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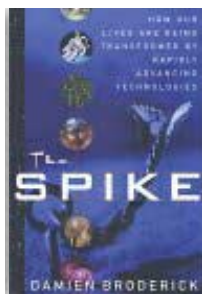
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... review

The Spike: How our lives are being transformed by rapidly advancing technologies

Damien Broderick



FORMAT: Hardback
ISBN: 0312 87781 1
PUBLISHER: Forge
PUB DATE: Feb 2001

Price: \$63.00

Welcome to the world of the Spike. An eclectic group of visionaries scattered around the globe proclaim that the acceleration of technological development will result in changes more far reaching than anyone today can comprehend, perhaps within the next decades. In *The Spike*, revised for its new US publication, Damien Broderick skilfully leads us on a journey through the debate on these themes and beyond.

The underlying premise is that the pace of technological development is exponential. Simple mathematics suggests we will reach a discontinuity, or 'Singularity' as it is usually called by its proponents (visit www.aleph.se/Trans/Global/Singularity for a definition of this concept). At this point the pace of technological change becomes essentially infinite, all assumptions have to be thrown away, and we enter a world which we mere mortals cannot hope to understand. Broderick's avowed aim is to gain whatever insight we can into this coming transition of humanity.

The primary planks of this transcendence are proposed to be greater-than-human artificial intelligence, and the augmentation of humans, including direct computer interfaces, gene engineering, 'uploading' of our minds into machines, and extended lives, possibly to immortality.

All heady stuff, and until now more the domain of science fiction writers than mainstream science. Because this is nascent science, there are deep divisions on the realities of the technologies to achieve this, and perhaps the greatest strength of *The Spike* is in bringing to life the debate on whether and how various technologies could result in a Singularity. Gainsayers as well as fanatics are quoted, although there is never any doubt where Broderick's sympathies lie.

The Spike gives one of the best overviews available of the debate around the concept of Singularity and the related theme of 'transhumanism', or how we as a race can transcend the limitations of our flesh. Where it goes beyond the other literature I've read is in examining many of the myriad implications of the technologies. Everyone will find a new angle. I was amused and intrigued by the issue of protecting the intellectual property of people who have uploaded themselves into software. If people can make unauthorised copies of

you, then you could find yourself enslaved millions of times over. Not a happy thought.

Clearly the book is not intended to provide a solid case to sceptics on the inevitability of Singularity, but rather to stimulate our imagination on where all this may take us, built on an understanding of the underlying technological drivers. At this it succeeds admirably, in particular with a thorough review of nanotechnology giving a good insight into the promise of the field. Readers should be alert, however, for frequent bold leaps of logic. And while the rich debate on these issues is extremely well portrayed, make your own judgments on the credence of some of those quoted. Given that due caution, *The Spike* provides an excellent primer for speculation on how humanity may utterly change in our lifetimes. ●

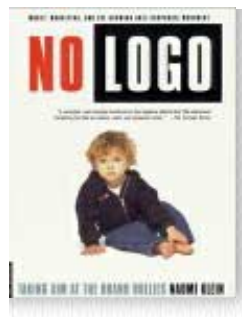
Ross Dawson is a GBN Australia Practitioner. His next book examines the business implications of the global communication networks coming to life.

... review

No Logo

Naomi Klein

FORMAT: Paperback
ISBN: 0006530400
PUBLISHER: Flamingo
PUB DATE: Jan 2001



Price: \$21.95

In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein seeks to show us why the world's greatest brands are increasingly threatened. Using a well documented set of examples this book is a journey that will take you from the malls and boardrooms of branded consumer goods to backwaters and economic zones of the third world. However, I can't help but ask if the whole paradigm on which this book is based is out of date.

In the 80s and 90s multinationals began emphasising that the logo/brand was the most important component of the corporate body. As organisations focused increasingly on their recipes and profits rather than the worker making them, is it any wonder activists, hackers, the displaced and others have called this approach into question?

Through *No Logo* we see there is logic as to why some brands are targeted by the activist. Their size and recognition factor make for better stories. And this book goes beyond the well known examples of Nike and Shell. We learn there is a broad new platform of globalised, yet

localised, reformers aiming to wrestle control and engineer new global bargains with multinationals. We're led to believe — perhaps even want to believe — a more citizen-centered alternative to the international brand experience is possible.

No Logo provides insights into the changing nature of resistance and consumer response, not only to brand experiences but to government and other traditional institutions. It invites corporate leaders to re-think their contracts with consumers, and provides new insights into changes afoot in the communications landscape.

