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IMAGINING AFTER CAPITALISM

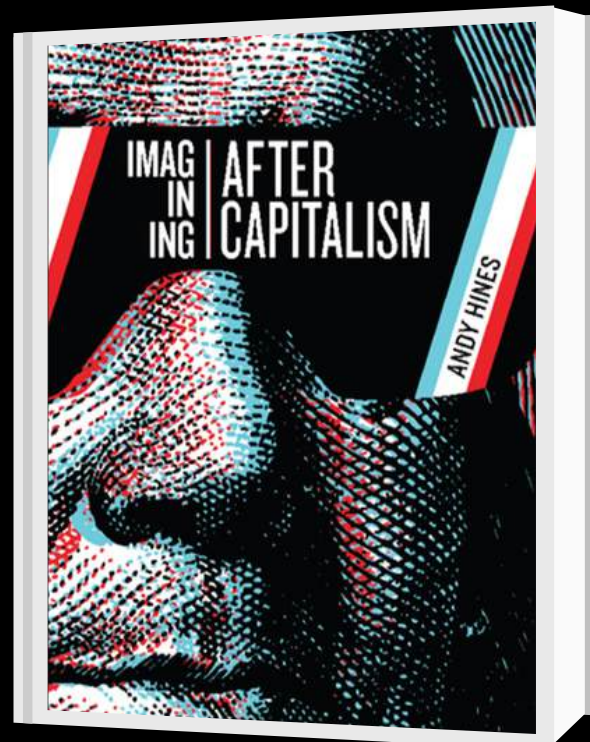
Three futurists discuss Andy Hines' new book focusing on a post-Capitalist world.

BY LAVONNE LEONG, ABDULRAHMAN ALSULAIMI, AND HAUSON LE

*Three heads are better than one. From Saudi Arabia, Los Angeles, and Honolulu, we came together on Zoom to talk about *Imagining After Capitalism*, a new book by Professor Andy Hines, program coordinator of the graduate program for strategic foresight at the University of Houston. We should add that we're all professional futurists and former students of Andy's, so we come as fans. But we're also here to describe the book, talk about what surprised us, what interested us as futurists, and who we think this book is for.*

Lavonne Leong: Welcome to the *Imagining After Capitalism* book party! So, Andy Hines writes that this project started back in 2012, and as good futurists do, they were already imagining "after capitalism" way back when the rest of us were stuck in capitalism, because it's hard to imagine outside your paradigm. But people are referring to "late-stage capitalism" more and more often.

Abdulrahman Alsulaimi: For me, what makes me read a book is one of two things. Either the topic is enticing, or I like the author. And in this case, I got both. It was a great experience to see the whole thinking process, the methods, and the tools. So, as a futurist, the most significant impact on me is how those tools can be used and integrated into my arguments and into my thought process.



CAPITALISM

Lavonne: One of the major tools Andy uses is the Three Horizons method, created by Andrew Curry and Bill Sharpe. The question that Three Horizons asks is, "How do you go from one system to another?" The first horizon would be the present system, the third horizon would be the hypothetical future system, or ideas about the hypothetical future system could be. And then the second horizon is that zone of transition. So, the book itself starts out asking, "Is capitalism still fit for its environment?"

The first half of the book describes a big set of signals, which are pieces of information from the environment that you can use to piece together a picture of where things might be headed. Collectively, those signals say that capitalism is getting less and less fit for purpose.

Then Andy points out that yes, lots of people are talking about the end of capitalism but no one has really asked what all the existing alternatives are, or tried to synthesize those possibilities in a futures/foresight way. So that's the niche that the book is filling. The second half looks at three scenarios of what the possibilities might be.

Hauson Le: The first half was one of my favorite parts of the book, because I had not researched capitalism much. I see it not working, but...Andy talks about the key purpose of this work is to question the myth/metaphor. The walls that we exist in — like, "This is reality, and we aren't even aware of the walls." He presents some key assumptions [of capitalism], like "Things need to be scarce." Or the belief that people naturally seek to maximize their own self-interest. Everyone shares this bubble: "Everyone is self-interested, that's just how the world is." But there was a time before that. And relative to human time, it's not that long; 95% of human existence has not assumed that.

Another assumption of capitalism is growth being fundamental. I love Andy's use of metaphors or stories to explain. One that struck me was asking, "What if people never stopped growing taller?" That hit me so intuitively. Yeah, that would be a crazy world, and it seems so natural for growth to stop for people. But when it comes to capitalism, it's expected that it's going to grow forever.

