

IMAGINARY FUTURES

From Thinking Machines to the Global Village

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Dr. RICHARD BARBROOK

COMING SPRING 2007 FROM PLUTO PRESS

Imaginary Futures: From Thinking Machines to the Global Village

Dr. Richard Barbrook Puts Forth a Radical New Challenge to Today's Cyber-savvy Internet Masses in Imaginary Futures

May 2007 brings with it a new work of literature that will force both intellectual thinkers and cyber-savvy youth to re-evaluate the political history of the Internet and consider responding to a new call to action in how the world's most important tool of revolutionary politics should be approached.

Richard Barbrook traces the early days of the Internet, beginning from a pivotal moment at the 1964 World's Fair, in what critics are saying is the most well-researched and original account of cybertechnology among contemporary works. He demonstrates how business and ideological leaders put forth a carefully orchestrated vision of an imaginary future, where robots would do the washing up, go to the office and think for us. With America at the forefront of these promises, Barbrook shows how ideological forces joined to develop new information technologies during the Cold War era and how what they created historically has shaped the modern Internet, with intended political consequences.

Crucially, he argues that had the past been different, our technological and political present would not be what it is today. Barbrook puts forward conclusions that challenge new generations to take the power of the Internet into their own hands, resist status quo politics and use the world's most powerful political tool to shape their own, better, destiny. His message: *if we don't want the future to be what it used to be, we must invent our own, improved and truly revolutionary future.*

Anyone who uses the Internet should read this book because it is:

Brilliantly researched
Politically radical
Funny

PRESS CONTACT

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Beautifully designed, including a collection of retro-fabulous artworks created by Alex Veness, Imaginary Futures captures the fashionable kitsch of the 1950s and 1960s Atomic Age ideals, while richly detailing the important role played among the Internet's own family tree of inventors, philosophers and pop culture leaders. Imaginary Futures is both radically inspiring and collectable.



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IMAGINARY FUTURES

Here is what BBC4 presenter and Cambridge University Professor Simon Schaffer is saying about Imaginary Futures:

There is an urban guerrilla feeling and tone to this book with an ambitious message to point out. It is fantastically radical, because it reminds us of what could have been and what may still happen. He shows us how decisions made during the Cold War had very specific effects on how the Net is laid out, how its users are constructed and who pays what to whom. He is exceptionally good at humorous juxtapositions, showing how exhibitions, design, celebrity, media and pop culture link together, politically. We don't get accounts of cyber technology that are as authoritative as this, it is extremely original. Many Net writers adopt an a-political stance, but Richard shows it is the opposite – and that the most important political issues of our time are tied into the Net. Many think we are isolated using the Net and individualized, but Richard shows this thinking is rubbish.

IMAGINARY FUTURES EXCERPTS:

THE PAST

The model of the future offered to me as an adult in late-2000s London is the same future promised to me as a child at the 1964 New York World's Fair. What is even weirder is that – according to the prophecies made more than four decades ago – I should already be living in this wonderful future.

Computers were described as 'thinking' so the hard work involved in designing, building, programming and operating them could be discounted.

While some prioritised defending civil liberties at home, most of them were convinced that the first priority of the American Left was to prove its anti-Stalinist credentials in the Cold War confrontation. Since socialism – in all its interpretations – was a dangerous foreign concept, a more patriotic form of radical politics had to be developed. During the long period of conservative rule of 1950s, this aspiration became the rallying-call for a new movement of progressive intellectuals: the Cold War Left.

THE NOW

As the most liberal nation on earth, the United States must also be the furthest advanced along the path towards socialism.

The Iraq War was not only a war for oil, but also, more importantly, a war for media. When the US military's hi-tech victories were covered live and in full-colour on the global TV news bulletins, the whole world would understand that the United States was the most advanced nation on the planet.

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THE FUTURE

When the owner of the future controlled the present, geopolitical rivalries and class conflicts were focused upon the struggle between opposing definitions of the global village. At various times from the 1950s to the 2000s, the information society was identified as a state plan, a military machine, a mixed economy, a university campus, a hippie commune, a free market, a medieval community and a dotcom firm.

Contrary to the tenets of McLuhanism, the convergence of media, tele-communications and computing has not – and never will – liberate humanity. The Net is a useful tool not a redemptive technology.

Cooperative creativity and participatory democracy should be extended from the virtual world into all areas of life. This time, the new stage of growth must be a new civilisation.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Richard Barbrook is the author of Pluto Press's Spring 2007 release *Imaginary Futures* and has also written a number of highly influential essays on the clash between commerce and cooperation within the Internet, including 'The Hi-Tech Gift Economy', 'Cyber-communism', 'The Regulation of Liberty' and, with Andy Cameron, 'The Californian Ideology', published in 1995 it was a controversial critique of the neo-liberal politics of *Wired* magazine. He has recently published a book on the social groups shaping the information society, 'The Class of the New' (2006). During the early 1980s, he was involved in pirate and community radio broadcasting and helped establish Spectrum Radio, a multi-lingual station in London, and published extensively on radio issues. Between 1995 and 2005, he coordinated the pioneering Hypermedia Research Centre at the University of Westminster and was course leader of its MA in Hypermedia Studies, the first of its kind on offer in Britain. Educated at Cambridge, Essex and Kent Universities, Barbrook is currently a Senior Lecturer of Politics at the University of Westminster.

Alex Veness is a London-based artist working with issues of globalisation and the effects of upheaval in post-Soviet Russia as well as exploring the dramatic growth and realignment of the Chinese economy. He produced 16 artworks on paper in airbrush and watercolour for *Imaginary Futures*. Veness is currently Lecturer in Fine Art at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

For an interview with Dr. Richard Barbrook and to secure artwork for publication:

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