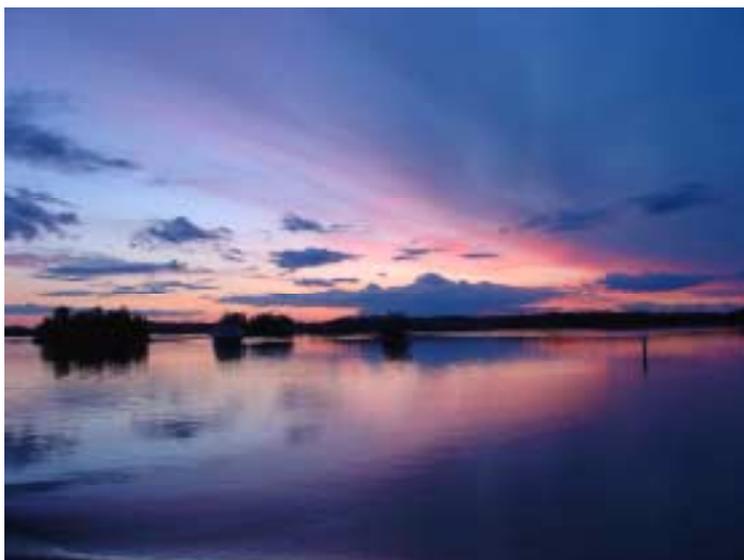


TENSIONS OF EUROPE
(ToE)
NETWORK NEWSLETTER

(1) July 2006

Theme: Focus on Finland



Sunset on the Saimaa Canal (photo: Donna C. Mehos)

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Word from the Editor

It is my pleasure to present this first issue of the *Tensions of Europe Network Newsletter* with a **Focus on Finland**. You will find the perspectives of various participants in the Second Plenary Conference in May hosted by the South Karelian Institute of the Lappeenranta Technical University. During this unusually successful meeting on *Technology and Rethinking European Borders*, participants created an informal and friendly atmosphere that led to constructive debate and lively discussions. The social program gave everyone ample opportunity for interaction, samples of local culture, and a unique experience of real tensions of Europe at the Russian border. Many thanks to our host, Karl-Erik Michelsen and his team for organizing a conference to remember.

The *Tensions of Europe* Research Program was officially launched in Lappeenranta. During the conference, the ESF EUROCORES Program *Inventing Europe* was in the air. With the deadline for Outline Proposals just days after the conference, collaborative research projects took shape. Proposals were discussed not only in the Collaborative Research Sessions but also in the small groups we witnessed meeting in the hotel

lobby and in secluded corners of the conference center. The ESF has now invited 14 full proposals from the 23 submissions in May. Good luck to all of you as you develop your projects and await the ESF decisions. Do keep me posted on your proposals so I can report on our successes in a future newsletter.

I intend to keep you abreast of developments in the network with the *Newsletter*. It will appear with general news approximately twice a year, and occasionally with special reports on specific events such as the First Summer School taking place this September in Bordeaux. I would like future issues to include reports on research projects, archive reports, and historical images in addition to organizational news. Because this *Newsletter* is intended to serve you, I would welcome suggestions about the information you would like to read or communicate to the network. Your contributions are critical to its success.

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Summer School, Bordeaux September 2006

The first *Tensions of Europe* Summer School, organized by Christophe Bouneau and Pascal Griset, will be held at Bordeaux University in France, September 18-22, 2006. The Call for Applications went out in May. Clearly, communication in the ToE network worked well to publicize the Summer School. The Finland conference-- where many active ToE members gathered--did the rest to assure many interesting applications. Now that the deadline has passed, we are pleased with the results. We have received about 30 applications for only 20 places so the organizing committee will have the difficult and disagreeable task of rejecting one third of the applicants. Decisions will be sent by mid-July. A waiting list will certainly be made in case accepted participants withdraw.

The Summer School will be a very international one. In addition to six teaching professors from six different countries, graduate students and post-docs representing 18 different countries across Europe and the USA applied.

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Focus on Finland Word from the Host

It was a sunny, funny, and productive conference. Locally organized by myself and a team from the South Karelian Institute of the Lappeenranta University of Technology, the *Tensions of Europe* Second Plenary Conference was held in Lappeenranta, Finland in May. More than 100 scholars attended the conference and discussed as well as experienced its theme, *Technology and Rethinking European Borders*. The conference participants addressed both topics familiar to ToE and completely new ones. We also enjoyed almost 24-hour daylight, refreshing saunas and swimming, vodka and smoked salmon, and dancing under the midnight sun.

