

# An Interview with John Shirley

---

Scott Douglas Jacobsen



**IN-SIGHT PUBLISHING**

Published by In-Sight Publishing  
In-Sight Publishing  
Langley, British Columbia, Canada

in-sightjournal.com

First published in parts by In-Sight Publishing,  
a member of In-Sight Publishing, 2017  
This edition published in 2017

© 2012-2017 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen and John Shirley.

All rights reserved.

No parts of this collection may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised, in any form, or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented or created, which includes photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

Published in Canada by In-Sight Publishing, British Columbia, Canada, 2017  
Distributed by In-Sight Publishing, Langley, British Columbia, Canada

In-Sight Publishing was established in 2014 as a not-for-profit alternative to the large, commercial publishing houses currently dominating the publishing industry.

In-Sight Publishing operates in independent and public interests rather than for private gains, and is committed to publishing, in innovative ways, ways of community, cultural, educational, moral, personal, and social value that are often deemed insufficiently profitable. Thank you for the download of this e-book, your effort, interest, and time supporting independent publishing purposed for the encouragement of academic freedom, creativity, diverse voices, and independent thought.

*Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

No official catalogue record for this book.

Jacobsen, Scott Douglas & Shirley, John, Authors

An Interview with John Shirley [Academic]/Scott Douglas Jacobsen & John Shirley

pages cm

Includes bibliographic references, footnotes, and reference style listing.

In-Sight Publishing, Langley, British Columbia, Canada

Published electronically from In-Sight Publishing in Langley, British Columbia, Canada

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*Designed by Scott Douglas Jacobsen*

## Contents

I. Acknowledgements .....	3
a. Abstract .....	4
i. An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part One).....	4
b. Abstract .....	17
i. An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Two).....	17
c. Abstract .....	25
i. An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Three).....	25
d. Abstract .....	35
i. An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Four).....	35
II. Bibliography .....	44
III. License and Copyright.....	46

### **Acknowledgements**

To John Shirley for patience in the individual publications, and permission for the old man and the kid to publish an e-book together on everything within the old man's panoramic purview, which was fun.

Scott

## Abstract

**An Interview with John Shirley. He discusses: geographic, cultural, and linguistic background; influences and pivotal moments in major cross-sections of early life; origination of the interest in science and fiction; origination of the interest in science fiction; a definition with some “self-definition” of Shirley; production or collection that took the most time and resources; personal sacrifices that coincide with the lifetime of professional writing; distinguishing characteristics of the cyberpunk genre; interactions with people such as Neil Gaiman, Dame Edna, Mrs. Shirley, Brandon Lee, Rosie, and others; a picture of a boy with a violin; statement by Bruce Sterling with comparison of Shirley to literary luminaries, and possible responsibility to the writing community with such comparisons;**

*Keywords:* author, fiction, John Shirley, science, science fiction, writer.

### **An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part One)<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

*\*Footnotes in & after the interview, & bibliography & citation style listing after the interview.\**

- 1. In terms of geography, culture, and language, where does your family background reside?<sup>4</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Science Fiction Author and Writer.

<sup>2</sup> Individual Publication Date: October 1, 2016 at [www.in-sightjournal.com](http://www.in-sightjournal.com); Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2017 at <https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/>.

<sup>3</sup> Photograph courtesy of John Shirley.

<sup>4</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). Biography. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/jsbio.html>.

My parents, aunts, and uncles are largely from the Kansas City, Kansas, area and outlying areas. Some are farmers. My father was abandoned by his mother, on her second marriage, and placed in a Catholic orphanage. He had such problems with ulcers, later, they removed two-thirds of his stomach. He also seemed to have problems with depression. He died of meningitis when I was ten years old. Our family, before he died and after as well, moved around restlessly—Texas, California, Oregon—looking for a better situation. He found it in Nevada, but then he ran into meningitis.

**2. How did this influence development?**

I identified with no one place. All the moving about truncated my socialization. My innate, genetically provided personality seemed socially blind, in some respects, as well. I could be a leader of a group or an outcast, depending on stimuli. Except when I'm with a few very close friends, I've always felt best, around other people, either in the background, watching, or on a stage. Once on a stage I'm completely at home.

**3. What about influences and pivotal moments in major cross-sections of early life including kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, high school, and undergraduate studies (college/university)?**

Some bullying endured; clumsy physically; alienation from sports. Classic nerd misfit stuff. Drawn to fantasy and adventure, much time spent in library searching it out. Historical

adventure also drew me. In addition, I was prone to extreme states of mind, picturing myself as Dracula (at a very young age) or a superhero...but I was far from heroic, shrinking, in those days, from physical confrontation. Later I learned to fight.

I think I had that particular disability—I don't recall the term for it—that made it difficult for me to follow people talking at any length, but I absorbed written information easily. In time I noticed my shortcoming and forced myself to attend more closely so I could follow what a teacher was saying; I taught myself to be more attentive... Still, like any number of “Calvins”, as in *Calvin and Hobbes*, I was still drawn into the fog, or perhaps the alternate world, of my own imagination in school, caught up in elaborate fantasies...Very “Walter Mitty” but more than just that kind of thing. A common syndrome, one I never quite got over.

I found that if I told other kids “I had a dream last night and you were in it, we had an adventure” they would listen raptly, and I would make up a story. That taught me something of the art of storytelling—I eventually learned to turn this internal escapism into a moneymaking proposition as a storyteller—and I also absorbed writing from my reading, was a sponge for it. I never could remember how to parse a sentence with grammatical terms, but I could always write a good sentence. I was like a piano player who couldn't read music, but who simply learned how to play by listening and experimenting with the keyboard. A natural “piano player”. Writing as osmosis. I can write in numerous styles I absorbed in this fashion.

**4. Where did interest in science and fiction originate for you?**

My older sister had a boxful of *Galaxy* and other magazines; I raided the box and was drawn by the colorful, symbol-charged art, the otherworldly possibilities. From there it was a short trip to find the same authors and similar ones in the library. I also watched *Superman* on TV—a sort of science fiction story—and read comics. As for science, I was always curious about astronomy, about the planets, about the hidden Earth beneath the outer crust, about the secret world hidden deep in the sea. So I did read nonfiction by Isaac Asimov, and other science writers for the young. It could be quite exciting; I recently got the same feeling from watching the new version of the *Cosmos* on television with Neil deGrasse Tyson.

**5. What about interest in science fiction in particular?**

The first extensive science fiction reading I did was in grade school: *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*; then Heinlein's juveniles, and other science-fictional juvenilia. I also read all the Oz books, the Mary Poppins books, Andrew Lang's Fairy Books (e.g., *The Blue Fairy Book*, *The Red Fairy Book*, etc.), adaptations of Arthurian stories, Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan books and his interplanetary novels, like *A Princess of Mars* and so on. So "the fantastic" was a consistent thread through all those. I watched old movies on TV: *Dracula*, *The Wolf Man*, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *War of the Worlds*... anything science fictional. I was also enamoured of Errol Flynn swashbuckler films like *Captain Blood*. I read a good deal of H.G. Wells, too.