The emergent viral nature of anti-brand campaigns, for instance, are more effective and economic than the PR responses provided by targeted companies — perhaps we are on the cusp of seeing *No Logo* style resistance form and morph around communities of the millions. And yet

'We're led to believe — perhaps even want to believe — a more citizen-centered alternative to the international brand experience is possible.'

the solution for organisations seems clear: apply a more user-community-centric approach to the emerging transparent economy. Brands are more than an experience — they represent a decisive end-to-end relationship. ●

Stuart Henshall is a GBN practitioner. An interview with Stuart appears in the July edition of AFR BOSS Magazine.

recommendation

Red wine for your health

Andrea Schaffer

FORMAT: Paperback

ISBN: 1553560019

PUBLISHER: Key Porter Books

PUB DATE: May 2001



Price: \$26.95

In *Red Wine For Your Health*, Andrea Schaffer investigates the restorative and healing powers of this age-old beverage.

Based on a scientific study called the French Paradox theory — an experiment that found that wine-drinking cultures such as France had much lower rates of heart disease and stroke than did countries where wine is less often consumed — *Red Wine For Your Health* clearly explains the role of red wine consumption in improving cardiovascular fitness.

Schaffer outlines the complex workings of the heart and circulatory system and explains how recently discovered naturally occurring chemicals like flavonoids and antioxidants have been scientifically proven to have a positive impact on the body's cardiovascular system. The benefits of red wine in treating bacterial infections, stomachaches, kidney stones, and many other ailments, are also explored. ●

A new edition with five extra chapters, this tantalising book is for people who want to conquer their life, their work and their environment. It is for those who are fed up with inaccuracy and untruths. It is a tool for those who have the vision to shape new futures and the courage to realise their dreams. Come with us on a journey that will enrich and liberate you as you learn how to tackle the roots of personal achievement, management and leadership in the networked world.

Unlike its rosy predecessor *How to win friends and influence people*, this manual acknowledges that, sadly, your success might force you to lose friends and infuriate people. ●

recommendation

Biodiversity and democracy — rethinking society and nature

Paul M Wood

FORMAT: Paperback

ISBN: 0774 80689 3

PUBLISHER: UBC Press Canada

PUB DATE: March 2000



Price: \$37.95

The world's species, genes and ecosystems are going extinct at an alarming and unprecedented rate, largely as a result of human activities. If this trend continues, human civilisation itself is at risk. Yet we remain either unaware or unconcerned.

In *Biodiversity and Democracy*, Paul Wood looks at this dilemma from another perspective. He argues that the problem can be traced back to how we think about both biodiversity and democratic societies. He examines the concept of biodiversity, recasting it as an essential environmental condition that is being irreversibly depleted, not a biological resource that can simply be replaced. He then demonstrates how democratic policies cater to short term public preferences, with little or no concern for the long term. ●

recommendation

How to lose friends and infuriate people

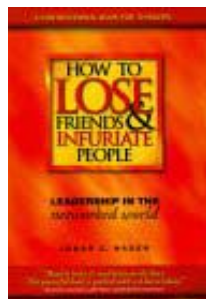
Jonar C Nader

FORMAT: Paperback

ISBN: 0141 00532 7

PUBLISHER: Penguin

PUB DATE: June 2001



Price: \$19.95

Extinguishing the future

A critical response to the 'Future Survey Super Seventy Best Books 1996-2000', Michael Marien (Ed)

Richard A Slaughter

A few weeks ago a copy of the so-called 'Super Seventy' arrived on my desk. As I looked through it my first response was astonishment and disbelief, followed by deep disappointment as I searched for anything that reflected my own understanding about what is new and exciting about early 21st century Futures Studies (FS). Since then digests of the 'Super Seventy' have appeared in *The Futurist* and the previous edition of the GBN Australia Online Bookclub. In my opinion, both take the work as given and passively reproduce parts of it. This is a mistake. The survey is deeply flawed and requires critique. The following is taken from a longer article that will be published in *Futures* in late 2001.

If the 'Super Seventy' demonstrates anything at all it is the failure of the lone reviewer who sets his own standards and makes countless decisions without constant reference to other views. It clearly shows what happens when too much power is sequestered in one individual over too long a period of time. In the absence of real openness, sound editorial practices, critical dialogue and debate, the habits, preferences and idiosyncrasies of any one individual become axiomatic and unquestionable.

Two filters can be seen at work. The first is Marien's own modus operandi and way of seeing that goes with it. By combining the power to select and define with the assertion that this view, and this view alone, is right, Marien has sadly fallen into the critic's most seductive trap. The other is the mini-tradition established by the Future Survey itself and its intended market. Essentially, the Future Survey adds value as a broad brush environmental scanning tool to the package offered by the World Future Society, mainly to professional members. But as Wendell Bell has pointed out elsewhere, it covers general futures-related work very well but core futures material very poorly. So what is presented as a balanced selection is nothing of the kind.¹

Marien's great achievement in the 'Super Seventy' is to provide an overview of ostensibly 'best' futures-related material that completely overlooks most of what is new, original and exciting about it. In seeking to select abstracts from the very broad field of material that is available, Marien has sadly lost focus, perspective and

insight regarding what is central and vital within FS itself. In other words, he has sacrificed depth of insight into the evolution and development of FS per se for breadth of coverage of futures-related topics. That's understandable intellectually, even laudable, if you are aiming to serve a generalist market. But, in so doing, the 'Super Seventy' shows that the interests of a young discipline have been overlooked, even abused.

