How To Be Modern: a Situationist Social Democrat's adventures in radio, gaming and the Internet

Richard Barbrook and Petar Jandrić

Introduction

Richard Barbrook is a media theorist, social scientist, and one of the most important analysts of the political and the ideological roles of information and communications technologies. He studied at universities of Cambridge, Essex and Kent. In early-1980s, he helped to set up the multi-lingual Spectrum Radio station in London, and published extensively on radio issues. Richard has spent his entire academic career at the University of Westminster in both its Media and Politics departments. In 2007, with Fabian Tompsett and Ilze Black, he co-founded a Situationist art group Class Wargames (2015). Based in London, the group has restaged Guy Debord's *The Game of War* (Becker-Ho and Debord, 2009) in various places throughout Europe, Russia and Brazil. He is now working with Cybersalon on the British campaign for the *People's Charter of Digital Libertie*s.

Richard wrote numerous highly influential articles such as 'The Californian Ideology' (Barbrook and Cameron, 1995) and 'Cyber-Communism: how the Americans are superseding capitalism in cyberspace' (Barbrook, 2000). He also wrote three important books: *Media Freedom: the contradictions of communication in the age of modernity* (Barbrook, 1995), *Imaginary Futures: from thinking machines to the global village* (Barbrook, 2007), and *Class Wargames: ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism* (Barbrook, 2014). Richard is a trustee of Cybersalon, an online think tank on digital futures, and a member of the Labour party. His *Imaginary Futures* book received the Media Ecology Association's Marshall McLuhan prize in 2008.

In this article, Richard Barbrook discusses his ideas with Petar Jandrić who is an educator, researcher and activist. He has written three books, dozens of scholarly articles and chapters, and numerous journalistic articles. Petar's works have been published in Croatian, English, Serbian, Spanish and Ukrainian. He regularly participates in national and international educational projects and policy initiatives. Petar's background is in physics, education and information science, and his research interests are situated at the post-disciplinary intersections between technologies, pedagogies and the wider society. Petar has worked at Croatian Academic and Research Network, the University of Edinburgh, Glasgow School of Art, and the University of East London. At present, he works as professor and director of BSc (Informatics) programme at the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, and visiting associate professor at the University of Zagreb.

Do-It-Yourself media meets the phantom armies of the mixed economy

Petar Jandrić (PJ): Dear Richard, it is an honour and privilege to engage in this conversation with you. Please allow me to start the conversation with your days of involvement with pirate and community radio broadcasting. How did you develop an interest in do-it-yourself media?

Richard Barbrook (RB): In 1976, as a 20-year-old student, two important things happened in my life. Firstly, I saw the Sex Pistols at the 100 Club in London and, secondly, I read Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994) [1967]. I belong to the punk generation who thought that *The Society of the Spectacle* was the answer to everything. One of the key concepts that we learnt from Debord was: smash the spectacle! Punk was very much about smashing the spectacle and Malcolm McLaren – the Sex Pistols' manager – championed this do-it-yourself cultural politics. It was not just about admiring the band. It was also about playing your own music, creating your own fanzine, making your own film and hosting your own club night. A few years later, when I was beginning my doctorate, I met some guys who had been involved in community radio in Australia. They asked me to help them with *Our Radio* which was a pirate station that they had just started. We wanted to be the Situationist punks of the London airwaves!

Between 1981 and 1986, led by Ken Livingstone and John McDonnell, the Labour Left was in control of the Greater London Council (GLC). Their administration became so popular that Margaret Thatcher – the British prime minster of the time – eventually abolished the GLC because her Tory party could not win the next election for its members! During these exciting times, I was a Labour Left activist and heavily involved in the GLC's community radio campaign. There were more languages spoken in London than in any other city in the world, but English was then the only language that you could hear on the airwaves. With a grant from the GLC, we founded *Spectrum Radio* to enable refugee and immigrant groups to make programmes for their own communities. When we applied for a low powered Medium Wave licence for London, the Tory government vetoed our bid because they were paranoid about any loosening of controls over the media. I was later told by a newspaper journalist that the secret police had been tapping my phone for six months while these London licences were being awarded! After our bid was rejected, I knew that I had to leave *Spectrum* in order to save the radio station. Soon afterwards, the ethnic groups running this project moved its studios into Thatcher's parliamentary constituency and then invited her as the local MP to open their new premises. Thanks to this clever manoeuvre, *Spectrum* secured its community radio license and is still broadcasting to the London area. My first published articles were reflections on my experiences as a radio activist (1989) (1992).

PJ: How did you develop an interest in other media?

RB: During the period of my involvement with community radio, my then partner Fran Rayner was studying for a year in Paris. On one of my trips to see her, she introduced me to the wonders of Minitel around at a French friend's flat. Although pretty basic by today's standards, this technology was computer networking for the masses – the French had the Internet ten years before anybody else! Back then, Minitel seemed amazingly futuristic with its message boards and information services. I remember that Fran was even able to book our railway tickets to Nice online in 1985. Later, in the early-1990s, when the Internet took off

in London, I recognised immediately that this was a better version of Minitel – and quickly switched my focus from radio to the Internet.

PJ: Radio was an important element of the Situationist movement. Could you please outline links between radio activism and the Situationists? How are these links reflected in your later work?

RB: As an undergraduate student, I was deeply impressed by Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit's book about the May 1968 French Revolution: *Obsolete Communism: the left-wing alternative* (Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 1968). By obsolete communism, they meant Bolshevism in its Stalinist, Trotskyist and Maoist variants. In this book, they confessed that the New Left's greatest mistake during May '68 was not taking over the ORTF (the French state's radio and TV corporation). Instead, a few radicals did try to set up a pirate radio in the occupied Sorbonne, but it never really got off the ground. What I learnt from the Cohn-Bendit brothers' book was that the Situationist critique of the spectacle meant that we should transform one-way media into two-way communications. The Situationists were into what we would now call 'accelerationism' – the proletarian solution is going beyond capitalism not retreating into the past. Their optimism about the future was an excellent antidote to the fashionable Post-Modern nihilism of the 1980s.

During one visit to Paris, Fran and I watched Jean Baudrillard on the *Apostrophes* TV programme denouncing the evils of hyper-reality and calling for everyone to stop watching television, listening to the radio or using Minitel. He insisted that the best media was no media! As an old punk, I strongly disagreed with him. I had been taught by the Situationists that we could create our own radical two-way media. In my last book *Class Wargames: ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism* (2014), I talk about Tom Vague's wonderful concept of Pop Situationism (1997) which explains why I was so sure of this subversive solution back then. Historically, Situationism had begun in the 1950s as an avant-garde art movement, and then, during the 1960s, became a libertarian communist political movement. But, in the late-1970s, our generation had turned it back into an avant-garde art movement. As Tom Vague explains, the English punks were Pop Situationists.

For my mates, this meant do-it-yourself music and – in my case, making our own radio. So this was my link between Situationism and pirate/community radio. *The Society of the Spectacle* as the manual of media activism. Of course, what we then thought was really radical has now become mainstream. Everyone can make their own media on the Internet. We're all now Pop Situationists whether we know it or not!

PJ: In *Media Freedom: the contradictions of communication in the age of modernity* (1995), you develop a series of graphic models of media freedom. Your approach is truly fascinating, because – in spite of obvious shortcomings deriving from its ahistorical nature – your diagrams provide a clear set of successive images describing the history of the media. Some aspects of this book obviously come from pre-digital mass media, while others can easily be extended to digital information and communication technologies. Which conclusions from *Media Freedom* are still relevant today?

RB: *Media Freedom* was published in 1995 – at the start of the decisive shift from analogue media to digital media. We launched the book in Cyberia – the world's first cybercafé which had opened the year before in London – and that setting perfectly reflected this transition moment. We were at the end of one era and at the beginning of another one. At Westminster

University, Andy Cameron and I had just founded the Hypermedia Research Centre and were about to launch its MA in Hypermedia Studies. We were also writing 'The Californian Ideology' which would become our digital media manifesto. (Barbrook & Cameron, (1996) [1995].

For me, personally, the *Media Freedom* book launch marked the first stage of a new part of my life. During the 1980s, while I was very involved with the Labour Left and pirate/community radio, I had also been studying for a Politics doctorate with David McLellan at Kent University. When Margaret Thatcher won her third election victory in 1987, it was obvious that my career as an activist was over for the moment. The GLC had been abolished. There were no radio licences for lefties. The Right were in the ascendency within the Labour party. So I thought: what did Karl Marx do in such times of defeat? He went to the British Museum Library and wrote a book! I decided to follow his example. I completed my PhD thesis. I got a research job at Westminster University. There, I spent the next few years assisting Vincent Porter's project looking at broadcasting regulation in France, Belgium, Italy, Germany and other European countries. It was by mashing together insights from my PhD thesis, research for Vincent and my pirate/community experiences that I was able to write *Media Freedom*. This was my critique of the academic orthodoxies of Media Studies – a diatribe against the lazy orthodoxies of both neoliberalism and Bolshevism.

Back in the 1980s, the intellectual debate about the media was always about the market vs. the state. It was either market good/state bad or state good/market bad. Whether they were into Ronald Coase or Stuart Hall, people kept on repeating the same old arguments about the relative merits of commercial and public service broadcasting. At a satellite and cable TV conference at the ICA in London around this time, I spent the day listening to this tired debate once again. Then, in its final session, Raymond Williams – the Welsh Marxist cultural theorist – came on to the stage and said wearily: "We have just witnessed the battle between the phantom armies of the mixed economy." In one line, he had dismissed the entire rationale of that day's tedious arguments – brilliant, 10 out of 10! When I wrote *Media Freedom*, I was trying to escape from this false dialectic between the market and the state which Williams loathed so much. The message of my book was simple. The market and the state were the two manifestations of spectacular media. It was not either one or the other because they were both the same thing.

I am pleased that you like the book's diagrams of different types of media freedom. Since its publication, I have revised them and uploaded these new versions on my Politics and Media Freedom module's website (Media Freedom, 2015). However, I disagree that the diagrams are ahistorical. Instead, they are freezing particular moments in time. The models of media freedom have superseded each other one after another culminating in what I now describe in my module's final lecture as the Net model of media freedom (Barbrook, 2015a).

