates, i.e. Sony, Time-Warner, CNN, yadda, yadda.

The key is that the culture industry does not have any native artistic sensibilities. They merely pile onto, absorb and regurgitate the zeitgiest. So, if one can introduce into the zeitgeist a "viridian" chic (see Viridian Note 001 and the The Viridian Manifesto as to what are the criteria of being viridian) that makes it incredibly desireable to reject carbon-consumer culture then one should be able to effect a change in attitude among the general public.

You need to check out those two links as they really flesh out the Viridian Pope-Emperor's (a.k.a Bruce's) ideas regarding viridianism.

Connor Anderson (who forgot his /. login)

Science fiction authors and predictions, prophecy (Score:3, Interesting)
by Oates **(cjones(at)one(dot)net)** on Friday October 08, @12:59PM EDT (#21)
(User Info) http://w3.one.net/~menagery/chris/

Arthur C. Clarke summarized the four types of predictions that science fiction authors make in their works in *The Hammer of God* (1993).

From memory (parity error!), I believe they were:

- Straight, predictable predictions (*the sun will rise at 6:15am tomorrow morning*)
- Prophetic predictions that may or may not come true (*In the year 2021, civil unrest will bring down the government of the United States*)
- Influential predictions which inspire people to work to an end (*computers will get smaller and more personal, virtual reality will be accessible by everyone*)
- Some *other* kind of prediction that I can't remember right now. Either it was in the form of completely wacky predictions, or could easily be classified in one of the other three categories. This, or any category, may be the kind intended to stretch the reader's mind.

(If someone has a copy nearby, or knows this better than I do, please correct this!)

Most of the speculative science fiction that I've been weaned on take the form of the second or third category. The stories themselves don't always seek to say that this is**the** future, as much as it is **a** future, vision, or framework to make an interesting character or to draw the reader into a new way of thinking about the world. Authors like Mr. Sterling aren't ashamed to try to have the reader draw conclusions and take actions based on this fiction. Good science fiction is often less an entertainment medium than a way to communicate new ways of thinking, something for which I'm grateful to those authors.

I also appreciate the sentiment that Mr. Sterling brought up about characterizations as well. I hate to say it, but Ben Bova's book on writing science fiction stories helped to convince me to stick with scenarios and computer programming rather than fiction. I write flat characters--my true interests lie in the technologies, the breadth of a society, the intriguing vignettes of daily life or special activity, and the narrative. This makes me a bad fiction author, so I appreciate the seconding of that opinion by Mr. Sterling. (I would write something like *Escape from New York* and consider it a masterpiece because of the picture it draws. I could never write something like *Heavy Weather* because I don't have the empathy or interest in my characters...**sigh**).

Chris

Info on Brandeis University stuff ? (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @01:15PM EDT (#27)
Bruce Sterling wrote:

> That weird crowd at Brandeis University, who are trying to evolve and grow
> artificial machines in a cyberspace, and then manufacture them as working
> gizmos in real life. They have little web-movies of those Karl Sims-style
> gimmicks just floppin' around in there. That's one of the most unspeakable
> things I've ever witnessed. Weirder yet, the thing they're doing in that lab is
> really close to the central gimmick of my Hugo-awarding-winning story
> "Taklamakan" (1998).

Does anyone have more info about it ?

Re:Info on Brandeis University stuff ? (Score:2, Informative)
by wheelear on Friday October 08, @01:28PM EDT (#30)
(User Info)
The Brandeis University Dynamical & Evolutionary Machine Organization (DEMO)
An overview along with AVI and VRML files are here

A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:1)
by Junks Jerzey on Friday October 08, @01:33PM EDT (#32)
(User Info)
Too many self-described computer geeks and futurists blow it all by being thinking that:

* Star Wars
* Star Trek
* Blade Runner
* Alien(s)
* The Matrix

are some sorts of high-points in the history of brilliant storytelling. Good effects? Yes.
Fun to watch? Yep. But they're pretty much pop-trash in the same way that Twinkies and
Devil Dogs are.