What are these interests? Some suggestions might include:

1. brief summaries of innovative ideas;
2. reviews of new methodologies and tools;
3. a focus on distinctive new voices;
4. changing paradigms of futures work;
5. abstracts of journal special issues;
6. guides to relevant web sites;
7. attempts to graphically map emerging insights and work; and
8. a special emphasis on non-standard and non-Western offerings.

We should also add:

1. regular checking and revision of abstracting procedures; and
2. evidence of the participation of a critical community.

Looked at thus, one can immediately see how stale Marien's approach has become. Clearly the selection criteria being used has not been examined or updated for far too long. If the focus were less on a generalist, US-centred view, and more on multicultural, multi-perspective, discipline-building then Future Survey would be a very different publication and any 'Super Seventy' would have more credibility. Let's imagine for a moment that Future Survey was edited by someone who believes that the futures field does exist, that vital material arises in all sorts of places and in many forms (not just in books) and who was centrally interested in the further development of FS itself? What differences might we expect to see? Consider some of the themes highlighted in special issues of *Futures* in recent years.

For example:

- Dissenting Futures (March 1999);
- Futures of Community (June 1999);
- Post-Normal Science (September 1999);
- The Global Century (November/December 1999);
- The Morning After (January 2000);
- Humanity 3000 (August 2000);
- Anticipatory Anthropology (October 2000); and
- Limits to Growth Revisited (February 2001).

Here is plentiful evidence of innovative work. Similar lists could be compiled for each of the dot point items above. Different criteria would necessarily make reference to 'other ways of knowing', to emerging work, futures courses and websites. These days credible (and incredible) views of 'the future' are only a mouse click away. Books continue to have a role, but anyone who thinks that they are the only game in town is kidding themselves. My own students are directed towards a few key books but much of the material they use is CD-ROM and web-based.² Even though a 'lone reviewer' could not do justice to this diversity, a judicious sprinkling of such material would make a huge difference. In the light of these omissions we can see more clearly just how conservative and limited the Future Survey view has become over the years.

Some of the many themes that Marien has ignored are:

- critical futures studies;
- anthropological futures studies;
- post-structural futures studies;
- multi-cultural or decolonised futures;
- integral futures studies;
- international overviews of futures studies;
- applications of FS in school systems, tertiary teaching and research; and
- discipline building, quality control and legitimation in FS.

The inadequacy of Marien's approach is further demonstrated in the 'Six Lessons Learned' with which he completes his introduction. Here are the six, with brief comments.

1. Futures thinking is quite a stretch. (Is this new?)
2. The benefits of horizontal analysis. (Whoops! Marien favours horizontal analysis and fails to recognise the way that depth and breadth must be reconciled in the forward view. Hence a highly problematic assertion.)³
3. No easy answers. (Ditto 1, above, and really not worth saying.)
4. Infotech and the environment as key drivers. (His point is that they should be seen together — not in isolation — but this, again, is unexceptional.)
5. The dominance of non-futurists. (This conclusion results from Marien's own *modus operandi*. It is hardly a 'lesson'; merely a direct result of the chosen method.)
6. The 'new futurism' unfolding. (The books Marien liked

best are largely by non-futurists. This 'lesson' is merely another artefact of the approach.)

The poverty of insight and lack of understanding demonstrated in these banal and simplistic pseudo 'lessons' is very disappointing. At the end of the day a 'thin' approach, an inadequate method, lack of consultation and feedback and the consequences of living and working for years out of an unexamined US-based mindset render the 'Super Seventy' a sterile exercise that, in effect, 'extinguishes the future'. A quick scan through volume four of the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies provides a startling contrast with the item under review here.⁴

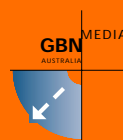
I cannot imagine that Marien consciously intended to produce a survey of so little originality and value. The fact is that to many informed observers, FS shows every sign of 'coming of age'. So it is to be greatly regretted that the thinking behind Future Survey, and the so-called 'Super Seventy', remains insensitive to what that means.

Endnotes

1. Wendell B, Reader Questionnaire, February 1999.
2. See the Australian Foresight Institute website at: www.aboutforesight.org.
3. Slaughter R 'Beyond the Mundane: Reconciling Breadth and Depth in Futures Work' Futures, Special Issue on Methodology, forthcoming early 2002.
4. Inayatullah S (ed) *The Views of Futurists*, Vol 4 of the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, CD-ROM. Foresight International, Brisbane, 2001. The CD-ROM contains profiles of some 110 individuals from around the world and shows a fascinating pattern of diversity of insight and influence along with widely shared motivations. ●

Richard A Slaughter is Foundation Professor of Foresight at Swinburne University, Melbourne. His latest book is Gone Today, Here Tomorrow (Prospect, Sydney, 2000).

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