Neoliberalism for hippies

PJ: Arguably, your most famous work is 'The Californian Ideology'.

RB: Undoubtedly - the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam have just published a beautifully designed 20th anniversary edition (Barbrook, 2015b)!

PJ: How did the article arrive into being?

RB: As I already mentioned, Andy Cameron and I were working at Westminster University together. Andy was teaching graphic design and had just set up – with some of his students – the ANTI-rom collective of interactive designers. What inspired 'The Californian Ideology' was mine and Andy's growing frustration with the early manifestations of dotcom neoliberalism in London. Almost all of our Internet pioneers were opposed to the Tory agenda of privatising the National Health Service, British Rail and other public services. Yet, when it came to the Internet, they would immediately start spouting neoliberal nonsense which they had recently read in *Wired* magazine! So Andy said: "We must write a critique of *Wired* as the manifesto of the Hypermedia Research Centre and its new MA in Hypermedia Studies." We created 'The Californian Ideology' initially for ourselves, to clarify what distinguished our views about the Internet as against the free market fairytales being told by *Wired* magazine.

PJ: So you deliberately went against the stream – and in more than one way. What was the dominant narrative of the day? How did you go about to challenge it?

RB: At the time, there were lots of people who thought that the Internet was just a temporary fad. A prominent academic at Westminster University told me: "The Internet is like Citizens' Band radio – and it will soon also disappear in a puff of smoke!" However, Andy and I were well aware that the Internet would fundamentally change the future of the media. When I was involved in pirate radio, we had climb tower blocks to install our transmitters and antennas – and then defend this equipment from the police or other pirates who wanted to steal it. A massive effort was made for a very small audience. But, with the advent of the Internet, it was obvious that everybody would soon be a broadcaster. What we had once dreamt as punks was now becoming a reality. This is why 'The Californian Ideology' begins with our rousing declaration that the Internet was the do-it-yourself media that the Left had been talking about for decades.

We thought that this is the moment when the technology has finally arrived to create practical Situationism. I had seen Minitel in France back in the 1980s, but the Internet was really something else: do-it-yourself media for everyone. Yet, the dominant narrative of the mid-1990s was that this new technology would create dotcom neoliberalism. If you read *Wired* magazine, you were told that heroic entrepreneurs were the only pioneers of the digital future. They were the geniuses taking the factors of production and recombining them to create the next stage of the capitalist economy.

PJ: What were the ideological underpinnings of the dominant narrative?

RB: *Wired* had this very seductive idea of a hippie version of neoliberal capitalism. They wanted their Californian ideology to replace not just socialism in the state capitalist interpretations promoted by Fabians and Bolsheviks, but also the more libertarian variants of the New Left and the Labour Left. The central person in the *Wired* mythology was the entrepreneur, for whom the creation of the Internet was a great new business opportunity. Having lived since 1979 under a Tory government, lots of English people understood that the freedom-loving rhetoric of neoliberalism was hokum. We knew how the Thatcher monster had abolished the GLC, broken the 1984/5 Miners' strike and clamped down on democratic dissent. But, in California, *Wired* cleverly disguised this entrepreneur myth in the iconography of the 1960s counterculture. If you look at this magazine's graphic style, it was imitating the

underground newspapers of the psychedelic generation. Its editorial board was full of old hippies who had been involved in the Whole World Catalog, the Well and so on. *Wired* promoted a seductive combination of 1960s counterculture and 1990s neoliberalism. Digital technology was the most radical thing in this mash-up, but its Silicon Valley radicalism was – surprise, surprise – actually very reactionary.

PJ: In 2016, your conclusions sound so simple and clear. However, I would imagine that there is a lot of complex work behind these important ideas. How did you develop your critique? Where did you start?

RB: When I was studying for my PhD, I was given a research grant to spend the summer of 1981 in the San Francisco Bay area. There, I met hippie activists who had been involved in the massive protests during the late-1960s against the brutal American occupation of Vietnam. One of them had taken part in the student occupation of San Francisco State University – and she had witnessed Ronald Reagan – as Governor of California – sending in army tanks to break up their demonstration. As this story proves, the *Wired* meme is absurd. Back in the 1960s, hippies and entrepreneurs were on opposite sides of the barricades!

When 'The Californian Ideology' first appeared, it was criticised an anti-American conspiracy piece. On the Well, we were the target of an online forum called 'Looney Leftists Sniping at *Wired*'. But, we were never anti-American! On the contrary, what we were trying to say is that there are many admirable things about America and its culture – but these admirable things are not neoliberal. They are not what *Wired* celebrated as free market economics. The 1960s counterculture had opposed corporate greed and technological tyranny. In 'The Californian Ideology', we wanted to emphasise that Steve Jobs' transition from hippie to entrepreneur was the exception rather than the rule. When I visited San Francisco in 1981, I also met people who had known Jobs before he became rich and famous – when he had long hair, was taking acid and into Buddhism. They had stayed true to the collectivist ideals of their hippie youth while he had reprogrammed himself to become an egotistical entrepreneur. Our article was pro-American leftism and anti-American neoliberalism!

PJ: How did *Wired* manage to combine the 1990s neoliberalism with the 1960s counterculture? How did they manage to reconcile so many obvious differences?

RB: If you open the first issue of *Wired*, and look at the editorial page which lists its staff and contributors, their favourite hardware and software – at the bottom of the page is their patron saint: Marshall McLuhan. At the time, in 1995, McLuhan was an almost forgotten figure. A couple of years earlier, I was teaching at the London College of Printing and gave a lecture about this Canadian guru. The students came back the next week and said: "There are no books by McLuhan in the university library!" I was annoyed, but not surprised. Courses at the London College of Printing were teaching Jean Baudrillard and other Post-Modernists who were heavily influenced by his ideas – but McLuhan himself had been purgeed from the library shelves for his intellectual heresies.

PJ: Why did *Wired* decide to revive Marshall McLuhan? What are the links between his theory and the Californian ideology?

RB: McLuhan's key prophecy was that the convergence of media, computing, telecommunications into the Internet would create a new stage of human civilisation. He made this prediction in *Understanding Media: the extensions of man* (McLuhan, 1964) – that

is five years before the first nodes of the Internet were connected together! McLuhan had a media technological determinist view of history. He explained that, for most of our history, humans had lived within an oral culture. Then, few hundred years ago, the printing press arrived in Europe from China. With Johann Gutenberg's invention of movable type, humanity moved into the modern era marked by nationalism, industrialism, individualism and rationalism. As the next stage of civilisation, McLuhan foresaw the triumph of a new audio-visual culture which he dubbed the global village. In his grand narrative of history, McLuhan placed the machine in command. Human civilisation was not created by human actions and desires, but by our media technologies. This type of analysis is the intellectualisation of commodity fetishism – the creative power of human beings is attributed to an object and then that object becomes the subject of history. Translated into Marx's terminology in *Capital Volume 1* (1976) [1867], McLuhan's theory celebrated the self-expansion of capital as fixed media capital.

PJ: Can you say more about the intersections between McLuhan's prophecies, the Californian ideology and the capitalist economy?

RB: In *Imaginary Futures: from thinking machines to the global village* (2007), I investigated how and why McLuhan's media technological determinism became the dominant ideology of Cold War America. During the mid-1960s, McLuhanism was first developed to prove that the USA of the military-industrial complex was the future in the present. What America was today, the rest of the world would be tomorrow. Although this original version was discredited by defeat in Vietnam, McLuhan's prophecy that new media technologies would create a new human civilisation was also enthusiastically embraced by the 1960s counterculture. Jerry Rubin from the Yippies famously declared: "You can't be a revolutionary today without a television set – it's as important as a gun!" (Rubin, 1970: 106).

Already in *Woodstock Nation: a talk-rock book* (1969), his co-conspirator Abbie Hoffman was writing as if modern politics is rival interpretations of McLuhanism arguing against each other. The debate between Left and Right over who owned this media technological determinist theory continued throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and right up to the 1990s. McLuhan himself might have fallen out of favour, but other gurus soon took his place: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine, Alvin Toffler and, eventually, the writers of *Wired*. McLuhan's prediction of the global village was remixed as the technotronic society, the information society, the Third Wave and similar neologisms. The moniker might change, but the core argument always remained the same. Media technology not human activity was the shaper of the future.

In the mid-1990s, *Wired* magazine updated McLuhan's determinist theory to argue for dotcom neoliberalism. They claimed that digital technologies would create the privatised, deregulated, individualistic society that can only be found in mainstream economics textbooks. Under Fordism, the problem with really existing capitalism had been that it did not conform to theoretical shibboleths of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. According to *Wired*, the Internet would finally allow us to turn these neoliberal dogmas into everyday reality. Their future was a better past with dotcom technologies.

PJ: So, *Wired* had fused technological determinism with neoliberalism…

RB: Of course! In 'The Californian Ideology', we said that underneath the advertising hype of 'let's all be excited about the possibilities of these new technologies to create new products,

new services, new ways of communication, and new forms of arts and cultural expression' was a dodgy political project based on a dubious economic theory. *Wired* was in the service of hi-tech neoliberal globalised capitalism. Now, after the 2008 financial crisis, we can see that this historical epoch is reaching its end. But, when 'The Californian Ideology' was published in 1995, we were living just after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformations in the Eastern Europe. It appeared only three years after Francis Fukuyama had declared that the American empire had realised the Hegelian end of history – and that there was no possibility of human civilisation progressing beyond liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism (Fukuyama, 1992). On the Left, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt would soon be echoing *Wired*'s analysis in the Autonomist politics that they advocated in *Empire* (2001). In 'The Californian Ideology', we took delight in mocking this received wisdom that the Internet was the apotheosis of neoliberal capitalism.

When we wrote our article, *Wired* was promoting Newt Gingrich who was then the leader of the Republican party in the US House of Representatives. According to the title of an article by Esther Dyson, Gingrich was both their friend and foe, but we thought it was much more the former than the latter. Dyson, Alvin Toffler and other *Wired* contributors were closely involved with this hardline Republican politician's think-tank called The Progress and Freedom Foundation (2015) – a very Stalinist title, I would say. Here we had a magazine which claimed to be the inheritor of the hippie counterculture, but was bigging up the political leader of American conservatism. This was the main contradiction behind the *Wired*'s seductive idea of the Internet.