The location and the conference theme matched perfectly because Lappeenranta is just 25 kilometers from the Russian border, a border with a rich history. The third conference day was spent in the old Finnish town of Vyborg, which is now located in Russia. The trip from Lappeenranta to Vyborg is only 54 kilometers but it took us more than four hours to get through the EU-Russian border. This was a concrete example of how borders create tensions not only on the level of nation-states but also between people,

face-to-face. After a Russian lunch upon arrival in Vyborg, we had a pleasant afternoon session in the famous Alvar Aalto Library where Daniel Alexandrov delivered the keynote address. The return trip through the 150-year old Saimaa Canal was spectacular.

This was an important meeting for those of us at the Lappeenranta University of Technology. After working hard for several months organizing the conference, we felt very satisfied and happy to see so many enthusiastic scholars in Finland where the history of technology is not well established. We are already noticing the first positive effects that the *Tensions of Europe* conference has had, and will continue to have, in the development of the field here on the EU border. We would like to thank all of you who travelled to Finland for both your participation and contributions that made it a success.

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Word from the Network Chair Report of the Transition Committee Meeting

The first phase of the *Tensions of Europe* project focussed on network and agenda building. After the first plenary conference in Budapest in 2004, the Transition Committee was formed to explore future possibilities to fund research and to maintain the network. The committee agreed to continue with *Tensions of Europe* as both a network and a platform for the development of research collaboration. This second phase of ToE was launched in Lappeenranta.

At the Transition Committee Meeting in Finland, it was clear that network participants have been very active. As a result of the first phase, no less than five books are either out, or well on their way to publication, as are a number of articles. The First Summer School is being planned and the call for applications was out. With the launching of the second phase, discussions about the ToE network and the EUROCORES Program *InventingEurope* dominated the discussion. Important points and decisions discussed in the meeting include:

- There is no official link between the ToE network and the program *InventingEurope*. However, we expect that members of the network will participate in *InventingEurope* research projects. We also expect that *InventingEurope* researchers unfamiliar with ToE will become involved with the network. In the unlikely event that all or most of the *InventingEurope* participants are not in the ToE network, the relations between the two groups is uncertain. Because it is important to develop a joint intellectual community, the Transition Committee recognizes that cooperation between ToE researchers working on independent projects and *InventingEurope* participants will be crucial.
- *Tensions of Europe* will continue to act as a platform for new research collaboration on transnational history on the role of technology in the making of Europe. Research might address the problems formulated in the EUROCORES proposal or it might identify new relevant topics.
- As the network entered its second phase, the Transition Committee's work was completed. This is not to say that the committee will be disbanded. Rather, it will continue to meet at ToE conferences as the Advisory Group. A smaller Management Team will work with Johan Schot, to organize ToE tasks. At this point, it is comprised of Maria Paula Diogo, Mikael Hård, Dagmara Jejesniak-Quast, Tom Misa, Ruth Oldenziel, and Aristotle Tympas.
- ToE network activities will continue to be coordinated by the Foundation for the History of Technology in Eindhoven. The Eindhoven Technical University has granted financial support for six years to the foundation for this work. The ToE Management Team will work with the foundation.
- The network will maintain its informal structure. All are welcome to join.
- The next ToE conference will take place in the Netherlands in mid-2007 jointly with the

InventingEurope Program participants. The *InventingEurope* Program will be launched at this conference. The Eindhoven team is responsible for organizing the meeting.

- A book series plan will be developed for the *InventingEurope* Program. The *Tensions of Europe* network will seek to collaborate with the ESF Program book series.

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Notes and Remarks from a Newcomer

As a relative outsider—an anthropologist who has never taken part in a ToE meeting—I was pleasantly surprised when I participated in the congress that took place in and around Lappeenranta from May 24-28. My positive feelings and judgments derive from both matters of intellectual content as well as the general atmosphere and other context-related factors. Apart from two sessions that I would like to report about in detail, I do not intend to give precise accounts of the sessions that I attended or of the

discussions that I witnessed. Rather, I would like to present some general impressions. I will start my report with content-related remarks and end with some notes about the characteristic that is presumably most important in meetings such as these: the general atmosphere made possible by the efforts of the local organizers.