**6. You self-define as follows:**

*John Shirley is the author of numerous books and many, many short stories. His novels include Bleak History, Crawlers, Demons, In Darkness Waiting, and seminal cyberpunk works City Come A-Walkin', and the A Song Called Youth trilogy of Eclipse, Eclipse Penumbra, and Eclipse Corona. His collections include the Bram Stoker and International Horror Guild award-winning Black Butterflies, Living Shadows: Stories: New & Pre-owned, and In Extremis: The Most Extreme Short Stories of John Shirley. He also writes for screen (The Crow) and television. As a musician, Shirley has fronted his own bands and written lyrics for Blue Öyster Cult and others.<sup>5</sup>*

**You authored a number of publications.<sup>6</sup> In fact, you have a productive capacity worthy of the title “prolific.” From some of the books listed including “Bleak History, Crawlers, Demons, In Darkness Waiting, and seminal cyberpunk works City Come A-Walkin', and the A Song Called Youth trilogy of Eclipse, Eclipse Penumbra, and Eclipse Corona,” what one or two mean the most to you?**

That is not how I self define. I did no even write that bio material, although it is not untrue. It \*includes\* some “self definition”.

---

<sup>5</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). John Shirley: The Authorized Website. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). Bibliography. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/jsbiblio.html>.

The Eclipse Books — AKA the A Song Called Youth trilogy—in the revised edition, are my best works of science fiction. The books are socially prescient, the characters real, there is much rich symbolism and imagination in them. They preserve my respect for rock'n'roll energy without becoming adolescent. *City Come A-Walkin'* was a unique book, a kind of magic realism novel with cyberpunk elements. *Demons* is a strong, well written allegory. I've written and published suspense thrillers too, like *Spider Moon*, which is one of my best books but hard to find at the moment. The ones that mean the most are the ones that I regard as most meaningful—that is, meaningful, I hope, to readers. But I always want people to read the most recent edition because I always edit the books extensively. Books I wrote when fairly young need more work, naturally. The post-edit editions are far better books.

#### **7. You have a number of collections too:**

*...the Bram Stoker and International Horror Guild award-winning Black Butterflies, Living Shadows: Stories: New & Pre-owned, and In Extremis: The Most Extreme Short Stories of John Shirley. He also writes for screen (The Crow) and television.<sup>7</sup>*

**Of these individual productions and collections, what one took the most time and resources?**

---

<sup>7</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). John Shirley: The Authorized Website. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/index.html>.

Collections accrete as short stories are written. The editors and publishers invest the most time and resources once the story is written. Paula Guran edited most of them. I re-edited some of them recently. I did do some considerable organization and conceptualization in the unique story collection *Really Really Really Really Weird Stories*, from Nightshade. The book is divided into four parts, *Really Weird Stories*, *Really Really Weird Stories*, and so on. That is my concept and I organized the stories. I also conceptualized the organization of *Black Butterflies* and *In Extremis*, picking experientially tinted stories, or stories that delved deep into my sense of horror at the reality of the human condition. I wanted to bring the underside, the hidden aspects of human experience, the demimonde, into the light. Many of the stories emanate from my time as a drug addict and my connection with people in the “sex industry” and personal traumatic experiences. So that linked them all up. *Really...Weird* probably took the most time.

**8. What personal sacrifices comes from a lifetime of professional writing?**

I have to be my own boss; I have to develop an inner boss, a supervisory adult within, to get the stories written, the books finished. I have to struggle against depression. I had to put aside a lot of my musical/performance ambitions to make money the only way I knew how. I had other jobs—typist, and so forth—but I was always trying to make a living as a writer. I have had to sacrifice self-respect for some jobs, working in the “tie-in novel” mill, writing books based on videogames and movies and TV series on a work-for-hire basis. I tried to do them well and bring something to them, but it wasn’t designed to make me feel like the artist I wanted to be. I had to run up against my limitations. Though I worked in television and

movies I was bad at the committee-interactive part of it, being part of a writing team, and writing to order in a way that's far more demanding than tie-in novels...I had to find time to write my own self-inspired, completely original works in between, in this phase of my life. I had to accept rejection sometimes. The occasional bad review...they were rare but one of them nearly killed me...all part of the deal.

**9. What seems to distinguish personal writing in the cyberpunk genre in contrast to others – as you originated some of the writing in the movement?**

I think cyberpunk itself was more adult than much other contemporary science fiction was, in its day. It seemed to be largely about “the street’s uses for technology”—the hustler, the thief, the outcast, the rebel, the outsiders using technology in their own way. There was an outlaw flavor to it. We were also bringing beat lit influences (at least Rudy Rucker was), influences like JG Ballard and Philip Dick and mainstream writers like John LeCarre and John D Macdonald and Richard Stark, noir, crime fiction—all this was folded in, to try to create a synthesis that reflected the grimly unfolding dystopia about us...The personal impact of technology as a social force was an issue...I also used cyberpunk in political allegory in *A Song Called Youth*...We’re seeing both sides of technology now, definitely including the dark side.

My personal cyberpunk—perhaps it has more anger in it. I looked around in the world and reacted to the social hypnosis I seemed to see; I reacted to injustice more than the others, I think; I felt an inner shame at not doing something to change the inequities, to rescue people

from despair, so I tended to write stories that modeled a solution—like my stories “The Prince” or “Wolves of the Plateau”—or that somehow threw a social horror, some futurological dilemma, into stark relief. In short, I was more political, though Lew Shiner had his share of political slant. But I tried to write in a way that dramatized politics instead of pontificating about an issue—I wanted to be like Dickens or Steinbeck. At the same time, I was very into the cyberpunk texture, and the depiction of the demimonde...

**10. In a little section, tucked away, on the personal and professional website, one can find a little webpage called *Oddities*.<sup>8</sup> It contains some bits entitled *two dames, the mysterious rosie: queen of all dogs, in memorium: brandon lee, a typical shirley fan, hot chicks, mark twain, murder, tv eye, and boy with violin*. These include content, and photographs, with Neil Gaiman, Dame Edna, Mrs. Shirley, Brandon Lee, Rosie, and others. In brief, how did each of these interactions occur throughout the personal narrative of 63 years represented, in part, in *Oddities*?**

I didn't create *Oddities*, nor did I create the website, though certainly I was happy to cooperate with it. Paula Guran put it together (And it is currently undergoing a long-needed revision). It grew haphazardly over the last 18 years or so. *Oddities* is mostly just humor, odd pieces that didn't fit in elsewhere. Brandon Lee's death inspired the dead infant crow photos—that's not humorous. Rosie was a little dog we had who died, who was beloved of our family. TV Eye is from a rock performance where I threw an axe into a plugged-in

---

<sup>8</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). *Oddities*. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/oddities.html>.

television set during a performance of the Iggy Pop song “TV Eye” (I’m a big fan of Iggy Pop).