PJ: How did you establish these contradictions? How did you go about them?

If you think of 'The Californian Ideology' as the story of the Emperor's new clothes, then Andy and I were the little boy pointing out the obvious contradictions. Now, twenty years on, I can happily boast that we have been proved right about everything! Yet, at the time, our article seemed controversial because we were attacking the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs who were building the Internet and their *Wired* boosters. Even now, when many of its targets have disappeared from view, our conclusions are still powerful.

The title of 'The Californian ideology' was inspired by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 2004 [1846]). In the same way that the Young Hegelians could only have come out of Germany in the 1840s, we knew that *Wired*'s contributors could only have emerged from 1990s California. There was the geographical closeness of bohemian San Francisco to capitalist Silicon Valley. There was the stark contrast between the birthplace of the hippie counterculture and the entrepreneurial spin-off of the American military budget. We wanted to stress that the power of the Californian ideology did not derive from *Wired* brainwashing its readers with an incorrect vision of the future. Our argument was the opposite of Lenin's elitist theory that the gullible masses are indoctrinated with false consciousness by the bourgeois media (1999) [1901]. Instead, we explained that *Wired* was successful because its contributors' views reflected what was happening in California at the time. From the outset, we were well aware that critiquing the Californian ideology could never remove this greatest argument in its favour: the cutting-edge of the Internet was in Silicon Valley. We were merely hoping that our article would encourage people to be more sceptical about the reactionary politics of *Wired*. How did we begin our critique of the Californian ideology? The first and the obvious step was to critique neoliberalism itself.

The history of the future

PJ: Your critique of neoliberalism starts long before the emergence of the Internet. Could you please outline these relevant lessons from history?

RB: When we started writing 'The Californian Ideology', Andy Cameron had just read Gore Vidal's *Burr: a novel* (2000) [1973]. Aaron Burr was one of the more colourful leaders of the 1776 American Revolution. In Vidal's book, there is a wonderful description of French visitors to Thomas Jefferson's Virginian home being shocked that this political rebel was the master of a slave plantation. Inspired by this scene, we decided that we had to critique *Wired*'s enthusiasm for Jeffersonian democracy. According to its writers, dotcom capitalism, by allowing everybody to be an entrepreneur, would return America to the halcyon days of the early republic when everyone was an independent individual with their own small farm or small business. In *The United States Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson had transformed this economic autonomy into a political programme: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Jefferson, 1776). Yet, at the time that he was writing these stirring words, he owned 200 human beings as his private property!

This dialectic of freedom and domination was what had eluded *Wired*'s admirers of Jefferson democracy. They were correct that the Founding Fathers had revived the libertarian hopes of the 1642 English Revolution – and paved the way for the 1789 French Revolution and the national independence movements of 19th century Europe and Latin America. But, what we found revealing was their absolute refusal to admit that a large number of the signatories of the *Declaration of Independence* owned slaves. The USA is a country with a capital city named after a slave owner, which was initially built by slave labour and whose location was chosen because it was one or two days horse ride from the slave plantations of Virginia. If interpreted with a sense of irony, Jeffersonian democracy is an excellent description of the racist origins of the American republic!

PJ: Thank you for this fascinating story. How did you link slavery to present day neoliberalism?

RB: In America, slavery often gets treated as an embarrassing but unimportant moment from this country's past. However, as Gerald Horne argues, one of the principle reasons why the Southern states joined the 1776 Revolution was because they were afraid that the British Empire was moving towards abolition. A few years earlier, a British judge had freed an American slave whose master had brought him to London because slavery was illegal under English common law. The plantation owners of Virginia feared that this decision had provided a legal precedent for the suppression of human bondage in their own country and therefore instigated what Horne has dubbed 'counter-revolution of the 1776' to protect their private property from British interference (Horne, 2014).

If you talk about Jeffersonian democracy without any sense of irony, you can not understand this shameful contradiction of liberalism. The American republic guaranteed individual freedoms, but it only recognised the individuality of white male property owners. As Horne emphasises, one of their most cherished rights was the right to own other human beings! What was the grim reality of this American slavery? If you did not pay people for their labour, the only way to make them work hard was to terrorise them into submission. Slavery meant

murder, torture, rape and humiliation. Liberalism was freedom, but only for an exclusive group. You need to move from liberal privilege to democratic emancipation if you want everyone to enjoy inalienable rights – not just white male property owners, but also men without property, all women and those people who were property.

PJ: What kind of response did you receive for this critique?

RB: When we were writing 'The Californian Ideology', we thought that our critique of Jeffersonian democracy was the least controversial part of our article. However, we were told that Louis Rossetto and others at *Wired* were incandescent with rage at our attack on the sacrosanct leaders of the 1776 American Revolution. Interestingly, different cultures approach their troubled history in different ways. My Chinese friends have no problems with saying that Mao Zedong should be both praised for his achievements and condemned for his crimes. On the one hand, this Founding Father of the People's Republic of China led the peasant revolution that overthrew a corrupt dictatorship, expelled the foreign imperialists, abolished serfdom in the countryside and, above all, extended the average lifespan from 29 to 63 years. Yet, on the other hand, he was also responsible for the disastrous famine of the Great Leap Forward, the vicious purges of the Cultural Revolution and many other terrible deeds. What I admire about my Chinese comrades that they can understand this contradictory legacy of Mao without any difficulty. But, in *Wired*'s interpretation of history, political leaders had to be either 100% good or 100% bad. It was like an old Hollywood movie – you either wore a white hat or you wore a black hat. You could not be both at the same time.

In our article, we pointed out the lack of ambiguity in this approach. The 1776 American Revolution was as flawed as any other modernising revolution – the 1642 English Revolution, the 1789 French Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution or the 1949 Chinese revolution. All of their great leaders had both their positives and their negatives. In 'The Californian Ideology', we were reiterating this fundamental historical truth: you can not separate Jeffersonian democracy from Jeffersonian slavery. What we learnt from the books in our article's footnotes was how Jefferson himself bought and sold human beings as if they were cattle or horses, ordered the whipping of children for slacking off work and – as Vidal delighted in retelling in his novel – seduced a 14 year old girl who he owned. Yes, we should admire this Founding Father for leading a world-historical revolution that freed his country from royal tyranny and instituted republican government, but we must also remember his illustrious political career was funded by the vicious exploitation of slave labour.

PJ: Having established your critique of liberalism, let us turn to digital technologies. What is their history? Where did they come from?

RB: According to the Californian ideology, the Internet was developed by heroic god-like entrepreneurs. What does that mean in practice? As we know, every dotcom company must have its talented individual who is a creative programmer, or an innovative designer, or a good organiser. However, technological innovation is also always a collective endeavour. This insight is particularly true in California. The American taxpayers provided the infrastructure of highways, universities, clean water and law-and-order without which Silicon Valley would have never come into being. It was the much reviled federal state which sponsored the research-and-development that transformed the Internet from theoretical speculation into everyday reality.

In 'The Californian Ideology', we also wanted to question the origin myth that explains why the US government spent so much money on this futuristic project: the military-industrial complex was developing a command-and-control system which could survive a Russian nuclear strike. We were very sceptical about the technological credibility of this account. Why would the US military replace cheap and reliable switches with expensive and flakey mainframes if they wanted their communications systems to keep functioning during the extreme violence of a nuclear war? Our conclusion, which I developed in much greater detail in *Imaginary Futures*, was that this conventional wisdom about the birth of the Internet was designed to downplay its McLuhanist political motivations. The *Wired* editors were correct to proclaim Marshall McLuhan as the patron saint of the digital age. The Internet was not the technology that inspired utopian prophecy – it was utopian prophecy that mobilised the resources of the American state to build the Internet.

PJ: Who and why invent the Internet?

RB: As I later investigated in *Imaginary Futures*, the original version of computer-mediated-communications was Russian not American. Back in the 1950s, after the death of Joseph Stalin, the cybernetic communists predicted that network computing would soon become the hi-tech replacement for both the free market and the totalitarian state. Axel Berg – Nikita Khrushchev's defence minister – was convinced that the disappointed hopes of the 1917 Russian Revolution could be fulfilled by the Internet. By 1964, the CIA was warning its political masters that the American team was about to thrashed by the opposition again. Those damned Ruskies had launched the first satellite into space, then the first man and, just recently, the first woman into space. Now they were threatening to do it again with the Internet. Fortunately, following the Sputnik debacle, ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) had been set up to beat the Russians in the next technology race. From the mid-1960s until the mid-1990s, the American state lavished money on computer-mediated-communications. The first people on the Internet were its military researchers, then natural scientists, next other academics, then hobbyists. Contrary to *Wired*'s mythology, entrepreneurs were the last people on the Internet! A military project became a university project, then a hobbyist project, and finally a commercial project. In 'The Californian Ideology', we insisted that the Internet was built as a mixed economy. Public funding and voluntary labour were the preconditions of dotcom business.

PJ: Can you outline contemporary reflections of this history? What is the role of the state in regards to today's Internet?

RB: In *Wired*, the neoliberal orthodoxy was: "Liberate the creative dotcom entrepreneurs from stifling state bureaucracies! Deregulate, privatise and globalise!!" Imitating Jefferson, John Perry Barlow even declared cyberspace's independence from all earthly governments (1996). I definitely enjoyed mocking this foolishness in my 'Hypermedia Freedom' article (Barbrook, 2001). What Andy and I found particularly ironic was that the Internet itself was the technological refutation of this neoliberal mythology. Its symbiosis of state, commercial and community initiatives was what we wanted to talk about. *Wired*'s fairy story about the invention of the Internet was also misleading about what made the Internet so fascinating and attractive in the mid-1990s. We much preferred do-it-yourself culture to dotcom business. *Wired*'s version of history was wrong – and, therefore, its prophecy of the future must be mistaken.

PJ: Based on false history, and Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism, *Wired* obviously couldn't make accurate predictions. Based on your critique, however, it might be possible to outline a more accurate vision of the future. What do you expect from the relationships between neoliberalism and digital technology?