Re:A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @02:13PM EDT (#45)
ACK. Have you never seen bladerunner? or read the PK Dick book it's (loosely) based
on? I'll agree on the rest, but Bladerunner had depth of character, and depth of scenario.

Re:A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:1)
by A Big Gnu Thrush on Friday October 08, @02:16PM EDT (#48)
(User Info)
Please remove Blade Runner from the above list. If you take the time to understand
what's going on in this movie, you'll see that it has nothing at all in common with the rest
of the list.

(I haven't seen The Matrix, so it may not belong on the list, either.)

Re:A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:1)
by starling on Friday October 08, @03:08PM EDT (#58)
(User Info)

> I haven't seen The Matrix, so it may not belong on the list, either.

It doesn't, unless all you're looking at is the special effects. There's quite a good story hiding underneath them.

-- starling

"Yes and No" on "The Matrix" (Score:1)
by ucblockhead (**sburnapSPAMSUXlinux@attSPAMSUX.net**) on Friday October 08, @04:30PM EDT (#75)
(User Info)

I'd say that you're right that there's a good story hiding in *The Matrix*, though the screenwriters muffed it on the execution. It could have been much better, story-wise.

(Otherwise, it was great.)

Re:A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:1)
by aiabx on Friday October 08, @03:22PM EDT (#64)
(User Info)

I'll agree with you on 4/5 of those. But Blade Runner is like getting a fancy french pastry in your twinkie wrapper. Like 2001, it's a film that is greatly improved by reading the book. The film can be (not must be) viewed as an interesting essay on the nature of what makes a human being human. Granted, the movie drops the ball on occasion, and isn't perfect, but give me a brave failure anyday over cautious mediocrity.
-aiabx

Re:A realistic view of "Escape from New York" (Score:1)
by mochaone on Friday October 08, @04:14PM EDT (#72)
(User Info)

And what's wrong with Twinkies and Devil Dogs? As long as you supplement your "pop-trash" with some meaningful caloric content (to play off your trite analogy) some light-hearted fun will serve you well.

Hates people who have stupid little sigs

Karl Sims and Brandeis (Score:2)
by Ledge Kindred on Friday October 08, @01:38PM EDT (#34)
(User Info)

As a big fan of Karl Sims wacky little wiggly things, I'd love to get a link to the work the Brandeis guys are doing on making physical versions. Anyone have any idea?

-=-=-=-=-
I remember when Sun *really was* about open computing

Re:Karl Sims and Brandeis (Score:1)
by icepick (**myers@nospam.fil.org**) on Friday October 08, @02:11PM EDT (#44)
(User Info)

So far I've come up with

- http://dendrite.cs.brandeis.edu/proje cts.html
- http://www.cs.brandeis.edu/~hornby/lux o1.mov

*.brandeis.edu are slow as heck... I guess they are getting /.ed
--
You're just jealous because the voices only talk to me.

Re:Karl Sims and Brandeis (Score:1)
by icepick **(myers@nospam.fil.org)** on Friday October 08, @02:22PM EDT (#50)
(User Info)

Hit paydirt!
http://www.biota.org/ksims/blockies/ index.html
--
You're just jealous because the voices only talk to me.

Give me a break (Score:0, Flamebait)
by FascDot Killed My Pr on Friday October 08, @02:10PM EDT (#42)
(User Info)

So, this is Bruce Sterling. Color me unimpressed. Yeah, he's cynical and sarcastic, knows the word "Linux" and says "fuck" a lot. Big deal.

[Escape from New York] works because it's a spectacular head-trip, not because of its so-called story-telling.

I'm not going to argue that this movie was a masterpiece or anything, but I think the movie's a little better than your dismissive critique. For instance, the main character suffers a perfectly valid set of conflicts: self vs others, to name one.