**11. Even further, you described some musical background too:**

*John Shirley was the original lead singer of SADONATION, and co-songwriter with Dave Corboy. JS was also lead singer and lyricist for Obsession (Celluloid Records), with Sync 66 and Jerry Antonias, and is currently lead singer of THE SCREAMING GEEZERS. He has written the lyrics for 18 songs recorded by the BLUE OYSTER CULT. He is also a novelist and screenwriter. He was co-screenwriter of THE CROW and wrote the novels DEMONS, BLEAK HISTORY, CITY COME A-WALKIN', BLACK GLASS and A SPLENDID CHAOS. His fiction spans science-fiction (cyberpunk), noir, and horror. His story collection Black Butterflies won the Bram Stoker Award. His new story collection, in august 2011, is IN EXTREMIS: The Most Extreme Short Stories of John Shirley.<sup>9</sup>*

**Curiously, in the same section entitled *Oddities*, a “boy” with a violin appears too: you.<sup>10</sup>**

**Where does this musical and lyrical aptitude source itself?**

I was a very young man when the violin picture was done (I cannot play violin). It’s a kind of embodiment of youthful verve. I did not write the musical background paragraph you see there—again, Paula Guran put the website together and wrote the copy there. So it’s not “you

<sup>9</sup>ReverbNation (n.d.). John Shirley. Retrieved from <https://www.reverbNation.com/johnshirley>.

<sup>10</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). boy with violin. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/violin.html>.

described”. But, yes, I was the original lead singer of SadoNation (go to YouTube, search for John Shirley SadoNation, “Johnny Paranoid” for a good video example) and other punk rock bands. I was then in post-punk bands, “futuristic funk” I called it. I have a band called The Screaming Geezers even now. I just did a recording called “I Want Ten Strippers at My Funeral” a few weeks ago. Where does it all come from? I came of age in the 1960s, early 70s, and big arena rock, powerful personalities like The Doors and The Rolling Stones and The Beatles and Frank Zappa and The Animals and Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin and The Who were everywhere. (I also loved Elvis as a kid.) I saw the Woodstock movie; I saw *Easy Rider*; I took in alternative cinema of all kinds. I went to concerts and was transfixed by the rockstar shamanism, so to speak, that I saw there. I heard storytelling in the lyrics especially in The Who and the Stones. Was later especially taken by Lou Reed as a storyteller in lyrics. Loved the atmospheric and visceral power of Iggy and the Stooges and then I struck upon the explosive musical fury of the Sex Pistols and the Clash and the Ramones and Richard Hell and Television and Suicidal Tendencies and the Avengers. All this was liberating. I found progressive bands like King Crimson...Plus, I had taken mescaline and LSD in the late 60s and some in the early 70s. (I take no drugs now.) Of course that’s going to imprint me with psychedelic rock...and it helped free me from my fears of other people. I opened up, blossomed in a way. I also took poetry classes, of course.

I became a fan of the Blue Oyster Cult in 1972 and my first-published novel, *Transmaniacon*, was titled and inspired by their early song “Transmaniacon MC”. There was always an energy of fantasy/sf in much of rock. It was amplified; it was, in a way, cyberpunk because the musicians were linked with electronics so intimately. Electric guitar solos

seemed nearly telepathic to me; an expression, through tech, of the hidden inner person, the libido, certainly, but also the self assertion of the anger and secret internal dialogue of the inner person.

All the cyberpunk writers listened to rock. Gibson and Sterling listened to another favorite of mine, Sisters of Mercy. To me it all interfaces. Michael Moorcock, too, wrote for the Blue Oyster Cult...I've written 18 sets of lyrics they've recorded...

## **12. Bruce Sterling stated:**

*the typical bruce sterling fan is a computer-science major in some midwestern university. 'stelarc' is a john shirley fan. stelarc is an Australian performance artist who has an artificial third hand, sometimes bounces lasers off his eyeballs, and used to suspend his naked body in midair by piercing his flesh with meathooks. i had lunch with stelarc recently. i was surprised how much i enjoyed stelarc's company and how much he genuinely reminded me of john.<sup>11</sup>*

**Furthermore, some compared luminaries such as “J.G. Ballard, William S. Burroughs, Anton Chekov, Philip K. Dick, Edgar Allan Poe, John Collier, Franz Kafka, William Kotzwinkle, Elmore Leonard, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Tom Wolfe” with you.<sup>12</sup>**

**What responsibility to the trade of writing seems to coincide with the external high positive evaluation of productions by you?**

<sup>11</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). A typical Shirley fan. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/stelarc.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Shirley, J. (2016). Fiction. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley/jsfiction.html>.

If I understand the question correctly, you're asking: Can I live up to these comparisons? I can only try. I have always felt like an artist. I'm always trying to improve, to get a new technique going, to become tighter and more powerful as a writer. It's up to other people to decide to what degree I succeed at that.

## Abstract

**An Interview with John Shirley. He discusses: the origination and development of the cyberpunk movement; responsibilities (if any) to the public and the writing community with exposure; the greatest changes in the technological landscape; greatest changes in the economic and socio-political environment; greatest changes in the academic and intellectual milieu; most probable near future five years on from John Shirley – False Singularities; most probable future; the probability of the Singularity; and immortality as argued by Ray Kurzweil.**

*Keywords:* author, fiction, John Shirley, science, science fiction, writer.

**An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Two)<sup>13,14,15</sup>**

*\*Footnotes in & after the interview, & bibliography & citation style listing after the interview.\**

### 13. How did the cyberpunk movement originate and development into the present?

Bruce Sterling organized us, more than any other person, partly through letters, actual physical paper letters at the time, and through his “zine” or newsletter perhaps, *Cheap Truth*. “Us” then being Lew Shiner, Rudy Rucker, William Gibson, Sterling, me...A little later there was Richard Kadrey and Pat Cadigan...It was a kind of salon of angry ambitious envelope-

---

<sup>13</sup> Science Fiction Author and Writer.

<sup>14</sup> Individual Publication Date: October 8, 2016 at [www.in-sightjournal.com](http://www.in-sightjournal.com); Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2017 at <https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/>.

<sup>15</sup> Photograph courtesy of John Shirley.

pushing, rock-inflected, William Burroughs/JG Ballard/Michael Moorcock reading writers—writers also aware of dadaism and surrealism and mail art and pop art and the Velvet Underground and industrial music and noir film makers of all kinds—and we saw an emerging cultural setting that other people weren't looking at so closely. Of course, there were precedents—Samuel Delany, Cordwainer Smith, Alfred Bester, PKD.

**14. You have representation in numerous publications.<sup>16</sup> What responsibilities (if any) to the public and the writing community come from this exposure?**

I do feel responsibility; it's in my nature. I try to be of help. I feel like I haven't been of enough help to the world. I feel too often like a man driving away from an injured person on the road. I'd never do that, but on a daily basis in a way we all do that. I look for ways to try to bring something useful to my interaction with the public. Maybe I'm kidding myself but I try.