RB: In 'The Californian Ideology', we attacked *Wired*'s prediction that the Internet was going to sweep away what they regarded as the imperfections within contemporary capitalism, such as state bureaucracy and national sovereignty. Their dotcom future was a hi-tech neoliberal dystopia. We remembered that Margaret Thatcher – as a disciple of Friedrich von Hayek – had insisted that 'there is no such thing as a society, only individuals and their families.' (Keay, 1987). We took delight in pointing out that the Internet's mixed economy did not conform to neoliberal theory. Over the past few centuries, capitalism has gone through many different stages, including slave capitalism, which were all quite different from the simplistic models found in the textbooks. Crucially, the Internet was not just the catalyst of the latest manifestation of this old mode of production, but also the premonition of new methods of social organisation. Maybe humanity could utilise this technology finally to move beyond capitalism?

PJ: Can you outline these opportunities in more detail? What are their present manifestations? How can we go about creating realistic future scenarios?

RB: In 2008, when I visited him at Stanford, Fred Turner took me to the entrance of Facebook's headquarters and, pointing at the clenched fist logo on the wall behind its reception desk, said: "Look Richard, there is the Californian ideology!" In our article, we had explored why dotcom entrepreneurs were so fascinated by New Left imagery. Back in the early-1970s, neoliberals were convinced that the convergence of media, telecommunications and computing would create an electronic marketplace where everyone was buying and selling information. Yet, when the Internet did arrive in mid-1990s, this prophecy was quickly disappointed. As the music industry soon discovered, social media can also decommodify information. Even today, unlike newspapers and television broadcasters, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are not primarily content providers. Instead, they make their money from digital platforms for people to share information with each other. Far from creating the neoliberals' perfect electronic marketplace, the Internet undermines the commodified media economy.

Talk to anyone who works in the music business. My friends in punk bands used to make records and then tour to sell their LPs or singles. Now it is the other way around – you share tunes online to earn a living out of playing concerts or DJ-ing in clubs. Music sales have declined because so much music can be downloaded for free. The same applies to films, newspapers and other old media. Not surprisingly, traditional gate-keepers have lost much of their authority. The Internet has allowed ordinary people to produce and distribute their own media. For the Situationists in the 1960s, breaking the copyright monopoly was a revolutionary demand. Since then, as I argued in 'The Napsterisation of Everything', decommodifying information has become ubiquitous (Barbrook, 2002). We live within a cut-and-paste culture. No wonder that dotcom entrepreneurs want to appropriate New Left iconography. Everyone is now a cybernetic communist!

Dotcom capitalism in the service of cybernetic communism

PJ: In 1999, you wrote 'Cyber-communism: how the Americans are superseding capitalism in cyberspace' (Barbrook, 2000). In your own words, this article was written as an ironic joke – nowadays, however, there are many people who take your imaginary future seriously. Can you assess opportunities of digital technologies for creating non-capitalist futures?

RB: 'Cyber-communism' was inspired by Lance Strate who works at Fordham University in New York and is a leading light in the Media Ecology Association (2015). In 1998, he was organising a conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Marshall McLuhan teaching at this Catholic institution for the first time. Lance contacted me and said: "We'd like you to speak at our event. Could you stir things up a bit with your presentation? The other academics will be playing it safe with papers that are designed to keep their job tenure. I'm sure that you'd love to be more subversive!" What Lance was asking me to do was imitate how McLuhan took delight in inventing 'thought probes' that challenged the conventional wisdom with their contradictory logic, such as his famous phrase 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964). I strongly disagree with both McLuhan's politics and theory, but I'm a big fan of his writing style if only because it offends against all of the pieties of the academic profession. Taking up Lance's offer, I began to think about how to construct a McLuhanist thought probe for the Fordham conference. It was 1998 – at the very peak of the dotcom bubble – so I knew that my target must be the widespread assumption that the Internet was the apotheosis of neoliberal capitalism. Channeling McLuhan, my plan was to argue the exact opposite by saying that the Americans had invented the only working model of communism in human history – and it is called the Internet! When I turned this Fordham speech into my 'Cyber-communism' article, I constructed a more detailed argument to explain why the USA in the late-1990s was leading humanity into the post-capitalist future.

I had recently read Latinka Perović's 'Flight from Modernity' (1999) and thought it would also be interesting to counterpose my accelerationist analysis of American dotcom culture with her denunciation of the regressive policies of Slobodan Milošević's regime in Serbia. At that time, his policies of ethnic cleansing and permanent war were destroying the social and political gains of Tito's Yugoslavia to benefit a bunch of shysters, gangsters and fascists. Yet, from today's perspective, I think that this concluding section of 'Cyber-communism' looks very dated. Far from being the flight from modernity, Milošević's regime now seems like a pioneer of the worst type of modern politics – neoliberal fascism. More than one person from the former Yugoslavia has told me that Ukraine today is going through what happened in the Balkans two decades ago. Serbia also had its own anti-oligarch revolution which put a new clique of oligarchs into power – and then they consolidated their rule by mobilising the population to murder, rape and plunder their neighbours.

When I was student, we were taught Lenin's theory of imperialism which argued that countries were invaded to seize their resources and territories. What I began to realise during the 1990s Balkan conflicts was that Milošević's regime was instead fighting a war for the sake of having a war. However, I missed including this insight in my 'Cyber-communism' article. We should now see Milošević's Serbia as a premonition of our post-9/11 world with its unending War on Terror, demonisation of Muslims, mass surveillance and so on. Not so much the flight from modernity as the acceleration into neoliberal fascism...

However, I still like the McLuhanist thought probe which underpins my 'Cyber-communism' article. After I gave my speech at the Fordham conference, I went back with Mark Stahlman

to his apartment where he pulled out his copy of McLuhan's collected letters. In 1969, McLuhan had been invited to the Bilderberg conference which was – then as now – a gathering of the great-and-good of America and Europe. Mark looked up his thank-you letter to its organiser – Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands – and showed me McLuhan's sarcastic comment about the Cold War propaganda which he'd been subjected to at this event: 'I asked the group: "What are we fighting Communism for? We are the most Communist people in world history!" There was not a single demur.' (McLuhan, 1987 [1969], p. 373) How wonderful – McLuhan himself had anticipated my thought probe in 1969!

From Marx's viewpoint, McLuhan was obviously correct. In the late-1960s, America was much closer to communism than Russia because it was more advanced politically, economically and culturally. What I had done in my conference speech – and later in the article version – was update McLuhan's joke for the dotcom 1990s. Today, this thought probe can be further extended by pointing out that the Internet of Things is an anticipation of democratic planning. Digital technologies should be used to replace markets and bureaucracies with workers' self-management. As Friedrich Engels said, the Left's objective is to move from the administration of people to the administration of things (1996) [1877]. Dotcom capitalism in the service of cybernetic communism!

PJ: This joke still retains strong tensions between neoliberal capitalism and communism. How do you go about these tensions?

RB: As we pointed out in 'The Californian Ideology', the Internet wasn't the invention of free market capitalism. Quite the opposite: it was initially built by academics, hackers and hobbyists. Contrary to the neoliberal orthodoxy, today's Internet users don't spend most of their time buying and selling information to each other. Instead, the business model of Google, Facebook and other successful dotcom companies is founded upon providing the software and servers for people to share information with each other. Being English, I love irony – and there is something deeply ironic about these dotcom capitalists building cybernetic communism. Historians have analysed the long and complex process by which capitalism supplanted feudalism. My McLuhanist thought probe was arguing that we are living through a similar extended transition from one socio-economic paradigm to another. Communism already exists in the here and now, but it is not yet the dominant mode of production.

PJ: Your work has always been deeply historical, and in both directions. *Media Freedom* looks at the past, while *Imaginary Futures* …

RB: … is a history of the future. When I was a Politics student in the late-1970s, we were taught by admirers of Louis Althusser, such as Bob Jessop, Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe. In this structuralist remix of Marxism-Leninism, Marx's detailed analysis of historical events was replaced by ahistorical abstract speculations. Even as a student, I was unconvinced by Althusser's philosophical approach. What had first got me into reading Marx was precisely his detailed accounts of the political crises of his own times, such as the 1848 French Revolution and the American Civil War. Unfortunately, over the past few decades, the contempt for history has got worse both within the academy and in the wider world. It is not just Post-Modernists claiming that the grand narrative of history is inherently oppressive and we should instead celebrate living in a perpetual present. There is also the desire to forget the past, especially if it does not fit into our contemporary mores.

I am always troubled by demands to pull down statues of dubious historical figures. It seems to me that this is the airbrushing of memory – the removal of embarrassing reminders of our ancestors' prejudices. In Trafalgar Square in London, there is a statue of Henry Havelock – the British general who ruthlessly crushed the 1857 Indian Rebellion. Over the years, there have been demands to replace this imperialist butcher with someone more appropriate for our multi-cultural city. However, I have always strongly disagreed with this 'politically correct' argument. It is important for today's Londoners to be reminded that large numbers of our Victorian forebears donated money for this statue. For me, it is a history lesson in metal and marble – we instead should install a placard on its side listing Havelock's crimes in all of their gory details! I am no fan of Lenin, but the recent toppling of his statues in Ukraine was an even worse example of this desire to erase the past. It is laziness to rewrite our history rather than think critically about why we are its heirs...

PJ: In the introduction to *Imaginary Futures* (Barbrook, 2007: 9-11), you contrast the notions of cyclical time and linear time. Could you please outline the main pros and cons of each approach? Which one is more appropriate for our understanding of the current reality?

RB: Outside the Houses of Parliament in London is another controversial statue – that of Oliver Cromwell – the Parliamentarian general who defeated King Charles and then made himself into a military dictator. He is our English equivalent of Lenin – or Bonaparte, or Mao or the other populist leaders who turned into despots. It is not just that these historical figures' statues have always been politically contentious. There is the deeper problem of understanding why the leaders of the oppressed have become the new oppressors again and again. Does this mean that Lenin's dictatorship during the 1917 Russian Revolution should be seen simply as a repetition of Cromwell's dictatorship during the 1642 English Revolution? But, surely, this Bolshevik leader was operating at a later stage of modernity than his Puritan predecessor? In both 1642 England and 1917 Russia, there was a similar historical trajectory within the revolutionary crisis, but each nation's experience of this process was very different. You can only understand what happened by thinking about both cyclical time and linear time. It is not an either-or approach when studying the past.