Also, he's completely missed the point the questioner was making: the science of the movie is lame--so it's gotta be the fiction that makes it entertaining. That is, it comes down to the story. Clearly there are plot devices like the neck bomb--so? Name one story that doesn't. Asimov's*Nightfall: A planet with 6 suns? It would never last long enough to let humanoids evolve. PLOT DEVICE! DESTROY!*

I haven't read (or, more likely don't remember) any of Sterling's fiction, but I can guarantee that within 10 pages I can find a plot device at least as implausible as the neck bomb.

Is it just me, or has Slashdot gotten really bland in the last 6 months or so?

Re:Give me a break (Score:1)
by ppanon **(ppanon@home.NOSPAM.com)** on Saturday October 09, @12:59AM EDT (#89)
(User Info)

Asimov's Nightfall: A planet with 6 suns? It would never last long enough to let humanoids evolve. PLOT DEVICE! DESTROY!

Well, I remember Larry Niven's 6 Puppeteer worlds flying through space as a Rosette around an artifical sun. Basically each world is in its neighbors' trojan points. Why couldn't you have the reverse of 6 suns in a rosette around a planet? It wouldn't be as gravitationally stable. Yeah, the odds against it are astronomical, particularly since the suns would have to have similar masses, but then it is a big universe. More likely, the suns were placed around that planet by somebody else? Now there's a follow up story!

Category for "ask foo" PLEASE! (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @02:18PM EDT (#49)

Could we **please** get a separate category for the "ask foo" articles so I can filter out this junk in my preferences? Come on, how are interviews "news"?

Cyberpunk origins (Score:1, Informative)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @02:48PM EDT (#54)

Strange that people keep referring to SF written in the 80's as early cyberpunk when the likes of John Brunner were doing it 20 years earlier (and in many cases with greater scope and more pertinent vision; the kind of thing which persists independant of the predictions). Let's not forget the giants upon whose shoulders we stand.

Re:Cyberpunk origins (Score:1)
by soupboy on Friday October 08, @03:46PM EDT (#68)
(User Info)

"The Stars My Destination" (Alfred Bester) was first published in 1948 I think. It kicks, conquers, and rules more butt in one chapter than most authors do in a lifetime.

Dang this auto-logon, anyway: I am not soupboy, I am "Leg-Humpin' Gwee-Dog".

Sandcastles in the sky (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @02:50PM EDT (#57)

"But it's easy for readers to imagine America getting really deeply invested into the "Information Economy," and then finding out that the whole shebang is built on sand."

Uh, Bruce...

Nathan

Comment on Interviews in General (Score:3, Insightful)
by mochaone on Friday October 08, @04:49PM EDT (#76)
(User Info)

Hi all,

I'm not particularly a fan of Bruce Sterling. However, since he has such a huge following, I thought I would read his anwsers to the submitted questions anyway to see what his thought processes were in response to real live people. Once again, I didn't come away overly impressed with the content he served up. But then again, that could be just me; I'm not really a big fan of William Gibson either(I do like his short stories). I am fully aware that making the preceeding statement is tantamount to committing heresy in this forum so I am prepared for flamage.

While Sterling didn't impress me, I did come away impressed with the actual concept of Slashdot arranging interviews based on questions solicited from the community. Most of the questions were well thought out and went beyond the typical clueless interviewer spiel that we see so often. While I am always impressed with the Slashdot crew , I doubt whether they alone could have presented a series of questions as diverse.

I think more impressive than the range of questions that were presented is the fact that this type of interview, I believe, is much more amenable to the interviewee, thus granting

us more opportunity to hear from the people making waves out there. How many times have we read an interview where the interviewer was either not prepared or just not qualified to conduct the interview? Subjects of interviews percieve these as affronts to their time as well as their intelligence.

Slashdot is fast becoming recognized as a community inhabited by a diverse range of techno-geeks, writers, scientists, etc., all of whom have something to contribute. I'm sure that when someone is presented with the opportunity to be interviewed by Slashdot, they realize they will have a challenging interview presented to them and that they will present themselves to a target audience that I suspect they respect as much as it respects them.

It appears that this concept of community participation is catching on. The groudbreaking (IMO) decision on the part of the editors of Jane's Intelligence Review to base an article from the comments/questions of the slashdot community shows that this humble little place where we dwell is fast becoming a force in our lives.