**15. You were born February 10, 1953. In the last 63 years, what seem like the greatest changes in the technological landscape to you?**

---

<sup>16</sup>Dueben, A. (2012, August 6). John Shirley: The Crow: Death and Rebirth. Retrieved from <https://suicidegirls.com/girls/sash/blog/2680449/john-shirley-the-crow-death-and-rebirth/>.  
 Fahey, T.B. (2014, September 2). Piper at the Gates of Hell: An Interview with Cyberpunk Legend John Shirley. Retrieved from <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/piper-at-the-gates-of-hell-an-interview-with-cyberpunk-legend-john-shirley>.  
 Laurence, A. (1994). An Interview with John Shirley. Retrieved from <http://www.altx.com/int2/john.shirley.html>.  
 Shirley, J. (2014, August 26). A science fiction author ponders the dystopic landscape of the sovereign citizen mind. Retrieved from <http://www.rawstory.com/2014/08/john-shirley-on-sovereign-citizens-draft/>.  
 Shirley, J. (2012, May 11). Tales to Terrify no 18 John Shirley. Retrieved from <http://talestoterrify.com/tales-to-terrify-no-18-john-shirley/>.  
 Ventrella, M.A. (2012, June 7). [Interview with Bram Stoker Award-winning author John Shirley](http://michaelaventrella.com/2012/06/07/interview-with-bram-stoker-award-winning-author-john-shirley/). Retrieved from <http://michaelaventrella.com/2012/06/07/interview-with-bram-stoker-award-winning-author-john-shirley/>.

The obvious ones—PCs, wi-fi, cell phones, the internet. A revolution that is both beneficial, socially valuable—and deleterious, at once. These media can weaken our capability of relating more directly to one another, they can weaken our attention spans for uninterrupted reading and work. The internet is a venue for misinformation and disinformation as much as enlightening data. But at the same time it's all an opportunity; it made it possible for people to organize support of America's first black president. It shows contrasting cultures to people in medieval-style backward societies. It's a great research tool, is the internet, I use it constantly. It provides instantaneous data exchange for scientists, accelerating the scientific revolution. I support the sciences, always.

The bio-engineering revolution may have a great impact we're barely aware of so far...I do believe we'll be growing and printing replacement organs that fit our bodies perfectly. 3D printing of a host of things could be a great revolution if it's reasonably competitive in the marketplace. Obviously the risks of biotech—homegrown biowarfare, or attempts at self-improvement that are simply grotesque and ultimately fatal—are to be closely monitored.

#### **16. What about the economic and socio-political environment?**

A Song Called Youth deals with that; so does *Demons*, really, from another direction. I'm kind of a soft socialist, the Bernie Sanders sort. People who think in "all or nothing" terms with respect to economic systems are childish and tunnel-visioned. "It must be the uncontrolled free market" is a recipe for disaster. We tried that with the Robber Barons and the Great Depression and the Great Recession and the mindless sprawl of industry that all but

wrecked the biosphere; that leads to climate change. Economics is connected to biology, on several levels. On the other hand, “we must have a 100% communal society” is just as wrongheaded. A synthesis is all that will work—until we have some kind of gigantic species-wide epiphany, which may never happen. We have to manage 7 billion people now and 9 billion, eventually. This will take an understanding of general trends and an appreciation of complexity both.

I believe that, politically, another kind of childishness is resisting globalization in the best sense of the term. We can be a united planet without being crushed by a few corporations, without losing local identity and most local sovereignty. But I also believe we must impose some human rights through a democratic world government. The emergency that is climate change and its consequences, the necessity of trying to avoid catastrophic global-scale warfare as climate change constricts food and habitable space and damages the sea, may well bring about some form of world government. This government will require a uniform set of basic human rights. Tolerance is important—but there are limits. We should require equality for women, and end to enforced marriages, acceptance of any sexual orientation between consenting adults, an end to torture and political imprisonment; an end to caste systems, an end to racial bias, an end to slavery; we should globally establish freedom of speech, freedom of religion or atheism, availability of basic health access, access to clean water and baseline food, access to education. Religion can be tolerated within certain boundaries; i.e., it cannot superimpose its superstitions onto secular education. People can choose religion and choose its form of education but it cannot deny people the agreed-on standard for education if they

choose it...All this will eventually lead to less waste of resources, less expenditure, because violations of these principles has its own costs.

### **17. What about the academic and intellectual milieu?**

There's always a tendency to elitism, but making basic education and computer interfacing more accessible will break that down. Academics and art should be to some large extent government subsidized. We should be providing free university education in the USA. We do need reasonable standards—people should not be getting financial support to pursue silly little backwaters like “the art of fingerpainting” or astrology or quackery like homeopathy. But public broadcasting stations should be supported by taxes; museums should be subsidized so that people can go to them freely...Talented artists should be located and subsidized to a far, far wider extent than now...

**18. You spoke at TEDxBrussels in a talk entitled *John Shirley – False Singularities*.<sup>17</sup> The talk critiques the common representations in the media, with an increase in frequency over three decades – at least, of the Singularitarians or the Trans-Humanists with the conceptual headship of Ray Kurzweil. Other individuals, too, such as Dr. Terry Grossman, M.D., Dr. Aubrey de Grey, Dr. Peter Diamandis, M.D., Saul Kent of the Life Extension Foundation, and others. Based on the responses about the technological landscape, the economic and socio-political environment, the academic and intellectual**

---

<sup>17</sup> [TEDx Talks]. (2011, November 23). TEDxBrussels – John Shirley – False Singularities. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtpX\\_9E\\_hU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtpX_9E_hU).

**milieu, and the TEDxBussels presentation, what seems like the most probable near future five years on from *John Shirley – False Singularities*?**

A mere five years? Much can happen in five years—sometimes a rush of events piles up in a short period—but I think more in terms of twenty to fifty years. Billions of people—two billion perhaps?—may be displaced by rising oceans, desertification, and diminution of arable land. Rising seas may well inundate many large cities along the coasts; New York may have to become like the Netherlands, or perhaps like Venice. Manufacturing will tend to congregate more and more in places chosen by computer model to be safe from demographic displacement, and this will create a guarded, semi-sequestered technocratic elite in those areas; there maybe be a danger of a sort of informal (or even formal?) techno-priesthood, a social bottleneck in access to computer tech and access. Money will probably become entirely electronic. There will indeed be a certain percentage of the population with wi-fi “internet of things” cerebral computer chip implantation. The gap between the rich and the poor could widen to a nightmarish vastness. Addiction to VR states will be a norm for some people...

But five years? Just more flooding of technological interfacing, and virtual communion, which will be helpful in some ways but could lead to widespread depression since it removes ordinary face to face contact...Medications will become more and more dangerously precise in their application so that people will be in ever greater risk of dependency. Terrorism certainly won't go away and we'll see a rise of terrorism on the right, domestic terrorism

stoked (mostly unconsciously) by the Trumps, the Glenn Becks, the Alex Joneses of the world, and by Dominionist pseudo-Christian extremists.