In pre-modern times, historical time was always cyclical. For Muhammad Ibn Khaldoun, there was the endless repetition of political power passing between the desert nomads and the city dwellers (Ibn Khaldoun, (2015) [1337]). The Prophet had founded his austere religion in the desert, his nomad followers then overthrew the decadent Persian and Byzantine empires, their warrior leaders became the Caliphs who would reign over a glittering Arab civilisation. But, as one generation followed another, the descendants of these nomads became increasingly corrupted by city life until, in 1258, the Mongols had arrived outside Baghdad, stormed its walls and destroyed the Caliphate. The historical process could now start again as these desert nomads established a new dynasty, created their own urban civilisation, declined into decadence and finally were swept away in turn. Reflecting on his own society's experiences, Ibn Khaldoun's theory of history argued that time was cyclical. However, living in modern times, we must also think of time as linear. We were just talking about how the 1642 English Revolution was reiterated as the 1776 American Revolution, the 1789 French Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution, the 1949 Chinese Revolution and so on. As well as repeating their predecessors' mistakes, each of these emancipatory upsurges has also tried to achieve something new. Historical time is now not just cyclical, but also linear. Humanity is slowly becoming able to learn from its mistakes!

PJ: The fetishisation of information technologies is a reoccurring theme in your writings. At the 1964 New York World's Fair, human progress was represented by the IBM System/360 mainframe (Barbrook, 2007: 18); nowadays, people still queue for hours to get the latest model of Apple's iPhone. Generally speaking, however, all technologies pass through a similar circle of adoption – at the beginning of the circle they are new and exciting, and at the end of the circle they become everyday and invisible. In the age of ubiquitous computing, where microchips are built in everything from refrigerators to cars, one could argue that their fetishisation is about to end – or at least to radically transform. Could you please historicise fetishisation of information technologies? What are its main past and present forms; what is its future?

RB: As Karl Marx explained in *Capital Volume 1* (1976) [1867], commodity fetishism is pervasive within societies organised around value relations. During pre-capitalist times, no one thought that machines could liberate humanity. There was technological innovation under slavery and feudalism although it took place at a much slower pace than nowadays. However, before modernity, class domination was experienced intimately. Under feudalism, the peasantry had to hand over a large proportion of their crops directly to the aristocrats and priests. In contrast, under capitalism, people are now exploited through the impersonal relationships of the market and the state. There is this constant temptation to confuse human actions with these fetishised representations – the object becoming the subject of history. Just listen to the business reports on the TV news programmes where journalists talk about the global financial markets being optimistic or depressed rather the bankers who are trading shares, bonds or currencies within them. Technological fetishism is a similar phenomenon – human creativity becomes an attribute of the machine. As I said earlier about McLuhanism, the grand narrative of history is reduced to the self-expansion of capital as fixed capital.

I find it revealing that this ideological mystification was also embraced by the supposedly anti-capitalist Bolsheviks. At the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, Lenin made a famous speech where he said: 'Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.' (Lenin, 1920) For the next seventy years, his successors measured the USSR's progress towards socialism by the increasing amounts of goods and services that their nation was producing. In the East as in the West, developing new technologies like space travel or computer networking was more important than improving the daily lives of their citizens. The machine was the demiurge of history for both sides of the Cold War!

As I have already emphasised during this conversation, we must reject this temptation of technological fetishism. It is humans that imagine better futures – and then invent the machines which will allow them to realise their dreams. The Situationists argued for do-it-yourself media in the 1960s – and it is only now becoming a ubiquitous feature of modern societies. After five decades, digital technologies have finally caught up with their revolutionary imagination! Of course, Silicon Valley companies want to believe that their latest products are inherently liberating, but they are continually surprised by which innovations are successful and which are not. For instance, text messaging was originally designed for engineers to communicate quickly with each other and was considered far too basic for the general public. Yet, when people discovered this software on their mobile phones, texting soon became a transformative technology – displacing other forms of communications in its cheapness and convenience. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp are flourishing today because writing texts had already become an integral part of daily life. We know only too well that technology can be used to oppress and exploit

us. Fortunately, we can also hack these machines for our own purposes. Critiquing technological fetishism is intellectual inspiration for this struggle for cybernetic emancipation!

Digital wargames and the return of analogue

PJ: In *Imaginary Futures*, you place special attention to the American invasion of Vietnam. And you are not alone in that: before embarking on his studies of the history of computing, Fred Turner also wrote a book called *Echoes of Combat: the Vietnam War In American memory* (1996). What is the link between information technologies and the Vietnam War?

RB: Fred's book is excellent. I guess that our mutual interest in the Vietnam War is a generational thing – we both grew up watching it on TV. I also have more personal reasons. My father was Welsh, but he was also a proud supporter of the American empire. He was in his early-teens during the Second World War and, like many others then, saw the USA as the future because of its great wealth and vibrant culture. During the 1950s, when he was involved with student politics, my father became a member of a Right faction of the Labour party and was also involved with the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom – the forerunner of today's National Endowment for Democracy (2015). He later became a British academic specialising in American politics. What people forget today is that the United States then seemed very progressive and meritocratic compared with not only the repressive and conformist Stalinist system, but also the stuffy and deferential culture of post-war Britain. My father saw no contradiction between being on the centre-left and being pro-American.

When I was growing up, leading intellectuals of the US Democratic Party came to dinner at our house, such as Robert Dahl, Walt Rostow and Daniel Bell. These were the people who I identified as the Cold War Left in *Imaginary Futures* – the 'best and brightest' who had staffed the Kennedy and Johnson presidential administrations during the 1960s. Domestically, they were in favour of votes for African-Americans, more welfare spending, grants for modern art and better educational opportunities. But, when it came to foreign affairs, they turned into hawks who justified the worst crimes of the empire. Walt Rostow visited us in the early-1970s after he had helped to organise the mass murder of Vietnamese civilians as Lyndon Johnson's National Security Advisor. I remember that he was a very charming guy – you would have never suspected that he was a notorious war criminal! In retrospect, it is odd to think that my father invited Rostow to dinner even though he must have known what he had done to the Vietnamese. The photo of the Barbrook family at the 1964 New York World's Fair on the cover of *Imaginary Futures* partially explains this ideological blindness. My father was about to spend a sabbatical year at the Political Science department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which Rostow had helped to establish. As I later discovered while researching *Imaginary Futures*, all of its academics, post-grads and visiting scholars – like my father – were funded by the CIA!

PJ: So your father was an important person…

RB: No, he was an ordinary academic – one of the many European apologists of the American empire. Of course, the British Left also contained lots of apologists of Stalinist Russia. Same politics, different superpower. This was the weirdness of the Cold War when people became patriots for someone else's country. During my research for *Imaginary Futures*, I was fascinated to discover how my father's dodgy friends played a leading role in the genesis of the Internet. *Wired* played up the countercultural origins of digital media. But,

as Fred Turner has emphasised, the Internet was invented by the US military not the hippies! What I also appreciate about Fred's *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the rise of digital utopianism* (2006) was how he filled in the background details for our broad brush overview in 'The Californian Ideology'. Crucially, he explained that the editors of *Wired* were at best semi-detached members of the New Left during the 1960s. Their rural hippie communes definitely were not inspired by Maoist China! Fred was also able to interview the *Wired* editors while they would have never to talked with me. When Fred met Louis Rossetto, his opening remarks were: "I hope that you are not a Barbrookist?!"

PJ: I guess that having your name turned into an adjective is a certain measure of success…

RB: As Marx said: "All I know is that I am not a Marxist" (Engels 1975)!

PJ: People have always played (war)games; typical cases are *Chess* and *Go*. However, it is only with the development of raw computer power that we are able to play fairly realistic simulations of real-world events. Unsurprisingly, their first application (and one of the main reason for their development) is for military purposes. In *Imaginary Futures*, you said that 'the cult of the computer encouraged this cybernetic ritualisation of the Cold War' (Barbrook, 2007: 216). Could you please analyse the role of simulations on the way we, as humans, think about reality? Also why are analogue games still popular today?

RB: In 2007, at one of the first meetings of the group, we discussed whether Class Wargames should build a digital version of Guy Debord's *The Game of War* (Becker-Ho and Debord, 2009). Apart from Mark Copplestone who made toy soldiers for a living, all of our members were involved in some way with new media. However, we quickly came to the conclusion that this was a bad idea. We were already spending too much of our lives looking at computer screens! Instead, we decided to construct a twice-sized replica of Debord's 1977 design for its board and pieces. We have been playing and exhibiting this analogue version ever since...

We were ahead of the curve in this decision. Since then, there has been a major revival in board gaming. Like us in 2007, lots of people are also locked to their screens at work and need a break from them in their time off. They grew up playing computer games and have rediscovered board games as a fun substitute. This return to analogue is a communal phenomenon – the great thing about board games is that a group of friends can chat, drink and socialise with each other while playing together. Near where I live in London, a board game café opened last year and it's packed most evenings. You even need to book days in advance to get a table at the weekend.

PJ: What does this approach tell us about history?

When I was a teenager, I was a history nerd. What excited me most about wargaming was the opportunity to re-enact my favourite battles. It was fun trying to outwit my opponent, but this was secondary compared to my obsession with military history. I understood a lot more about the Eastern Front of Second World War after I had led my miniature Red Army to stunning victories over the Nazis! This hobby has certainly grown since my youth when the largest wargames convention would attract two or three hundred people. When Class Wargames participated in *Salute '08* in London, this event had more than five thousand attendees admiring its fabulous toy soldier simulations. Analogue is back with a vengeance!

PJ: Can you link these conclusions to the role of technological fixes like big data in contemporary research?

RB: As I explained in *Class Wargames*, the US government funded the development of computers during the 1950s to fight the Cold War. As well as guiding missiles or managing supply lines, they were also programmed to run politico-military simulations. In *On War,* Carl von Clausewitz (2006) [1832] said that if you are training army officers, they need to study both military history and military theory – how successful generals fought their campaigns and the principles which can learnt from them. It was this pedagogical mission of the Prussian General Staff in the 1820s that inspired the first professional wargame – Georg von Reisswitz's *Kriegsspiel*. By the 1950s, the US military had begun upgrading its wargames with computer technology. Their researchers were convinced that they could now create realistic simulations of nuclear confrontations with the Soviet Union or counterinsurgency operations against Third World revolutionaries. However, they got fooled by their own technological fetishism. There is the funny story of how, in 1969, the players of a US military computer game of the Vietnam war were told that: *'You won in 1964!'* (Allen 1989: 140) Ironically, the apparent realism of this hi-tech simulation had misled not enlightened its designers. The US military would learn the hard way that the Vietnamese were not playing by the same rules as them!

