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# The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal

By M. Mitchell Waldrop



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While most people may not be familiar with the name J. C. R. Licklider, he was the guiding spirit behind the greatest revolution of the modern era. At a time when most computers were big, ponderous mainframes, he envisioned them as desktop tools that could empower individuals, foster creativity, and allow the sharing of information all over the world. Working from an obscure office in the depths of the Pentagon, he set in motion the forces that could make his vision real. Writing with the same novelistic flair that made his *Complexity* "the most exciting intellectual adventure story of the year" (*The Washington Post*), Waldrop presents the history of this great enterprise and the first full-scale portrait of the man whose dream of a "human-computer symbiosis" changed the course of science and culture, gave us the modern world of computing, and laid the foundation for the Internet age.

"Waldrop's account of [Licklider's] and many others' world-transforming contributions is compelling." (John Allen Paulos, *The New York Times Book Review*)

"A masterpiece! A mesmerizing but balanced and comprehensive look at the making of the information revolution." (John Seely Brown, former director of Xerox PARC, and coauthor of *The Social Life of Information*)



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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

While it's true that no one person's vision encompassed all of what we now consider personal computing, we can't help but focus on individual effort as we try to understand how we got here. Science writer M. Mitchell Waldrop carefully balances this hero culture with a historian's mania for completeness in *The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal*.

"Lick," as his students and colleagues called him, was deeply involved in guiding the evolution of personal and networked computing from the 1950s through the 1980s, after leaving a career in cognitive psychology. Waldrop captures his spirit vividly--contrary to our stereotypical view of computer scientists, Licklider was profoundly interested in his fellow humans, and this interest helped him lead the design of technology adapted to human needs.

Waldrop interviewed dozens of contemporaries and examined reams of notes and primary sources to compose this massive biography of influence that stretches from MIT to the Pentagon to Xerox PARC and far beyond. If it sometimes seems that Licklider was a little too well beloved, especially in comparison to some of the more colorful figures in computing's recent history, it is worth remembering that his patience and humility were the very qualities that helped deliver the home-computing revolution we take for granted today. If we had to choose just one 20th-century computer pioneer that we couldn't do without, it would have to be the man behind the Dream Machine. --*Rob Lightner*

#### From Publishers Weekly

Licklider was a brilliant scientist whose essential contributions to cognitive psychology and cybernetics included critical early developments in the field of man-machine interaction. However, his original work is often overshadowed by his accomplishments as a teacher, administrator and project leader and this ably written and well-researched biography isn't likely to propel him into the limelight. Waldrop (*Man-Made Minds*) devotes about 20% of the book to Licklider himself; the rest covers his teachers, colleagues and students at MIT and the Pentagon including computing pioneers Douglas Engelbart, Wes Clark and Larry Roberts and Licklider's indirect influence on the development of personal computers and the Internet (via "the world's first large-scale experiment in personal computing" at MIT). To his credit, Waldrop avoids common stereotypes of computer nerds or saints, delivering a vivid account of Licklider and his contemporaries. But he was not able to interview Licklider (who died in 1990), nor does he include material from personal papers or memoirs. Instead, Waldrop bases most of the book on secondary accounts, including biographies and histories of technology. The result is an informative and engaging history of computers from the 1930s to the 1970s, with an emphasis on Licklider and his period of greatest influence, 1957 to 1968. (Aug. 27)Forecast: A six-city author tour will raise some interest, but there isn't much demand for another history of computing and the Internet, especially when Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon's *Where Wizards Stay Up Late* and Martin Campbell-Kelly's *Computer* cover the same material.

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#### From Library Journal

Licklider, known to many simply as "Lick," was a revolutionary thinker for his time. During the early 1960s, he viewed the computer as a tool of communication and focused his attention on networking them for

accessing information and resource sharing. Waldrop, a former writer for Science magazine and author of Complexity, paints a comprehensive portrait of his subject, describing how his dream of a "human-computer symbiosis" would change the course of history and culture. Lick's work as the director of the Advance Research Projects Agency (ARPA) for the Department of Defense led him to envision "a user at a remote terminal, having access to a variety of resources at several interconnected computer centers." While heading ARPA, he developed time-sharing the interactive use of computers by several people at the same time and paved the way for the creation of the Internet. This fascinating account is recommended for an informed audience. Joe Accardi, William Rainey Harper Coll., Palatine, IL  
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#### **Katrina Frey:**

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#### **Noah Gardner:**

The publication with title The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal includes a lot of information that you can learn it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. This specific book exist new information the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world currently. That is important to yo7u to learn how the improvement of the world. This particular book will bring you in new era of the the positive effect. You can read the e-book in your smart phone, so you can read it anywhere you want.

#### **Paula Royce:**

The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to place every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal nevertheless doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource information that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into brand new stage of crucial thinking.

**Darlene Lewis:**

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