

Session Summary

Conference: Social Capital Markets, Sept. 9, 2011.

Panel Topic: Investing for the Future of Technology

Panel Description: Join Jamais Cascio - one of Foreign Policy magazine's Top 100 Global Thinkers - in a sensemaking discussion. We'll consider the intersection of emerging technologies, environmental dilemmas, and cultural transformation. Jamais will introduce three future scenarios, and then curate a discussion helping attendees make personal sense of their learnings.

Moderator & Panelist: Jamais Cascio, Freelance Eschatologist, Open the Future

Design, Methodology, Approach: Lecture

Main Panel Discussion Points:

Cascio began by saying he's not here to talk about investments but about the future, saying he's been a professional futurist for 18 years (what he called an "easily distracted generalist"). He proceeded to discuss how everyone understood the apocalypse that would happen without sustainability but no one really understood what success - a sustainable world - would look like. His goal is not predicting but strategic foresight - what will happen given different pre-conditions. With that, we can then understand which direction we are steering towards. In this way, futurism offers distant foresight into possible scenarios that allows us to then test strategies against different types of futures.

He offered three distinct alternative scenarios, outlined below:

1. Walking the tight rope – this is the mainstream vision of the future characterized by increased efficiency in everything to maintain our lifestyle in sustainable way. He commented that this has many challenges and the possibility of this can fade away.
2. Flux capacity – characterized by resilience, recovery after crisis, and remaking institutions of institutions. He gave example of 3D printing, which now only costs \$10,000, and thus can eliminate carbon footprint of products. Some other aspects of this are connectedness but not control, and emphasis on not just efficiency but community. He said this was more plausible than the first but requires changes in culture and requires crisis first. Things will have to fall apart first.
3. Catalytic conversions – characterized by experimentation, disruption, and rapidly evolving concepts. It says sustainability isn't enough and everything is malleable - nothing is safe. He thinks this world is most plausible - a risky world but a world of empowerment.

Outcomes & Analysis: This session helped significantly increase the understanding of not just scenarios that can play out in the future, but how to strategically think about understanding the possible ways that our world can unfold in the next 100 or so years. Cascio did a fantastic job of setting up the framework of how to think about the world's evolution and the potential catastrophe without sustainability. He then proceeded to outline the disruptions and different likelihoods of how things can shape up. This is particularly relevant for the social enterprise world as it helps present a framework as to how to understand the evolution of the world, and the opportunities present in it for change as one of these scenarios plays out.

Keywords:

Futurism, technology

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