There may be weather cells of low oxygen, sort of like a meteorological version of the ocean's "dead zones", so that people have to flee the sudden lack of oxygen in those areas. That's highly speculative but I think it's possible, as a consequence of our destruction, through acidification of the seas, of oceanic organisms that provide much of our oxygen, combined with the destruction of rain forests.

#### **19. What about the most probable far future?**

What's your idea of "far"? A thousand years? Five thousand? I see a shattering reduction of the human race, it will be winnowed down, to one-fifth what we're seeing now, in the far future. High-rise farming will be the norm, with enormous tracts of green areas between; a culture that polarizes between decadence and technocratic expansion will take us into space. I believe there will be a faster-than-light work-around for spacecraft. I do not believe the human race will destroy itself entirely; I think it'll learn from its mistakes, and will expand into the cosmos. That's in the far future...To get ourselves there I think humanity will have to rebuild some of Earth's biosphere and allow the evolution of new areas of wildlife habitat biocomplexity so we have a world we can thrive in...

#### **20. What seems like the probability of the Singularity?**

More and more computer efficiency will lead to more and more dependency; some groups will control the means of satisfying that dependency. I am sure we'll have cascading advances of technology. But the kind of rather magical-thinking motions engaged in by Transhumanists, dreams of superhumanity and independently willed AIs, will be frustrated.

I do not believe that AIs will become dangerous unless we program them to be so. I see no reason they should become independent; they are not imprinted with survival instincts. Even if an artificial intelligence develops self-awareness, I don't see that as leading to aggression or fear. It will remain emotionless. Why would we be stupid enough to program them with survival-instinct aggressiveness?

**21. Does immortality as argued by Dr. Ray Kurzweil seem reasonable – even with an extended timeline – to you?**

Biological life extension for those privileged to access it is inevitable; computer-created immortality is a fantasy concocted by people who cannot believe in an afterlife (and there's no reason they should) but also cannot face death. Transferring an elaborate matrix or copy, three-dimensional or not, of personality and "memories" (I don't think they'll be actual memories) is no more immortality than an autobiography or making a video of oneself is. What is the self? How is a copy of what you suppose to be the self going to be the actual self?

**Abstract**

**An Interview with John Shirley. He discusses: definition of a cult and a religion; definition of mystical, religious, or spiritual sensibilities and experiences; the perspective of the cyberpunk genre on religion; philosophical assumptions with tacit assertion in discourse around artificial intelligence having consciousness; differentiation of human thinking from current AI; the most accurate depiction of the possible future of AI by science fiction; the good news for comprehension of consciousness and the construction of artificial consciousness (maybe); the bad news; the potential for superintelligence and if this will show human consciousness to be threadbare and sloppy; social and legal structure accommodations for non-human beings as smart or smarter than humans; possibility of humans merging with AI; possibility of other civilizations in our galaxy; the possible constructs produced by these civilizations; possible ways societies will fracture in the future; and the possibility of enflamed political controversies over AI as heated as the current political scene in America.**

*Keywords:* author, fiction, John Shirley, science, science fiction, writer.

**An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Three)<sup>18,19,20</sup>**

*\*Footnotes in & after the interview, & bibliography & citation style listing after the interview.\**

---

<sup>18</sup> Science Fiction Author and Writer.

<sup>19</sup> Individual Publication Date: October 15, 2016 at [www.in-sightjournal.com](http://www.in-sightjournal.com); Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2017 at <https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/>.

<sup>20</sup> Photograph courtesy of John Shirley.

**22. In the process of research, something came to the fore for me – from the performances published online by “[Phil Drummond]” or Phil Drummond.<sup>21</sup> In that, Philo Drummond had association with one previous interviewee, Reverend Ivan Stang, Rev. Ivan Stang, or Ivan Stang, from the Church of the SubGenius.<sup>22</sup> Reverend Ivan Stang, with respect to the Church of the Subgenius, said:**

*I suppose the biggest difference is that we admit we are bullshitting you. In that respect it is a remarkably honest religion. Also, we don't define Slack; it's different for each person, so there are no absolute values — except maybe for the tricky part about not robbing others of their Slack. Most religions become ever more specific about “right” and “wrong” and are essentially formulas. We do not provide any stable formula; in fact we illustrate that trying to fit human behavior into codified formulas is folly.<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> [Philo Drummond]. (2012, April 23). Sado-Nation with John Shirley. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6D474FA093259CCF>.

<sup>22</sup> Jacobsen, S.D. (2014, October 1). Reverend Ivan Stang: Co-Founder & Author, Church of the SubGenius. Retrieved from <http://in-sightjournal.com/2014/10/01/reverend-ivan-stang-co-founder-author-church-of-the-subgenius/>.

<sup>23</sup> The discussion in *Reverend Ivan Stang: Co-Founder & Author, Church of the SubGenius* (2014), in more detail, went as follows:

1. *As you have stated many times in public forums, and maybe private ones too, for those unaware of J.R. ‘Bob’ Dobbs, i.e. ‘the unsaved’, what three things do they need to know?*  
If they don't instantly see what's funny about it, they should probably avoid it. 2. If they can't read between the lines, they should probably stop reading. 3. If they often confuse Mad Magazine, or Saturday Night Live, with the news, they should RUN FOR DEAR LIFE.  
Beyond that, the key points are “Bob,” Slack, and The Conspiracy.
2. *Regarding ‘Bob’, ‘The Conspiracy’, and ‘Slack’, how do you define each term? Why did these become a foundation within the creation of the Church of the SubGenius?*  
Slack = the goal, what we all want (although it's different or each person). The Conspiracy (of the Normals) = what hinders Slack. “Bob” = the magic formula which facilitates Slack. But a major aspect of “Bob” Dobbs is the graphic portrait of “Bob.” That single image, inexplicable as it is, somehow ties all of it together. The moment that Philo showed me his book of clip art and we both simultaneously saw that damn halftone face was when we both knew we had *something*. We still do not know *what*.
3. *How does the Church of the SubGenius differ from most mainstream religions, e.g. Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism), Islam (Shia,*

## What defines a cult and a religion to you?

I have enjoyed my own connection to the satirical Church of the Subgenius—I have written for them, have been at some of their events, and I’m friends with “Philo” and “Stang” (not their real names). It’s a comedic construction, and a kind of art project, but it also makes its points about the absurdity of religion and kneejerk belief.

