

Workshop:

THE FUTURES OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

3rd October 2007

Venue: Leiden University,
Campus Den Haag, Bologna Room

Organised by Peter Pels and
Chris Goto-Jones, Leiden University.
Sponsored by NWO and Asiascape.net



Both the discourses of science fiction and those of global development have relied, in many of cases, on futures imagined as a result of technological change. The futures of digital technology, in particular, are as old as the immediate post-1945 period, and have predicted a number of different social revolutions: freedom from labour through artificial life or intelligence, fantasies of total surveillance and control, fantasies of libertarian life beyond the electronic frontier, even post-religious images of transcending the material. These futures changed from time to time and place to place: usually positive when predicting Third World development, often more pessimistic when written up as science fiction, but always steering the actual process of invention, investment and techno-scientific policy, whether in the West, the East, the North or the South.

This workshop proposes to bring together academic researchers in the fields of digital technology and popular culture, and representatives from beyond the academe who are concerned with the commercial, industrial and policy futures of digital technology, to discuss what kind of research is needed to understand how the futures of these various sectors may relate to the imaginary futures envisioned by science fiction and development since 1945.

The discussions in this one-day workshop will start by considering the future of thinking machines and the global village that, according to Richard Barbrook's *Imaginary Futures* (Pluto, 2007) has dominated Western thinking since the rise of robots and cybernetics. Our first step will be to ask scholars familiar with digital technology in East Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa to reflect on the question how different these imagined futures were and are from developments elsewhere in the world, especially in the field of "ICT for development". Secondly, we will ask the various representatives of cultural, policy-making and industrial organizations to comment on what kind of research in this field would be most relevant and needed in their sectors.

The tone and purpose of the workshop will be discursive and open, and the results of the seminar should be directly translated into foci for the proposed research project *The Future is a Different Country: Comparing Digital Futurities*, to be filed with NWO later in October 2007. Invited participants are asked to be ready and willing to present their views on the key topics and the general area.

Programme:

- 12.00 – Lunch in the foyer of Leiden Campus in Den Haag (4th floor)
- 13.00 – Opening remarks by Peter Pels
- 13.15 – Keynote address by Richard Barbrook (University of Westminster, London), author of *Imaginary Futures. From Thinking Machines to the Global Village* (2007).
- 13.45 – Discussion centred on issues from Barbrook's lecture
- 14.15 – Coffee
- 14.30 – Outline of the ***Future is a Different Country*** proposal by Peter Pels and Chris Goto-Jones
- 14.45 – Discussion and contributions focusing on representatives from 'maatschappelijke' (non-academic) organisations.
- 15.30 – Discussion and contributions focussing on academic content
- 16.15 – Coffee
- 16.30 – 17.00 – Final discussion, conclusions and summing up

Dinner in a restaurant near the workshop venue will follow, for those who are interested.

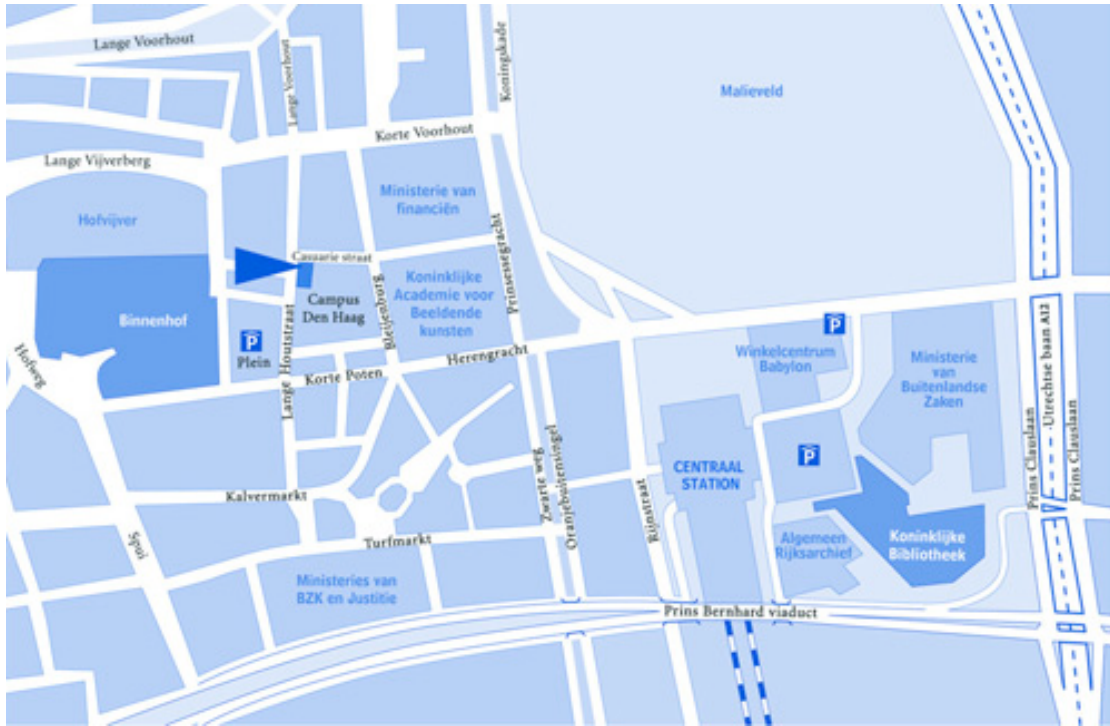
Invited participants:

This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

- Bart Barendregt (Leiden University)
- Bob Overbeken (XS4all.net)
- Chris Goto-Jones (Leiden University)
- Christian van 't Hof (Rathenau Instituut)
- Dorien Zandbergen (Leiden University)
- Hans Kuijpers (SieboldHuis museum)
- John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
- Manuela Rossini (ASCA, University of Amsterdam)
- Mark Harrison (University of Westminster, London)
- Marleen Stikker (The Waag Society)
- Merel Noorman (University of Maastricht)
- Michiel van Well (Stichting Toekomstbeeld der Techniek)
- Niels Huijbregts (XS4all.net)
- Peter Pels (Leiden University)
- Richard Barbrook (University of Westminster, London)
- Sally Wyatt (Virtual Knowledge Studio, KNAW)
- Sharon Kinsella (Oxford University)
- Susan Napier (University of Texas)
- Young Sook Choi (Kings College, London)

Location:

Campus Den Haag Universiteit Leiden,
Lange Houtstraat 5-7, 2511 CV Den Haag.
Tel: 070 – 3021070
<http://www.campusdenhaag.nl/>



Oversea's participants have been booked into the Corona Hotel in the centre of Den Haag:

Corona Hotel Den Haag, Buitenhof 39-42, 2513 AH Den Haag.
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