Earlier, you mentioned the game of *Go.* There is a great book by Scott Boorman called *The Protracted Game: a Wei-Chi interpretation of Maoist revolutionary strategy* (1969). *Wei-Chi* is the original Chinese name for *Go*. In his book, Boorman analysed Mao Zedong's guerrilla campaigns during the Chinese Civil War as if they were *Go* games. The good player starts by placing pieces to control the edges of the board – the countryside – and then works inwards to dominate its central nodes – the big cities. Boorman's message to the US military was to play board games not computer games if they wanted to win the Vietnam war. But, by the time that the book appeared, his argument had also been discredited. During the 1968 Tet Offensive, Võ Nguyên Giáp – the military leader of the Vietnamese resistance – played a very bad game of *Go*. He placed his pieces in the centre of the board which went contrary to everything that Boorman had recommended. At one level, this analysis was correct as the Tet Offensive was a military disaster – the Vietnamese lost heavily by exposing their troops to superior American firepower in the urban areas. However, as von Clausewitz says, great generals must rise above the rules of war. The Tet Offensive was also a decisive political victory because this surprise attack broke the morale of the American army. When its troops began refusing to fight, the US military had lost on the battlefield. Giáp knew von Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means – and had successfully put this military theory into practice during the Tet Offensive. However, the Right in America has never been able to accept that the Number 1 superpower was defeated by a peasant Asian country. Like the Nazis in Weimar Germany, it was much easier to blame someone else for their own follies. The Right claimed that the US military was stabbed in the back by the media and the hippies. It could not be possible that the Vietnamese partisans were braver and smarter than the American imperialists...

Ludic subversion against the integrated spectacle

PJ: In your *Class Wargames* book, you say that 'our campaign of ludic subversion had always stayed true to its underlying unity of purpose: the theoretical and practical critique of the integrated spectacle' (2014: 322). Arguably, there are many different ways for developing

critique of the integrated spectacle. What are the distinct features of your approach; why do you believe it is worth pursuing?

RB: In 2007, I had just finished writing *Imaginary Futures* – a book about Marshall McLuhan – and decided that my next project would focused on Guy Debord. However, I did not want to write another biography or another history of Situationism. I already had a shelf full of them! Some are good, some are bad, but they tend to treat Situationism as something to contemplate not to put into practice. Raoul Vaneigem warned that such chroniclers had 'a corpse in their mouth' ... (1975) [1967]

Class Wargames experienced this recuperation technique when we emailed the curators of the 2013 exhibition about Guy Debord at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France offering to host a participatory performance of *The Game of War* for them. Much to our amusement, we received a snobby reply saying that they had no intention of actually playing his game. It was just something to be passively admired in their show. The exhibition catalogue included a section about *The Game of War*, but it was obvious that the author had never seriously played the game itself (Guy, 2013). You would never write a review of a book without reading it or a film without watching it. Yet, it seems to be okay to talk about a game that you have not played! Class Wargames' mission is ensuring that the self-proclaimed admirers of Situationism have to play *The Game of War* not just pontificate about it...

PJ: Developed in the context of the Situationist movement, Class Wargames completely blurs the distinction between scientific research, politics and arts. Is that just another (methodological) attempt to interact with our reality, or it reflects deeper/wider change of approach? More precisely, do you think that the contemporary world can still be inquired using traditional disciplinary approaches, or it needs to develop towards post-disciplinarity?

RB: The review of my *Class Wargames* book in *Radical Philosophy* complained that our primary method of research was playing *The Game of War* and other politico-military simulations (Cooper 2015). But how else can you understand why Debord devoted so much time to designing his game? It was enlightening to read his letters, articles and books, but playing *The Game of War* is – surprise, surprise – the best way to discover the Situationist ideas embedded within its rules! I think that this criticism revealed a serious problem amongst Left intellectuals which is the academisation of knowledge. The university system rewards obscurantism and mystification. Articles in academic journals are written in a tortuous style that makes them painful to read. But, Left intellectuals should not be like medieval priests chanting a Latin mass in a private chapel. Our salaries are paid by our fellow proletarians and it is our class duty to disseminate knowledge in the vernacular. When I am writing a book, I spent lots of effort trying to make every sentence as comprehensible as possible. In order to talk about complicated ideas, you must speak in words that can be understood by lay readers. The greatest compliment that I have received for *Imaginary Futures* was from a DJ friend who has not gone to university, but still was able to enjoy this book from cover to cover. Mission accomplished!

One of the best things about reading Guy Debord in the original French is his classical style of prose. He had the wonderful ability to express very difficult concepts in poetic language. Don Nicholson-Smith has done a fantastic job translating his turns of phrase into English, but even he can not capture the beauty of some of these sentences. I have had students who were concerned that they could not fully understand *The Society of the Spectacle*. I always

tell them: "Do not worry, I also did not know what he was saying in some passages either on the first try. Just immerse yourself in Debord's language and imagery. This is a book which you can go back to again and again – and always find something new to appreciate."

Debord's great skill as writer was being accessible without being simplistic. He designed *The Game of War* as another method of disseminating Situationist ideas to a mass audience. What we discovered by putting on participatory performances of his game and other politico-military simulations was how they can allow us to debate Left politics in more creative and entertaining ways. At *Cyberfest '08* in the Hermitage, we played *Reds vs. Reds* to stimulate a discussion about how the Soviet Union emerged from the murderous split between Bolsheviks and Social Democrats. Our games are historical re-enactments which can make history fluid again. On that evening in St Petersburg, I was Leon Trotsky and the Bolshevik version of the Reds prevailed thanks to some lucky dice. But, if they had gone the other way, the Social Democrats might have come out on top instead. The past can turn out differently in a politico-military simulation.

Of course, playing games is a fun and sociable way to spend an evening. But, there is a serious political purpose inspiring Class Wargames' performances. We identify the contemporary Left's factions as historical re-enactment societies: Bolsheviks are living in 1917 Petrograd, Anarchists in 1936 Barcelona, Social Democrats in 1945 London and Autonomists in 1977 Milan. Their interventions in the present are all too often repetitions of the past. Class Wargames' response is to invite them to participate in politico-military simulations of their favourite historical period. If you like Trotsky so much, you should play him as a 28mm figurine in a *Reds vs. Reds* game. Then, you might understand that your politics are also make-believe...

PJ: The project of Class Wargames can be divided in three stages.

> In the first stage, we'd played *The Game of War* as an avant-garde artwork. The second period was focused upon propagating its political message of collective revolutionary leadership. Now, in its third manifestation, Class Wargames' interventions were devoted to teaching the skills of military combat to Left activists. (Barbrook, 2014: 322).

Could you please assess the main achievements in each of the stages? If you were to start this project from the beginning, what (if anything) would you differently?

RB: This quotation is a retrospective justification of a spontaneous evolution: the Owl of Minerva flying at dusk. Over the years, some of the artist members of Class Wargames have dropped out to pursue other interests – and new members with a more political intent have joined the group. But, you have to remember that Class Wargames was started almost by accident. I had a copy of Len Bracken's biography of Guy Debord with the rules of his game in its appendix (1997). Just before my father died, I recovered the stuff that I had stored in his attic when I left for university, including my teenage collection of toy soldiers for playing wargames. I gave away most of them to a friend's son and kept only a small number of metal figurines. I then used these toy soldiers to make a copy of *The Game of War*. Much to our surprise, when we started playing it, we discovered that this was a really good game! Around the same time as Debord had released his game, Bertell Ollman devised *Class Struggle* also to promote Left politics in ludic form (1978). Unfortunately, it is deadly dull. This is the sort of game that you buy as a Christmas present, play once or twice, and then it gathers dust in a

cupboard. Ollman's book – *Class Struggle is the Name of the Game: true confessions of a Marxist businessman* (1983*)* – is great, but the game itself is crap. What we quickly realised is that Guy Debord had achieved something very special. He had designed a game that not only had admirable politics, but also was fun to play!

PJ: What is the main difference between a good game and a bad game?

RB: Once, when my Brazilian comrades were playing *The Game of War* at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, both sides were within one move of winning after ninety minutes. I had to check the rules so that a cavalry piece could move out of supply to seize the opposition's remaining arsenal. This match was most revealing. Debord had obviously spent lots of time and effort in correctly balancing *The Game of War*. Both sides had a chance to win the game up to its final moves. Their contest was also of the right length. A good game is like a good film – it should not be too short or too long.

PJ: In 2009, you and Fabian Tompsett wrote the script for *Class Wargames Presents Guy Debord's The Game of War* (Black, 2009). Why did you decide to make a leap from analogue into digital and decide to make this film? More generally, what is the role of moving images in Class Wargames?

RB: Class Wargames created this film for our performances, exhibitions and website. The movie's purpose was – for those who were newbies – to place Debord's game in its historical context and to explain how its design was teaching both Situationist politics and military theory. Fortunately, we had a talented director – Ilze Black – as a founder member of our avant-garde art group – and we were also able to secure a small grant to cover our costs. One of my favourite bits of the whole movie is the final frame which says that our subversive Situationist film was Lottery funded by the Arts Council of England! The production process began with Fabian and I writing the long script which was later published as a pamphlet (Barbrook and Tompsett, 2012). We deliberately adopted an over-the-top style that insisted that Debord's game was military training for the cybernetic communist revolution. While this approach did accurately reflect our Situationist hero's own intentions, there was – of course – a heavy dose of English irony in there as well.

Ilze read our somewhat rambling script and then told us that it needed cutting in half for the film. What I would learn from working on our movie is how visuals can be used to communicate complex ideas instead of words. Once the final version of the script was agreed, Ilze commenced on her homage to Debord's anti-copyright technique of film-making – illustrating our words with Class Wargames' performances, Alex Veness' xenographs, political/military movie clips and documentary footage. I love the way that a policeman on horseback is hitting a 1990 Poll Tax protestor with his baton while the voiceover is explaining that everyone can play at being a little Lenin, Trotsky or Stalin in Debord's game so no one is tempted to become a little Lenin, Trotsky or Stalin in real life! For me, helping to make the Class Wargames movie is among the greatest achievements of my life – successfully disseminating Situationist theory in an accessible audio-visual form. There has also been the strange experience of hearing mine and Fabian's translated words on the soundtracks of its Russian, Latvian and German versions...