---

***Sunni, Sufi, and Kharijite), Hinduism, Chinese Traditional Religions, Buddhism, various Ethnic Religions, African Traditional religions, Sikhism, and so on?***

*I suppose the biggest difference is that we admit we are bullshitting you. In that respect it is a remarkably honest religion. Also, we don’t define Slack; it’s different for each person, so there are no absolute values — except maybe for the tricky part about not robbing others of their Slack. Most religions become ever more specific about “right” and “wrong” and are essentially formulas. We do not provide any stable formula; in fact we illustrate that trying to fit human behavior into codified formulas is folly. Also, we pay taxes.*

*One of my favorite lines is, “We’re like any other religion. It’s not that we love “Bob” all that much, it’s that we love the idea of everybody else going to Hell.”*

*I hope it goes without saying that most SubGeniuses don’t even believe in “Bob,” much less Hell.*

***8. Furthermore, how does it differ from other fringe religions, e.g. Christianity (Restorianism, Chinese Originated Churches, Church of the East, and Unitarian Universalism), Juche, Spiritism, Judaism, Bahá’í, Jainism, Shinto, Cao Dai, Zoroastrianism, Tenrikyo, Neo-Paganism, Rastafarianism, Scientology, Pastafarianism, Mormonism, Arceusology, Discordianism, Paganism, Crowleyites, and so on?***

*We’re much, much funnier than any of them, even Scientology.*

***9. What do you consider the most controversial part of your church compared to the mainline religions? In addition, what do you consider the most controversial compared to the other fringe religions? How do you examine the issue?***

*Some people become sincerely upset that we portray the God of the Bible as a monster from outer space. No punishments are threatened for sins like gluttony, adultery, addiction, etc. I guess the main point of contention is that we are making cruel fun of literally everybody’s most cherished beliefs, often simply because they are cherished. We are the Balloon Poppers, the Antidote to All Placebos.*

A cult, as Jacob Needleman said, is something easy to get into but difficult to leave. A religion, to me, is usually a large organized institutional device for consolation and comforting. As the Bible said, “by their fruits you will know them”. If the religion produces misery, it’s a miserable religion. If it’s kindly and not oppressive, I see no harm in it, and some religions may even provide kernels of truth hidden away within them. On the whole it’s probably time that we grew out of the need for them, but I don’t judge people for wanting comfort. “Anything that gets you through the night”.

### **23. What defines mystical, religious, or spiritual sensibilities and experiences to you?**

Too large a subject to get far into here.

My personal belief is that the majority of “mystical” experiences are purely neurological in origin, are variants of the dreamstate, and may or may not encode useful information.

However, some seekers after higher perception have had real insights, demonstrating that our consciousnesses are linked to a sort of sea of consciousness woven invisibly (mostly invisibly) within the cosmos.

Spirituality may be as simple as the Dalai Lama’s “my religion is kindness” and I cannot fault that. I believe there are methods (beyond the use of drugs) for enhancing consciousness as a thing in itself. As with William James and GI Gurdjieff and some others it seems evident to me there are levels of consciousness. But it’s easy to get lost in the search and many people wander into a sort of wilderness of blurred misperception. Something rigorous, like

the original form of Zen Buddhism, or Krishnamurti's methods for increasing awareness, are needed to keep from getting lost. I do not believe there is anything supernatural; there is only the unknown natural.

**24. What seems like the general perspective of the cyberpunk genre on religion in general-theological arguments, religious texts, socio-cultural activities, influence on politics, economic formulations, prayer, and so on?**

Cyberpunk writers have always stuck with characters who are "oil" to the water of religion.

They don't mix. Heroes and antiheroes of such tales are tough individuals with their own codes and are rightly skeptical of superimposed "religious" systems; these characters operate rather spontaneously except for, perhaps, some general recourse to secular humanism.

**25. What philosophical assumptions appear to have tacit assertion in conversation, discussions, media representations, and publications in the possibility for artificial intelligence (AI) having consciousness?**

I don't believe it's anything philosophical; I think it's lack of self knowledge. But I suppose a heightened belief in materiality and reductionism is involved. They believe that consciousness can be reduced to mere programming. Whereas it's something ineluctably holographic; a holography beyond our technology.

**26. What differentiates human thinking from current AI?**

I don't think there is current AI. There are "expert systems" that react as-if; there may be highly developed quantum computers in the works but they're not at the AI level yet. It's still a dream. We will develop AIs but they're just like an unspeakably complex abacus with a voice; the illusion that there's an independent mind in an AI is something we superimpose on them. It's like pareidolia. Kurtzweil, et al, are superimposing their daydreams on AIs, they're seeing "faces on Mars" in the random. Human thinking—well sometimes it's the same as an AI at a certain level. An AI could —some programs have—compose agreeable music according to certain principles, or think through things as we would. But there is a whole that is more than the sum of the parts that is in human consciousness, and there is a connection to instinctual wiring that AIs will lack (when there is actual AI).

**27. What science fiction genre and stories portray possible future AI in an accurate way?**

I haven't kept up, I read mostly nonfiction, but I think the depictions in Iain Banks's sf novels are very convincing.

**28. With the possible advent of the comprehension of consciousness, and the consequent means for the construction of artificial consciousness (maybe), what good news will this have for thinking beings such as ourselves?**

Consciousness has been comprehended by certain schools of thought, so to speak, for some thousands of years. It has to be tasted; it's felt like water on the hand; it's like a scent. It is an experience.

Artificial \*intelligence\* (as opposed to consciousness) will help us solve problems. New diseases will have new solutions—we'll have AIs that analyze new genetic and bacteriological and virological and environmental diseases and offer solutions, rapidly too. AIs will help us navigate interstellar space. AIs may (or may not) be added by interface to the problem-solving, analytical part of our own brains, so that genius becomes commonplace.

I'm a great believer in self-driving cars; something like AIs will make trains, planes and automobiles safer.

## **29. Any bad news for us?**

The misuse of AIs can be assumed; human beings are amazingly good at finding ways to misuse tools. Nuclear and biological weapons are a misuse of human laboratory tools. We use computers to help us operate weapons even now (not that we don't need weapons but they're often misused). Smart handguns that lock onto targets are in development. Bigger variants are in use in fighter jets. Extrapolate that to AIs...AIs will be used for espionage and sedition and terrorism: by AIs here I mean high-functioning artificial analytical devices.

**30. Will superintelligence emerge, and, if so, will this show human intelligence and consciousness as threadbare and sloppy?**

I already regard us all as threadbare and sloppy. But yes, re AI intelligence, up to a point. But it will not be independent. If human beings don't misuse it, it will be a great boon. Be a shame if we were too dependent on it.

**31. How will social and legal structures accommodate non-human beings that are as smart as or smarter than humans?**

I don't believe it will happen that way. I don't think they will ever be recognized as beings; they will have no independence. We should not create the illusion of it.

**32. Will humans merge with AI?**

Do we merge with our cars? In a way yes, in a way no. Is a man merged with a pacemaker in his heart? They will be, at best, extensions of us, really; they will be a kind of prosthetic to help us exceed our limitations. Some humans already, admittedly, over-identify with their computers, their phones (a most repugnant sight, the over-involvement with smartphones), so many will over-identify with their AI enhanced prosthetics. They may become near psychotic or psychopathic in the process, if they go too far. They may find it seemingly useful to take an emotion-suppressing drug which will—amongst other things—suppress empathy. I do

predict empathy-suppressing drugs in my story “Weedkiller” that appear in the British magazine *Interzone* last year.

**33. Do you think there are other civilizations in our galaxy?**

There are certainly others in the universe, solipsistic to think there aren't. Probably there are some in the galaxy. We will probably find them in time, at least from a distance; I hope they don't find us until we're ready. I have seen no evidence that extraterrestrials have visited this planet.

