

BLUE COLOURED PEOPLE

The research of the history of technology in Finland has been progressing with quite a considerable pace during the last ten years. However, the need for such knowledge has been growing faster than the possibilities to develop education, research programmes and publication. The situation is similar in many other countries. For example, in Germany the VDI is vividly trying to establish humanistic disciplines within the education of engineers because of the demand for this kind of research in the R&D work in the German industry. The successful development of new industrial products is no longer possible without the integration of anthropological, psychological and historical points of view. The Art, the intuition, is back in engineering as an influential factor.

For long, the research of the history of technology was followed by asking questions such as why did something happen, what were the effects on the society, and how did the human community respond. The historians are asked now how this data can be used to benefit our future in the socio-technological environment. The what-why-when paradigm is not anything new for the historians. The historical disciplines have been dealing with such questions in political and economic contexts for over a hundred years. The novelty of the last few decades is that the research is now focusing on technology, and that the history of technology is changing the whole picture we have of the development of the society.

In Finland, there is still a lot of work to be done in just finding out what has happened. There is a huge need for basic research considering the history of industry and the structures of the industrial society. But little by little, the fast growing field of publications is filling up the Black Holes. We are now creating the Big Picture of the processes that have directed the nation's course. In order to do so, numerous papers and articles revealing the key characters and material issues behind the processes need to be written and published. We need historical surveys on factories and enterprises, as well as the

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'nuts & bolts' histories of all kinds of gadgets. With the proper approach, there will be many novel aspects emerging from the sea of the history of industry and technological structures of the society.

Recently, the question of writing and publishing a monograph about the Big Picture of the Finnish history of technology has been under discussion. But there are also voices doubting if this is possible in the near future. Myself, I belong to those who are sceptical about the success of such an effort for the time being. However, these doubts do not have to prevent us from dealing with the larger and deeper questions of the history of technology.

The existence of the 'blue coloured people' struck me personally in the Bjerringbro Summer School in Denmark last August. They are not the Smurfs nor the 'blue collar people'. They are the tribe of anonymous actors in the large, messy complex of technology and society. The history of these blue coloured people cannot be written without the knowledge of the history of technology; the tribe does not even exist without the recognition of the connection between the society and technology. They are the masters of the Holy Dark, the subconscious world of the human mind that is becoming more and more important in designing our techno-based future. Whether we like it or not, technology is implicated in our society, and there are still a lot of questions that cannot be answered merely by the means of traditional engineering.

The "Bjerringbro discussion" turned out to be unexpected in many ways. The participants agreed on that the history of technology is "dark, sweet and soft". What does it mean? About forty highly educated individuals came to the conclusion that these are important issues. And what happens if the Wengenroth Balloon – the ever-increasing amount of information on the globe – explodes? The question cannot be answered solely from within the Finnish context. That is why I am writing this in English. The Bjerringbro Balloon exploded on August 18th 1999.

Panu Nykänen

Tekniikan Waiheita on Tekniikan historian seura ry:n kustantama aikakauslehti. Lehti ilmestyy neljä kertaa vuodessa. Lehden tilaushinta on 100 mk/ vuosi. Irtonumerohinta 30 mk. Tilauksen voi tehdä sähköpostiin (ks. toimituksen osoitteet).

Tekniikan Historian Seura ry:n jäsenille lehti lähetetään jäsenetuna. Kestotilaus jatkuu ilman eri uudistusta tilauksen peruutukseen asti. Tilauksen voi peruuttaa ilmoittamalla asiasta toimitukselle. Toimitus myy lehden vanhoja numeroita irtokappaleina mikäli niitä on jäljellä.

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Lehti vastaanottaa julkaistavaksi kirjoituksia teknologian historian eri aloilta. Aineiston jättö joulukuun numeroon 4/ 99 viimeistään 15. 11.

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