It is really amazing to sit back and watch how Roblimo, Hemos and the others are changing the way things are done. Keep up the good work fellas.

Hates people who have stupid little sigs
corporation that *will* survive 10 years (Score:2, Informative)
by zerone on Friday October 08, @05:57PM EDT (#80)
(User Info)
I can't think of a single corporate entity that's truly likely to be around ten years from now. I mean, without being bought out, re-named, taken over, acquired, or re-engineered, or moving into a new net-based business model.

Try thinking about VISA. ($1.2 tah-rillion in sales last year.) It's an info-age corporation that's done just fine for 30 years, growing 20% every year past booms bubbles busts bear bulls. No take-overs, buy-outs, trade-outs, shake-outs, raids. Why? How? It's**owned by its members**. Shared in "non-transferable rights of participation". Dee Hock, who founded it, wanted to extend ownership to merchants and cardholders, but it wasn't possible at the time. Had it been, he believes it would be four times more powerful today.

Key to Visa's success is chaos/organized *open* structure that attracts the by far most valuable (and least used) resource on earth: **human ingenuity**.

call it "chaorganization". **read about it here here here**

note: http://www.fastcompany.com/online/05/deehock.html link currently /.'d..
Science fiction is obsolete! (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @06:57PM EDT (#82)
I tried to read Gibson's "Idoru" recently, but I had to stop half-way through because it was completely boring. Nothing in it made me think, and the writing sucked. Why? Because my life is stranger than science fiction now.

All the stuff about Southern California and Japan in the book was lame -- if you ever

knew how crazy those places really are, you'd know that reading a bad science fiction novel about them is a pale shadow of the real thing.

Furthermore, the stuff I work on every day is pushing the edges of science fiction. Every day, I go into work and I work on creating the future.

That's the problem -- real life has caught up with science fiction, and surpassed it. Good science fiction is not about gadgets and technology, but how they affect people's lives and society. But with the rate of technological change going on now, watching real life unfold beats any science fiction I have ever read.

Re:Science fiction is obsolete! (Score:1)
by Pixie on Friday October 08, @07:55PM EDT (#84)
(User Info)

Definitely agree with you here -- some of the best scifi is about how lives / society are affected. Morality. Ethical dilemmas. The politics of everyday. Ursula K. LeGuin is particularly adept at this type of scifi.

GJ/P d++(-) s-: a- C++ UL P L+ E? W++ N o K- w>-- O? M+ V? PS++ PE Y+ PGP- t+ 5? X+ R tv b+++ Dl++ D+ G e+++ h- r++ z+

Perphaps you're confusing people with a genre (Score:1)
by R. Anthony (**flame_ranthony@hotmail.com**) on Saturday October 09, @03:18AM EDT (#92)
(User Info)

You see Science Fiction is alive and kicking. It is finally getting some main stream respect and attention, and there are some damn fine authors out there.

Some of the Masters & their best (in my opionion) works:

- Neal Stephenson - *Cryptonomicon*
- Spider Robinson - *Mindkiller*
- Orson Scott Card - *Ender's Game*
- Theodore Sturgeon - *Godbody*
- Larry Niven - *Lucifer's Hammer*
- Harry Harrison - *Sssssssssss Rat!*(early series)

The list goes on and on and on. Sci Fi is by no means obsolete, however some authors have strayed off the beaten path (or indeed have never been on the path). Sci Fi is about **I**deas, not gagets, it's about telling a story, inspiring people who are stuck in their current, and often unpleasant realities. It's about the potential of mankind, and our probable extinction. Sci Fi is Literature for neophyles (people who embrace change), unfortunately neo-phobic establishment ideas about what qualifies as literature often marginalize great works, and therefore they go out of print, and nobody reads them. Or the public is only exposed to the mornic, serialized, pre-fab drivel that fills the Sci-fi section bookshelves at the local B. Dalton.