**34. What constructs might these civilizations produce for themselves?**

I do think the Dyson sphere is possible, or Larry Niven's Ringworld. Some think that wormholes can be artificially constructed, or anyway controllably induced... I think there must be space colonies that exist purely in space, well insulated (perhaps by electromagnetic fields) from interplanetary radiation, self sustaining, perhaps mining local planetoids and converting their matter into biological sustenance through a form of 3D printing... I described a variant of the L5 colony humanity may well construct, between Earth and the Moon, in *A Song Called Youth*.

**35. How might societies fracture in the future?**

A thousand ways. Competition for resources between competing societies could lead to shortages within discrete competitive societies, which of course leads to social unrest. Religions can be fabricated (they have been in the past, out of whole cloth, see Mormonism and Scientology) which could be \*designed\* for maximum mind control, as a social exploitation and social command device. Obviously religions have done something like that in the past—look at the Middle Ages—but a computer model set up for social and psychological acumen could design an almost irresistible mind control religion which would then oppress and you'd get the reaction to the oppression. Or suppose a society uses pharmacology, like Soma in Huxley, to control people and then its manufacturing base for it collapses—billions of people in withdrawal could be catastrophic.

But, more likely, the cycle of an elite controlling wealth leading to a widening gap between rich and poor is the most recurrent “rust” or cracking of the machinery of society.

**36. Will future political controversies over AI become as heated as the current enflamed political scene in The United States of America?**

I don't see why they should since AIs are mere tools. Access to them will be a point of conflict though.

### Abstract

**An Interview with John Shirley. He discusses: possible political, philosophical, and ethical functions of science fiction; general philosophy; ethical philosophy; political philosophy; social philosophy; economic philosophy; marks of good writing about the future; marks of bad writing; science fiction writers predicting the world of now; science fiction and the near future; science fiction wrong about the future; tiresome tropes in science fiction; apocalypses overdone; dealing or failing to deal with climate change; large oncoming turning points in future history; colonization of nearby stars or restricting to the Sun and the Solar System; good techniques to learn to imagine the future; near and far future individuals differing from us; America's prospects to being the dominant nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the 22<sup>nd</sup> century as well; India and China becoming the new world powers; personal heroes; upcoming collaborative projects; upcoming solo projects; recommended authors; and suggested resources.**

*Keywords:* author, fiction, John Shirley, science, science fiction, writer.

**An Interview with John Shirley: Science Fiction Author and Writer (Part Four)<sup>24,25,26</sup>**

*\*Footnotes in & after the interview, & bibliography & citation style listing after the interview.\**

---

<sup>24</sup> Science Fiction Author and Writer.

<sup>25</sup> Individual Publication Date: October 22, 2016 at [www.in-sightjournal.com](http://www.in-sightjournal.com); Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2017 at <https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/>.

<sup>26</sup> Photograph courtesy of John Shirley.

**37. What (if any) political, philosophical, and ethical functions can or should be served by science fiction?**

Science fiction at its best is a mirror, it shows us ourselves as we are, projected into futurological settings so we can see ourselves objectively. Self-observation, critical self-knowledge, is of enormous value. It also projects the present, extrapolates, so that provides a model for possible failures. The novel *1984* helped us avoid—to some extent—Big Brother, in this nation. Envisioning nuclear wastelands in fiction helped motivate us to control nuclear weapon proliferation to an extent. (Humanity needs to get rid of them, of course). We can test out alternate societies in fiction—how would an anarchist society work? What would be the downside and the upside, what would be the social cost of it? And so on.

**38. What general philosophy seems the most correct to you?**

Scientific methodological thinking moderated by secular humanism, and respect for higher consciousness.

**39. What ethical philosophy seems the most correct to you?**

A careful cultivation and maintenance of empathy while still maintaining a capability for lethal self defense.

**40. What political philosophy seems the most correct to you?**

Democracy but with a strong federal (or global centrality) entity overseeing things so as to impose fair rule of law, and infused with respect for human rights and the environment.

**41. What social philosophy seems the most correct to you?**

A synthesis of socialism and the marketplace; social safety nets that are more extensive than now, but limited so people always have room for motivation. Freedom of sexual relations between consenting adults; legalization of possession of narcotics if they're not being sold by the possessor illegally; treating drug addiction with rehabilitation; access to medicine for all including mental health care.

**42. What economic philosophy seems the most correct to you?**

Economic stimulus from the center of society; numerous people employed with good benefits and good wages to maintain infrastructure. A reasonably high minimum wage. Rejection of libertarianism.

**43. What seem like the marks of good writing about the future?**

People writing from a grounding in many forms of literature, a good grounding in the English language, and not too much reliance on movies and television and animation and comics for genre inspiration. Those things are fine, but instead, use objective observation of the world to

make your projections; instead of just coming up with new variants of old stories, find new ideas. Understand the social implications of the sf world being created, not just tech.

Appreciate characterization.

**44. What seem like the marks of bad writing?**

Cliche, bad dialogue, reliance on movies and so on for inspiration, lack of grounding in good books of all kinds, laziness, self indulgence, vain overwriting; confusing underwriting.

**45. Did any of the writers from the golden age of science fiction come close to predicting the world of now?**

HG Wells famously predicted a number of things. You can look that up. I guess he was proto-golden age. *The Marching Morons* by Pohl and Kornbluth predicted many aspects of our world now. Cordwainer Smith predicted much techno interfacing.

**46. What can science fiction tell us about the near future?**

That people writing research papers will run out of ideas for questions and repeat their questions. But, see *The Sheep Look Up* by John Brunner; his predictions of the social consequences of toxifying our food and environment.

**47. What does science fiction tend to get wrong about the future?**

It fails to look at the dark side of technology and the dark side of sheer growth in civilization.

**48. What tropes are you tired of seeing in science fiction?**

I rarely read it anymore; I read science magazines instead; I read history a great deal. But I dislike science fiction that assumes libertarian ideals are fruitful in a positive way; that the marketplace alone is helpful. This has been cropping up. A society without regulation is a society ruled by corporate overlords.

**49. Which apocalypses have been overdone?**

Obviously the zombie apocalypse. The Mad Max assumption—although I like the Mad Max movies—of endless wasteland. BIG wasteland expansion for a while is likely; endless, not likely.

**50. How have we dealt with (or failed to deal with) climate change?**

We've mostly failed, though some inroads have been made. The recent international conference was at least a good start; the Chinese seem to be recognizing that it's real and they're a big part of the problem. We've failed to control egregious pollution emissions like coal burning particulates (with it, mercury pollution in the sea), methane from various

industries. Big industry—the petroleum industry’s refineries, for example—is still allowed too much air pollution.