Capitalism emerged from a set of conditions. It's not necessarily the ultimate pinnacle of humanity. And because those conditions are changing now, we also need to change.

Abdulrahman: I want to add to that Andy really focuses on values and value systems throughout the book. And the way he presents all these value systems is neutral, which is great because you can see each value system's bright side and dark side.

Lavonne: I also found *Imagining After Capitalism* to be surprisingly dense with foresight tools and information. It was clearly a ten-year project that someone had really thought about. And the book uses so many foresight tools. It's an accessible masterclass in how these tools can work together.

Abdulrahman: Absolutely. It was like the whole [Houston] master's degree in a book. He walks you through the whole process every step of the way. He uses practical wisdom, humor, and these little anecdotes that keep you going. He's not trying to persuade you toward one outcome or the other; he's just stating the facts. "This is not working. What are the alternatives? Here they are. What's the best possible outcome based on the logic?"

Lavonne: Let's talk about the three scenarios that comprise the second half of the book.

Hauson: I think the way he structured these three scenarios was beautiful. He centers each one around a central problem or issue with capitalism. If we're going to have a system afterwards, then these issues need to be addressed. So, the first scenario is Circular Commons, all about addressing climate change and carrying capacity. The second is Non-Workers Paradise, focusing on social and political elements, like the role of work, imagining moving the goal from full employment to full unemployment. That one blew my mind as well. The third transformative scenario image is Tech-Led Abundance, where technology will create abundance for all. This one is where I think a lot of people will gravitate towards generally, outside of the foresight community.



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Abdulrahman: Right. A key point that he makes in the final chapters is the lack of imagination [about what a post-capitalist world could look like]. What makes people apathetic, to not want to take any action towards moving away from a system, is because they don't have an alternative they can think of. The imagination is not there. I think that's the key point about *Imagining After Capitalism*. Andy does a great job of creating three synergistic images that can guide us away from the current systems.

Lavonne: I agree that the role of imagination is key. I feel like I grew up with imagination as being kind of this airy-fairy thing that was nice to have, but not essential to have. And now it's becoming more and more central, I think, to our work as futurists.

Hauson: Applied imagination.

Abdulrahman: Yes. He goes all the way back to [Fred] Polak: images can help us see pathways. So, who would you recommend this book to?

Lavonne: It's not just interesting for futurists. I would say anybody who's already feeling like, "Yeah, maybe capitalism is getting a bit creaky."

Abdulrahman: Absolutely. And it is also for the futurists, right? Because capitalism is still our operating system. It's a must-read.

Hauson: This is a long book, but anyone who likes to read and feels hopeless about the system, it's for them. A lot of people are asking me, like, "What's the point, if we can't change the system?" And if you ever encounter situations like that, this is the book to recommend.