Regarding *Idoru yes it is garbage, and Gibson is obsolete. He never really knew about technology from the start, which enabled him to write Neuromancer and give birth to an*

interesting movement, the so called cyberpunk movement. However, he is out of steam and flailing around in fictional universe that can only be described as a pseudo-intellectual/postmodern cartoon. For example, here's an excerpt about Gibson's new book, All Tomorrow's Parties from Wired Magazine's October 1999 Issue:

"All the heroes in All Tomorrow's Parties wield knives. Chevette, the onetime bike messenger and second-best thing in William Gibson's 1993 Virtual Light, has one hammered from a motorcycle drive chain. Rydell, former cop, night watchman, and now convenience store security guy, sports a lightweight ceramic knife, although he doesn't much like its balance. And the mysterious Konrad, the man who kills without fuss or muss, brandishes the deadliest blade, the one "that sleeps head down, like a vampire bat."

As you can see, the plot could easily be converted into a saturday morning cartoon, perhaps as ''Tenage Mutant Ninja Idoru-Bots with their super special knives and chains (OMG)." Also, the character Chevette is a blatant rip of of Hiro Protagonist from Neal Stephenson's book Snow Crash.

Who gives a shit about Bruce Sterling? (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Saturday October 09, @12:17AM EDT (#88)

This guy is about as dumb and boring as can be. No wonder this interview generated such little interest. Why interview everyday pretentious dumbshits?

Human Induced Global Warming (Score:1)
by doom (doom@kzsu.stanford.edu) on Saturday October 09, @03:38AM EDT (#93)
(User Info) http://www.grin.net/~mirthless/index.html

So here's my question-I-would've-asked-if-I-hadn't-been-busy-coding-this-week:

In all of the pop articles on the Viridian movement I've been seeing lately, Sterling asserts that the Global Warming theory is obviously correct, and anyone who disagrees is an idiot or a sellout. His evidence is just that the weather has been really weird lately... but no one disputes that, the only question is whether it's because of human pollution.

Maybe I just barely escape being classed as an idiot, because I wouldn't claim that the human-induced warming theory is wrong, I'm just not convinced that it's right. Certainly it's the consensus view among climatologists at this point, but it seems a little naive to assume that climatologists actually know something about the climate...

Anyway, my question for Sterling would just be "what convinced you?" Ideally I'd like a pointer to a written argument.

(Sometime I may even bring it up on one of his Viridian mailing lists, but personally I think it's bad form to invade an activist's forum and try and start fights with the activists. They want to talk tactics and strategy, not hash out the basics over and over again.)

Re:Hate to say it, but the guy is clueless (Score:1)
by parc on Friday October 08, @12:42PM EDT (#13)
(User Info)

Gibson tends to sound weird out of context of larger work, but he is very good at what he does. Read last months Wired, or some of his books.

Huh? Re:Hate to say it, but the guy is clueless (Score:1)
by StefanJ on Friday October 08, @01:04PM EDT (#22)
(User Info)
"Socialist?"

Bruce Sterling, "socialist?"

Hee-hee! Mind you, he doesn't strike me as one of your*Atlas Shrugged*-thumping libertarian fan boys, but he's no socialist.

Do yourself a favor and get a clue yourself. Read his _Wired_ travelogues, where he gleefully reports on the decay of communist utopianism.

Re:Hate to say it, but the guy is clueless (Score:1)
by seesik (**seesik@techgnosis.org**) on Friday October 08, @01:14PM EDT (#26)
(User Info) http://www.techgnosis.org

Well maybe you should "read any of his stuff" before you make sweeping and uninformed accusations about the man's understanding of behavior and economics. You're pretty far off base. IMO, the guy has his finger on the pulse of American culture.

Re:Hate to say it, but the guy is clueless (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on Friday October 08, @01:51PM EDT (#37)

Don'tcha meah has his fingers*around the throat of amerikan kulture?*

- **4 replies** beneath your current threshold.

Search   *Make sure your code does nothing gracefully.*

[home | awards | supporters | rob's homepage| contribute story | older articles | Andover.Net | advertising | past polls | about | faq]