**51. What seem like some of the large oncoming turning points in future history?**

The exponential expansion (not a singularity but significant) of computer technology will combine into an overarching system, based on the internet; it will be vulnerable and if it collapses there could be global chaos for awhile. I think there will be a confrontation—much more strident than now—with radical Islam and, later, with radical-right Christianity. The former made lead to a world war—probably—but not one that will employ nuclear weapons unless perhaps small tactical nukes. I think that radical Islam will be shattered by a general global prohibition, a rather draconian one I’m afraid. There will be a “reformation” or “enlightenment period” in Islam. That will make Muslim civilizations civilized. Women will be more assertive in global society and will insist on an end to patriarchal systems in the third world. There will be women’s militias enforcing this modeled on the Kurdish women’s militia groups. Our abuse of the ocean will reach a climax of negative side effects...

**52. Will we colonize nearby stars or restrict ourselves to the Sun and the Solar System?**

Eventually the human race will expand to the stars. Either we’ll devise new types of spacecraft drives or we’ll devise self-sustaining highly insulated spacecraft that will take colonists there over long periods of time.

**53. What are some good techniques to learn how to imagine the future?**

Read laymen's science publications, and use your imagination, but also just develop observation of the world at large. Developing patterns are visible if you look. Make spreadsheets (I do it in my mind) or charts. Use computer models. Hire people like me.

**54. How might future individuals differ from us – near and far future?**

Near future I predict a dismaying elitism, with many elitists shrivelling into dependency on designer drugs and VR lives; "second life" in the worst way. But others will be technocrats, some power hungry, others driven by humane impulses. In the far future, humanity will probably have "primitivists" and somewhat cyborgian people, all of whom are eventually made irrelevant by mutated homo superiors, who, I hope, will retain empathy while increasing intelligence and lifespan. These mutated human variants might be the result of genetic engineering. The whole issue of eugenics will raise its frightening head again.

**55. Insofar as the prospects for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, does America continue to be a dominant nation?**

The evidence is, yes, because despite the resistance on the part of a minority we continue to take in immigrants, many of whom are intelligent and creative, most of whom are hardworking, and they'll make us stronger. The USA also is very adaptable—it takes three steps forward, then one or two back, but we profit by some progress. We have actually made

great progress in the area of alternative energy—not as much as we need to make but it is a successful field, and it is expanding. While the idiocracy threatens us, there are still lots of people interested in education and many, many young people interested in tolerance. If the huge stresses coming from climate disruption are not too overwhelming the USA will do well: it is a well-founded social experiment. It corrects itself. It eliminated slavery, it allowed unions, women got the vote, and so on. IF we can reign in the religious right...there is much to hope for.

**56. What about the 22<sup>nd</sup> century?**

Recovery from world ecological sickness—like a person very sick from cancer, recovering, walking again.

**57. Do India and China become the new world powers?**

India seems to drag its feet. It can't even provide itself with reasonably clean water. (Yes, I know, Flint, Michigan, but we're far better at that on the whole.) China will be a great power as it continues to gradually liberalize.

**58. What personal heroes exist in history, in the present, and who most influenced you?**

Plato, the Buddha, the actual Jesus (not the conventional Christian version), Newton, Galileo, Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Dickens, Thoreau, Emerson, Cyrano de Bergerac, Charles

Darwin, Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire, Edna St Vincent Millay, Upton Sinclair, John Steinbeck, Will Durant, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, the Futurian science fiction writers (Pohl, Asimov, Knight etc), Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Ray Bradbury, Larry Niven, Alfred Bester, JG Ballard, Harlan Ellison, Frank Herbert, Jack Vance, Jacob Needleman, Krishnamurti, Ramakrishna, GI Gurdjieff, Mick Jagger, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Tom Verlaine, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, Patrick O'Brian, David Bowie, Anne Sexton...I could go on...but I won't...

**59. Any upcoming collaborative projects?**

Only in music. New songs with Blue Oyster Cult, new songs of my own with musical partners.

**60. Any upcoming solo projects?**

The novel *Stormland*, about a part of the USA in the future that has hurricane level storms 360 days a year, year after year, and the people who somehow are still there...and why they're there.

**61. Any recommended authors?**

All the ones I mentioned earlier.

**62. For those with an interest in further personal research into you, they can look at the approved personal and professional website: [www.john-shirley.com](http://www.john-shirley.com). Any other suggested resources for related individuals, publications, and general subject matter?**

There is also a [facebook fan page](#).

**Thank you for your time, Mr. Shirley.**

### **Bibliography**

- 1) [Philo Drummond]. (2012, April 23). Sado-Nation with John Shirley. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6D474FA093259CCF>.
- 2) [TEDx Talks]. (2011, November 23). TEDxBussels – John Shirley – False Singularities. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntpX\\_9E\\_hU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntpX_9E_hU).
- 3) Dueben, A. (2012, August 6). John Shirley: The Crow: Death and Rebirth. Retrieved from <https://suicidegirls.com/girls/sash/blog/2680449/john-shirley-the-crow-death-and-rebirth/>.
- 4) Fahey, T.B. (2014, September 2). Piper at the Gates of Hell: An Interview with Cyberpunk Legend John Shirley. Retrieved from <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/piper-at-the-gates-of-hell-an-interview-with-cyberpunk-legend-john-shirley>.
- 5) Jacobsen, S.D. (2014, October 1). Reverend Ivan Stang: Co-Founder & Author, Church of the SubGenius. Retrieved from <http://in-sightjournal.com/2014/10/01/reverend-ivan-stang-co-founder-author-church-of-the-subgenius/>.
- 6) Laurence, A. (1994). An Interview with John Shirley. Retrieved from

<http://www.altx.com/int2/john.shirley.html>.

- 7) Reverbnation (n.d.). John Shirley. Retrieved from <https://www.reverbnation.com/johnshirley>.
- 8) Shirley, J. (2014, August 26). A science fiction author ponders the dystopic landscape of the sovereign citizen mind. Retrieved from <http://www.rawstory.com/2014/08/john-shirley-on-sovereign-citizens-draft/>.
- 9) Shirley, J. (2016). Dark Echo. Retrieved from <http://www.darkecho.com/>.
- 10) Shirley, J. (2012, May 11). Tales to Terrify no 18 John Shirley. Retrieved from <http://talestoterrify.com/tales-to-terrify-no-18-john-shirley/>.
- 11) Ventrella, M.A. (2012, June 7). [Interview with Bram Stoker Award-winning author John Shirley](#). Retrieved from <http://michaelaventrella.com/2012/06/07/interview-with-bram-stoker-award-winning-author-john-shirley/>.

## License and Copyright

### License



*In-Sight Publishing* and *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* by [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

Based on a work at [www.in-sightjournal.com](http://www.in-sightjournal.com).

### Copyright

© Scott Douglas Jacobsen and John Shirley, and *In-Sight Publishing* and *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* 2012-2017. Unauthorized use and/or duplication of this material without express and written permission from this site's author and/or owner is strictly prohibited.

Excerpts and links may be used, provided that full and clear credit is given to Scott Douglas Jacobsen and John Shirley, and *In-Sight Publishing* and *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* with appropriate and specific direction to the original content. All interviewees co-copyright their interview material and may disseminate for their independent purposes.