PJ: Could you please analyse the main pros and cons of the Class Wargames approach in regards to teaching and learning? Would it be possible to develop a similar approach in the context of traditional educational systems?

RB: For a few years, I taught a gaming module on the BA in Politics at Westminster University (Class Wargames, 2015a). Simulations are definitely an interesting way of stimulating thinking about the complex issues tackled elsewhere on this course. In 2014, James Moulding and Kateryna Onyiliogwu decided to make a game inspired by Lenin's pamphlet: *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (2015) [1916]. Of course, this text should be criticised for its polemical simplification of the more sophisticated arguments of John Hobson's *Imperialism: a study* (2015) [1902]. Yet, despite the demise of the Soviet Union, Lenin's pamphlet still remains the default setting for understanding geopolitical competition. Even on the Right, most people believe that the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 was primarily motivated by the desire to seize control of this country's oil reserves.

For James and Kateryna, the big problem was how to turn Lenin's analysis into a playable board game. If you placed his pamphlet in its historical context of 1914 Europe, the competing sides will be too unbalanced. Germany is always in the worst position because it begins the game in the centre of the board surrounded by enemies. In contrast, Britain starts with a big advantage because it is situated on the left side of the board and is protected from land invasion by the English Channel. When I was at school, we loved playing *Diplomacy* which simulates the great powers' rivalry of this period – and Germany never won a game!

James and Kateryna came up with an inspired solution for this geographical problem: *Imperialism in Space* (Moulding and Onyiliogwu 2015). By stripping away the early 20th century setting of Lenin's pamphlet, they were able to emphasise the theoretical aspects of his analysis of imperialism. In their game, the rival space empires have to keep expanding so they can export capital from their home planet to new colonies. If they fail in this task, there will be an economic crisis that will spark off a proletarian revolution against the empire's ruling class. The winner of *Imperialism in Space* is the last space empire not to have succumbed to the proletarian revolution! James and Kateryna's design was really clever because their game teaches the theoretical ideas of Lenin's pamphlet instead of trying to replicate the historical circumstances which inspired its writing.

The People's Charter of Digital Liberties

PJ: As the old models of media production disintegrate, new models such as open publishing and open source are increasingly being trialled by individuals and companies. Looking at a broader scale, however, are we looking at a genuine transformation of economic activity at large. Can you say more about this transformation?

RB: There is the beautiful irony of the Internet companies which are Wall Street stars with business models that reject those of the traditional Wall Street companies. As Kevin Kelly from *Wired* admitted, their success is built upon a hybrid of the old forms of commodity production with the new methods of the gift economy (Kelly 1998). Left intellectuals often claim that the post-capitalist society can only be instituted after a cataclysmic revolution. However, human history tells a very different story. Crucially, the transition from feudalism to capitalism took place over many centuries. Money-commodity relations were already in control of daily life when the bourgeois revolution overthrew the absolute monarchy in 17th century England. John Locke was only able to theorise these new conditions of liberal capitalism at the end of a long period of socio-economic transformation – not at its beginning (2016) [1689]. We should not be surprised that there is intellectual confusion about how to describe the hybrid economy which is now emerging. Of course, it is fun to annoy Californian

neoliberals by talking about the inevitable transition from industrial capitalism to cybernetic communism. But, we will only truly understand the intricacies of this new post-capitalist paradigm when collaborative working methods of the Internet have taken over the entire economy. Reflecting on Fordham's McLuhan conference, Mark Stahlman gave a smart summary of our contemporary predicament: "software communism, very easy – hardware communism, very difficult." Information might want to be free, but you still need money to feed, house and cloth yourself!

PJ: During the past few years, we have witnessed a growing love-hate relationship between digital technologies and social movements. The Arab Spring and the Occupy protests demonstrated their democratic potential, but the NSA's mass surveillance schemes and the Great Firewall of China also proved their repressive possibilities. Can the Internet still be a catalyst of radical changes in the here and now?

RB: My friend Paolo Gerbaudo wrote a wonderful book called *Tweets and the Streets: social media and contemporary activism* (2012). In one chapter, he talks about how the Egyptian dictatorship convinced itself that the nation's youth was no threat to its corrupt grip on power because the Facebook generation was too busy staring at screens to engage in any serious political activity. Then, in 2011, Hosni Mubarak and his cronies realised to their horror that social media could also provide an effective platform for popular mobilisation. In Egypt, Facebook pages and blog postings revealed that there was a critical mass of people who were willing to go into the streets and protest against the regime. During this political crisis, social media enabled isolated individuals to fuse into a collaborative movement. Richard Florida (2002) has argued that the creative class - dotcom entrepreneurs and their employees – are the only pioneers of the digital future. I have traced the historical antecedents of this elitist claim in my book *The Class of the New* (2006). What Florida overlooks is how people with mundane jobs can also act as political radicals and cultural innovators in their free time. The Egyptian dictatorship could deal with a disgruntled minority of hipsters, but soon imploded when Cairo's slum-dwellers joined the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. When everyone has access the Internet, the most unlikely people will emerge as the pioneers of the future.

The McLuhanist prophecy gets things the wrong way around. It is not that digital technologies are remoulding human societies in their own image. On the contrary, people are shaping digital technologies to enhance what they are already doing. Long before the Internet became a mass phenomenon, I had been seduced by the punk politics of do-it-yourself media. Four decades after the Sex Pistols played in the 100 Club, our ideal of participatory creativity is no longer the privilege of a select few, but the presumption of the overwhelming majority. Now that network computing is becoming ubiquitous, we need to refocus our attention away from narrow economic questions to the remaking of the entire social system. Humanity is the subject of its own history – and everyone must be involved in the creation of a truly human civilisation.

PJ: Your recent writings 'calls for a new debate on the conception of citizenship'. What are the main starting points for this debate? Why is it so important today?

RB: I have written a book about McLuhanism - *Imaginary Futures* - and another one about Situationism - *Class Wargames* – which have been two of my political and theoretical obsessions since I was a student. For my next project, I am returning to another long-

standing interest – human rights. In my first book *Media Freedom*, I analysed how this fundamental right evolved in France over the past 200 years. What I now want to focus on is the British campaign for the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*. I was one of the speakers at a Cybersalon/People's Parliament about Edward Snowden's revelations of the NSA's mass surveillance programmes (Cybersalon 2015). At this event, both the panel and the audience agreed that a new bill of rights was urgently needed to reaffirm our personal liberties for the new information society.

We were not alone in this conclusion. The United Nations has drafted its own model declaration. Tim Berners-Lee – the inventor of the web browser – is championing his *Magna Carta for the Digital Age*. The Brazilian parliament has passed its *Marco Civil da Internet*. Italian legislators are working on their own *Declaration of Internet Freedoms*. Inspired by these examples, Cybersalon is involved with the cross-party campaign for a British version of these bills of rights. We have already written a possible list of clauses to begin the drafting process. My plan is to write an insider account of this political campaign to provide the empirical underpinning of a theoretical analysis of human rights. I have already used this approach in my *Class Wargames* book where the adventures of our avant-garde art group illustrated my discussion of the subversive ideas of Situationism. What intrigues me is that there is no credible modern theory of human rights. According to the experts, they are either a legal obligation or an ethical imperative which explains nothing about their socio-political purpose. This book will be my attempt to devise a historical materialist theory of human rights for the 21st century!

There is an old saying: you need to know where you are coming from to know where you are going to. Before we can formulate our *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*, it is important to examine the original versions of this initiative. There is the grand narrative of the Levellers' *1647 Agreement of the People*; the *1689 English Bill of Rights*; the *1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*; the *1791 United States Bill of Rights*; the USSR's *1936 Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens*; the United Nations' *1948 Universal Declaration of Human* Rights; the *1950 European Convention on Human Rights*; and the United Nations' *1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. According to T.H. Marshall, these documents traced the historical evolution of the three stages of civil, political and socio-economic rights (1992).

Not surprisingly, we have discovered that most of the existing Internet bills of rights have simply updated the clauses of these illustrious predecessors for the information society. What has proved more difficult is describing our new digital liberties. On the one hand, we do not want the NSA spying on our personal lives – we want to be able to discuss things in private, amongst ourselves, before making them public. But, on the other hand, we are continually revealing the most intimate information about ourselves when we browse the web, contribute to social media, shop online and so on. How do we write an Internet bill of rights which will both protect privacy and encourage sharing at the same time? Is there now a fourth stage of cybernetic rights emerging for the information society? 'Digital Citizenship: from liberal privilege to democratic emancipation' was my first attempt to answer these difficult questions (Barbrook 2015). The book will be the final version of my theoretical reflections on our campaign for the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*.

In his classic text, *On the Jewish Question* (1844), Marx emphasised that political emancipation may be not the final form of human emancipation, but it was the most

advanced manifestation under existing social conditions. Unlike Lenin and his imitators, Marx knew that the democratic republic and human rights were the preconditions of the workers' struggles for socialism. In Britain, this First International wisdom has recently been rediscovered with enthusiasm. After the Tory victory in the 2015 general election, the Labour party shifted to the Left when 57% of the membership voted for Jeremy Corbyn as our new leader. John McDonnell – my mentor at the Greater London Council – is now the opposition economics spokesperson! Thanks to his involvement, Labour is supporting the campaign for the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*. There are also MPs from the Greens, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists and even the Conservatives who will back this initiative. Our plan is for them to introduce the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties* as legislation in a forthcoming session of the British parliament. Even though it is sure to be rejected by the current Tory government, we are determined to push this issue to the top of the political agenda. If Corbyn's Labour wins the next general election, the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties* will definitely become the law of the land!

PJ: I saw your Facebook pictures in the British Parliament, with the workers' cap and everything…

RB: I am a Situationist Social Democrat. I am a political dialectic in one human being.

PJ: Some imaginary futures quickly fade and never return, while others such as artificial intelligence have never gone away. One of the themes that has inspired the development of numerous imaginary futures is the relationship between digital technology and participatory democracy. Is it possible to conceive of a plausible imaginary future that combines digital technologies with participatory democracy?