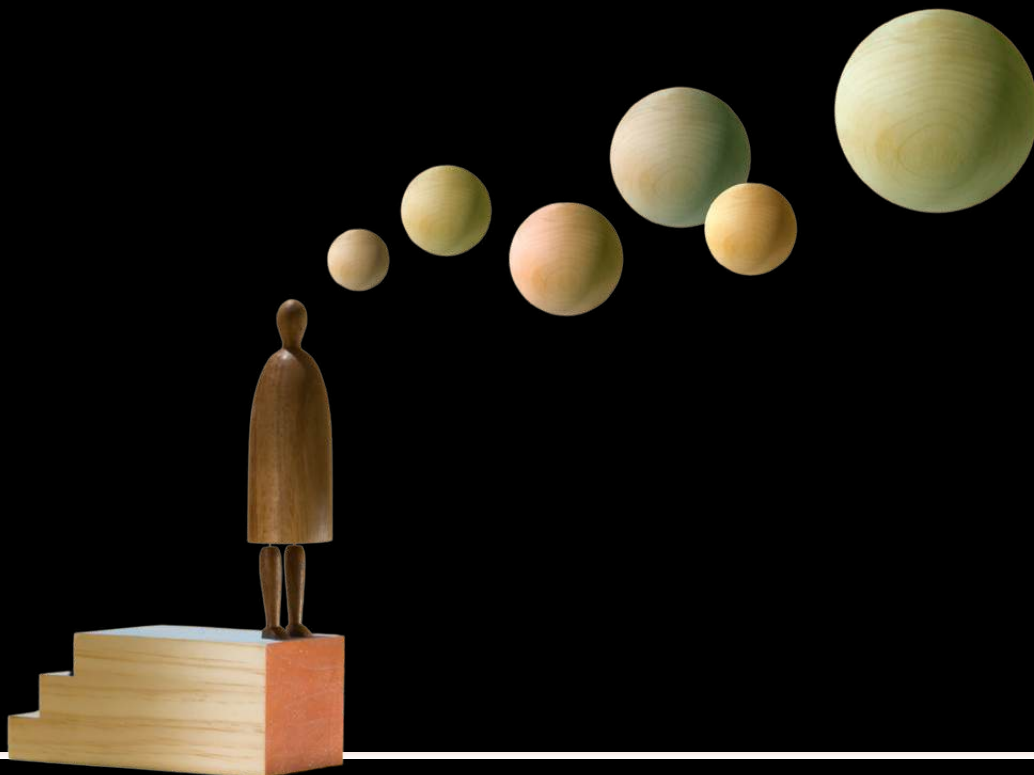
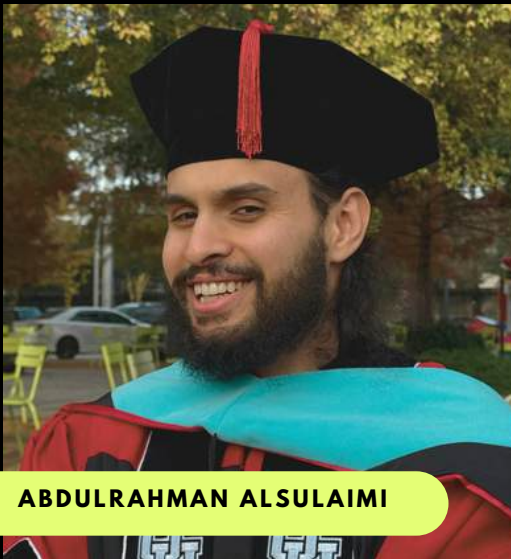


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Lavonne Leong is an award-winning futurist and former journalist. She is an Associate with Vision Foresight Strategy, sits on the editorial board of the Journal for Futures Studies and is a co-founder of the journal's Community of Practice, a network that promotes global cross-pollination of futures teaching and futures accessibility. Lavonne has worked with a range of clients, including the CDC, UNDP, and Engineers Canada. She holds an MSc. in Strategic Foresight from the University of Houston and a doctorate in English Language and Literature from the University of Oxford. She lives in Honolulu, Hawaii.



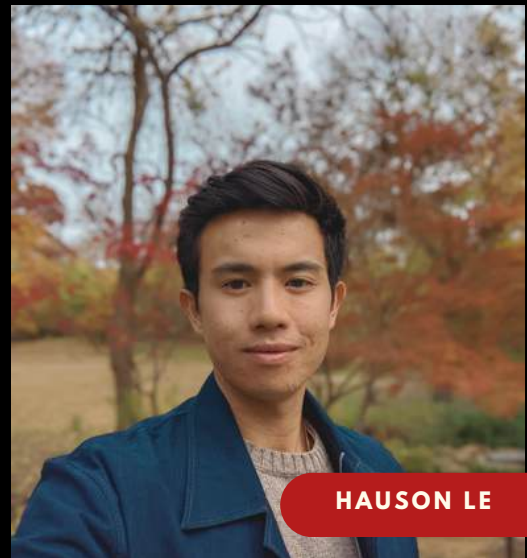
LAVONNE LEONG



ABDULRAHMAN ALSULAIMI

Abdulrahman Alsulaimi is a wayfinding futurist, healthcare practitioner, and educational consultant in Saudi Arabia. With a firm belief in the transformative but subtle power of storytelling and creativity, Abdulrahman approaches today's complex problems with purposeful foresight. He advocates for the strategic use of conjecture, intuition, and speculation — approaches often undervalued in rigid and traditional systems — to unlock unique opportunities and foster transition.

Hauson Le is a professionally trained futurist. He earned a master's degree in foresight from the University of Houston. His work is dedicated to expanding our sense of agency in shaping the future. Hauson was a recipient of a Most Significant Futures Work Award in the category of Inspirational by the Association of Professional Futurists. As the Alliance for Innovation's Strategic Foresight Manager, Hauson empowers local government leaders to think about the future in new ways through foresight research, capacity-building, and speaking on emerging signals of change.



HAUSON LE