

# FORUM: NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN FINLAND

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## INTRODUCTION

• EEVA BERGLUND •

Previous generations might have seen Finland as rural culture, at best adapting ambivalently to the speed, the noise, the lights and, inevitably, the machines, of city life. By the turn of the millennium, however, Finland was routinely being represented as exemplar of a bold and technology-friendly information society (Castells and Himanen 2002). The excitement has now subsided and export figures have led to a more sombre mood. Yet technology remains a national preoccupation and a tangible element of Finnish life. From an anthropological perspective, technology was always ubiquitous and thoroughly suffused with cultural values. Nevertheless, there is an empirically obvious way in which new technology—specifically in information and communications—is both ubiquitous and worthy of close attention.

Consequently, we are pleased to present this forum compiled by four Finnish researchers to provide a flavour of what is happening in Finland today. They show that anthropology is gradually also finding a place in Finnish debates on technological innovation. They also demonstrate clearly that the cultural neutrality of technology and the tendency to collapse ‘technical development’ and ‘progress’ into each other—both recognizable features of public discourse in Finland—are themselves culturally specific habits of thought. Not only that, such habits help to conceal a vast array of social processes which demand closer examination.

Each essay is based on work in progress (originally they were presented as a session at the Finnish Anthropology Conference, 2010). The authors are thus understandably reluctant to draw very firm conclusions about the case material, but they illuminate the potential and the importance of anthropological voices.

Suopajärvi's opening essay sets the scene with a description of the way technologized life is simultaneously both presupposition and preoccupation. In the northern city of Oulu, one of Finland's most visible centres of technology research and adoption, innovations in communications technologies are being rolled out just as sewers and roads were once laid out by municipal engineers. Only this time the technology demands a more prominent role for users. They are being asked to help ensure that the technology itself promotes the goal of equality. Or so it would seem.

Also drawing on data from the Oulu region, Kinnunen provides a fascinating glimpse of how technology and bodies are being fused together, designed indeed, in response to a perceived threat to the health of the nation's youth. Her Foucauldian interpretation of a technological project involving army recruits brings telemedicine, tattooing and piercing, and youthful emotions all into an assemblage of a kind that anthropology is particularly well placed to analyze.

Emotions are also at play in Haverinen and Härmä's pieces. They highlight even further the extent to which the debate on new technologies desperately needs the kind of insights that anthropology, with its sensitivity to all that is culturally and politically marginal, can offer. Haverinen takes us into the world of virtual mourning and shows what is in some way obvious and in another almost disturbing—that lives lived online lead inevitably to mourning online. Again, Finnish specificities of culture and convention produce patterns of behaviour that only empirical investigation can identify, and that anthropologically informed interpretation can begin to understand—using that word both in the sense of 'making sense' of and 'being empathic'.

Finnish emotions lead to playful speculation in Härmä's theoretically intriguing contribution on how museums and galleries, in their efforts to use digital artworks as a democratizing force, might at the same time be subjecting audiences to new forms of discomfort. Not to physical discomfort, exactly, but rather to the embarrassment that can follow if visitors feel themselves to be too much at the centre of a work and, like generations of self-conscious consumers of the arts before them, unsure how to behave.

These examples of applying anthropological insight to techno-social change in Finland demonstrate clearly the value of the exercise. Until now, such research has been exceptional rather than routine. We hope that in time, findings from similar work will become taken-for-granted—indeed ubiquitous—elements of the technological discourses and projects which are shaping everyday lives in Finland and elsewhere with such vigour and such consequence.

#### REFERENCES

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**Castells, Manuel and Pekka Himanen** 2002. *The Information Society and the Welfare State: The Finnish Model*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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## IN THE FIELD OF THE UBIQUITOUS CITY

• TIINA SUOPÄJÄRVI •

The technologized urban environment has fundamental effects on us: it modifies our understanding of time, distance and privacy. For example, by talking on a mobile phone with someone who is waiting for you, you are already with that person. This means that the concepts of communality and communication need rethinking to fully understand the existing and emerging effects of technological development in socio-cultural reality. What