RB: That is a very good question. How should we begin to answer it? As a member of the Labour Left, my advice would be to think like good Marxists. Our primary goal is to utilise network computing for the democratisation of the political economy of capitalism. With the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*, we are writing the rules of the game of the information society. Of course, both sides of the political spectrum share the same ambition. For instance, back in the early-1990s, neoliberals in Eastern Europe argued that the old Stalinist system lacked any fixed rules of the game. Not surprisingly, their new constitutions guaranteed social and political rights while ignoring socio-economic rights. Nowadays, the Internet also has no agreed rules of the game. The clauses of the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties* should provide this source code of the information society. There are common principles that can unite the libertarian spirits of both Left and Right. There are also fundamental differences in our socio-political objectives that will divide the two sides from each other. The drafting of the clauses of our Internet bill of rights is certainly going to be an interesting process! This is why I want to write a book about our campaign for the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties*...

Unfortunately, even the existing rules of the game are being broken in Western countries. The NSA's mass surveillance programs are illegal according to the *1791 United States Bill of Rights* which was added to the American constitution. The Fourth Amendment was adopted because, already in the 18th century, there were state spies who opened and read people's personal correspondence. Yet, thanks to the Wahabbi terrorists, the NSA is able to ignore the Fourth Amendment with the old excuse of national security. We need the *People's Charter of Digital Liberties* to reaffirm the classic liberal and socialist interpretations of human

rights for the digital age. We must also invent new rules of the game which nurture the cybernetic rights of sharing, collaborating and participating. As Marx taught us in *On the Jewish Question*, individual autonomy is the precondition of collective endeavour. The 1960s feminists were correct: the personal is political!

PJ: The age of the digital requires new modes of knowledge production and education, and your work is in its forefront. Reading your works, I noticed that your approach to writing, resembles a radio programme created of successive elements (songs, jingles, news) – or a linear blog …

RB: … or house music.

PJ: Could you please link your research approach, and your writing approach, to the structure of produced knowledge? What is the main message of your work in regards to learning in the age of the digital?

RB: Christine Evans-Pugh - a *Guardian* journalist - came to interview me about *Imaginary Futures*. She said: "You do not just use these phrases such as remixing and sampling, your book also reads like dance music." And I replied: "Well spotted! *Imaginary Futures* was written in all night sessions to the rhythms of dub reggae, house music and drum & bass." Of course, this is not surprising given that I was involved in the 1980s pirate radio scene which popularised club culture in London. As we've been discussing, my theoretical writings are inspired by my personal experiences. I might be in my late-50s, but I still enjoy clubbing, especially at Toi-Toi's minimal electronica parties. Being modern is one of the greatest pleasures of life!

PJ. Thank you a lot for this amazing interview, Richard!

References

Allen, T. (1989). *War Games: inside the secret world of the men who play at World War III*, London: Mandarin.

Barbrook, R. & Cameron, A. (1996) [1995]. The Californian Ideology. *Science as Culture*, 6(1), 44-72.

Barbrook, R. (1989). FM Fatale. *Catalyst*, Number 1, October-November, 34-35. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/01/04/f-m-fatale/.

Barbrook, R. (1992). Choice or Participation?: an analysis of British radio in the 1990s. *Science as Culture*, 15(3/2), 240-262. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/02/28/choice-or-participation-british-radio-in-the-1990s-by-richard-barbrook/

Barbrook, R. (1995). *Media Freedom: the contradictions of communications in the age of modernity*. London: Pluto Press.

Barbrook, R. (2000). Cyber-communism: how the Americans are superseding capitalism in cyberspace. *Science as Culture*, 1(9), 5-40. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from

http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/04/17/cyber-communism-how-the-americans-are-superseding-capitalism-in-cyberspace

Barbrook, R. (2001). Hypermedia Freedom. In P. Ludlow (Ed.), *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates and Pirate Utopias*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 47-58. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/04/15/hypermedia-freedom-by-richard-barbrook/

Barbrook, R. (2002). The Napsterisation of Everything*. Science as Culture,* 11(2), 277-285. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/04/10/the-napsterisation-of-everything-by-richard-barbrook/

Barbrook, R. (2006). *The Class of the New*. London: Open Mute. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://theclassofthenew.net.

Barbrook, R. (2007). *Imaginary Futures: from thinking machines to the global village*. London: Pluto Press.

Barbrook, R., and Tompsett, F. (2012). *Class Wargames Presents Guy Debord's The Game of War (the extended film script)*. London: Unpopular Books. Retrieved 22 February 2016 from http://www.classwargames.net/?p=1659

Barbrook, R. (2014). *Class Wargames: ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism*. Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Minor Compositions. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.classwargames.net/?p=1656.

Barbrook, R. (2015). Digital Citizenship: from liberal privilege to democratic emancipation. Retrieved 22 February 2016 from http://www.cybersalon.org/digital-citizenship-from-liberal-privilege-to-democratic-emancipation/.

Barbrook, R. (2015a). 'Lecture 10: The Net Model of Media Freedom'. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://politicsandmediafreedom.net/lecture/lecture-10-the-net-model-of-media-freedom/.

Barbrook, R. with Cameron, A. (2015b). *The Internet Revolution: from dot-com capitalism to cybernetic communism*. Retrieved 22 February 2016 from http://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/no-10-the-internet-revolution-from-dot-com-capitalism-to-cybernetic-communism-by-richard-barbrook-with-andy-cameron/

Barlow, J.P. (1996) A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence.

Becker-Ho, A. & Debord, G. (2009). *A Game of War*. London: Atlas Press.

Black, I. (2009). (director). *Class Wargames Presents Guy Debord's The Game of War*. London: Class Wargames.

Boorman, S. (1969). *The Protracted Game: a Wei-Chi interpretation of Maoist revolutionary strategy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bracken, L. (1997). *Guy Debord – Revolutionary.* Venice: Feral House.

Clausewitz, C. von (2006) [1874]. *On War.* Project Gutenberg. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm.

Class Wargames. (2015) Website. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.classwargames.net.

Class Wargames. (2015a) Education. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.classwargames.net/?page_id=584.

Cohn-Bendit, D. & Cohn-Bendit G. (1968). *Obsolete Communism: the left-wing alternative*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Cooper, S. (2015) 'Fun and Games'. *Radical Philosophy*, Number 190, May/April, 64-66. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.classwargames.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Cooper_Review.pdf.

Debord, G. (1994) [1967]. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books.

Engels, F. (1975) 'Letter to Conrad Schmidt 5th August 1890' in Marx, K., and Engels, F. *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress, p. 393.

Engels, F. (1996) [1877]. *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/

Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

Francis Fukuyama (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the Streets: social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Guy, E. (2013). Où l'on Fait le Portrait de Guy Debord à Travers les Livres et son Jeu de la Guerre. In E. Guy & L. de Bras (Eds.), *Guy Debord: un art de la guerre.* Paris: Bibliotèque Nationale de France/Gallimard, 172-184.

Hardt, M. & Negri, A. (2001). *Empire*. Cambridge (MA) and London (England): Harvard University Press.

Hobson, J. A. (2015) [1902]. *Imperialism: A Study*. London: James Nisset. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://archive.org/details/imperialismastu00goog.

Hoffman, A. (1969). *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Book*. New York: Random House.

Horne, Gerald. (2014). *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: slave resistance and the origins of the United States of America*. London: Verso.

Ibn Khaldun, M. (2015) [1337]. *Muqaddimah*. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ik/Muqaddimah/.

Keay, D. (1987). Interview with Margaret Thatcher. *Woman's Own*, 23 September. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689.

Kelly, K. (1998). *New Rules for the New Economy: 10 ways that the network economy is changing everything.* London. Fourth Estate.

Lenin, V. I. (1999) [1901] *What is to Be Done?: burning questions of our movement*. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/

Lenin, V. I. (1920). Report On The Work Of The Council Of People's Commissars. *Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Part II*. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/8thcong/ch02.htm.

Lenin, V. I. (2015) [1916]. *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Moscow: Progress. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/.

Locke, J. (2015) [1689]. *Two Treatises of Government: in the former, the false principles, and foundation of Sir Robert Filmer, and his followers, are detected and overthrown. The latter is an essay concerning the true original, extent, and end of Civil Government.* Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/locke/government.pdf

Marshall, T.H. & Bottomore, T. (1992). *Citizenship and Social Class.* London: Pluto Press.

Marx, K. (1844). *On the Jewish Question.* Retrieved 7 June 2015 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/.

Marx, K. and F. Engels. (2004) [1846]. *The German Ideology*. In J. Rivkin & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Marx, K. (1976) [1867]. *Capital Volume 1.* London: Penguin.

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw Hill.

McLuhan, M. (1987) [1969] Letter to Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, 14th May 1969. In M. Molinaro, C. McLuhan & William T. (Eds.), *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 372-373.

Moulding, J. & Onyiliogwu, K. (2015). *Imperialism in Space*. Retrieved 7 December 2015 from http://www.classwargames.net/?p=1644.

National Endowment for Democracy (2015). About. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.ned.org/about.

Ollman, B. (1983). *Class Struggle is the name of the game: True confessions of a Marxist businessman*. New York: W. Morrow.

Ollman, B. (2015) [1978]. *Class Struggle*. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1510/class-struggle.

Perović, L. (1999) 'The Flight from Modernity', *Bosnia Report,* 28th May. Retrieved 7 December 2015 from http://www.bosnia.org.uk/news/news/280599_1.cfm.

Politics and Media Freedom (2015). About. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://politicsandmediafreedom.net/.

Rubin, J. (1970). *Do It!: scenarios of the revolution*. New York: Ballantine Books.

The Media Ecology Association (2015). About. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.media-ecology.org/.

The Progress and Freedom Foundation (2015). About. Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.pff.org/about/.

The United States Declaration of Independence. (1776). Retrieved 7 June 2015 from http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/DeclarInd.html.

Turner, F. (1996). *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War In American Memory*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Turner, F. (2006). *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network and the rise of digital utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vague, T. (1997). *Anarchy in the UK: the Angry Brigade.* Edinburgh: AK Press.

Vaneigem, R. (1975) [1967]. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, London: Practical Paradise.

Vidal, G. (2000) [1973]. *Burr: A Novel*. London: Vintage.