The thing that struck me most during the sessions that I attended was the fact that the history of technology was treated as an inextricable part of the wider (political, economic, and social) contexts in which technological developments take place and are utilized. I did not hear anything about engineers in their labs, tackling all sorts of problems in order to bring their inventions to perfection – inventions that, as a *deus ex fabrica*, then plunge into society, where they easily, effortlessly, and without resistance, come to occupy their natural place. Especially in the round table sessions, but also in the research sessions that I joined, it was striking that, in fact, relatively little attention was paid to the development and realization of material technologies. Most discussions dealt with the relation between technological developments and the wider social context, questioning the conceptualization and description of the relation between society and technology. The most

telling and exemplary cases in point were two round table sessions: the first plenary session “Steps Toward a Technological History of Twentieth-Century Europe” and later “Comparison and Beyond: The Methodological and Theoretical Challenges of a Comparative European History of Technology.”

In the plenary session, the panellists and commentators stimulated a discussion based on the question: how should the technological history of twentieth-century Europe be written? Because all three panelists offered completely different approaches, questions and potential problems were brought into view sharply. Tom Misa made a powerful plea for the writing of a standard European history textbook in which the role of technology would be emphasized. The significant goal of such a project would be to reach a broad and generally interested (academic) audience--including students--and thus to facilitate the integration of the historical role of technology into mainstream economic and political history. It was pointed out, however, that this approach risks subordinating, once again, the historical role of technology to pivotal moments in economic and political history.

This danger did not threaten the approach proposed by Håkon With Andersen, in which intersections of general history and the history of technology were chosen as focal points. The twentieth-century history of Europe could be rewritten in view of themes and developments in which technology has had a decisive influence on the continent's history. Andersen's six themes--the factory, travel, the family, fear and control, industrialized nature, and a cure for everything--were developed in his project on the Norwegian national context. He did not suggest different themes to investigate European history but one could, for instance, think of subjects such as “destruction,” “prosperity,” and “contact.” Although this approach is certainly very original and challenging, problems the audience voiced included the potential overlap between themes and the lack of a coherent perspective. Furthermore, questions about the representativeness of the chosen themes would undoubtedly arise and potentially threaten the authority of the text.

In his presentation, Johan Schot made a plea to rewrite European history as a truly transnational history by studying European integration on three levels: the macro level of “transnational infrastructural landscapes,” the meso

level of “transnational infrastructural regimes,” and the micro level of the ways in which these infrastructures are constructed and used. To show the important role of technological developments, Schot warned the audience not to be too afraid of technological determinism but rather to embrace the issue that lies behind it: the technological shaping of society. This would imply, for instance, that the murder of the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne in June 1914 would no longer be ascribed a historically decisive role in the origin of World War I but rather, the invention and first utilization of trenches or poisonous gas would. Although it is possible that this specific example would appeal rather broadly, this method risks appealing only to interested insiders, leaving one preaching to the converted.

Although fundamental historiographical questions were raised during this plenary round table session, the panelists also stimulated discussions about more than the relationship between general history and technological change. They also raised topics that the academic community, in my opinion, often wrongly deems trivial such as the importance of good writing and serious reflection on the question of audience: for whom do we write?

In an indirect way, the issues that emerged in this plenary round table discussion reverberated in sessions throughout the conference. For example, some questions often posed include: to what extent is the standard version of European history, in fact, the biased result of the Cold War? Should Russia be incorporated in our analyses and writing of European history? If so, upon which “Russia” should we focus?

Difficulties pertaining to writing European history, partly due to the convention of writing *national* histories, reached center stage during the round table session “Comparison and Beyond” in which panellists addressed the questions: What exactly is Europe? How should European history be written? Apart from the fact that, as some of the participants rightly pointed out, the production of comparative history based on national histories is something completely different than that of international or transnational history, comparative history can be problematic. What is to be compared? Who decides what standards to use? What does comparative history teach us? Although comparisons based on national histories ideally portray international similarities and differences, to what extent are the results unrepresentative derivatives of

the questions asked and the methods used?

No matter how obvious these caveats are, the intention to write a truly international or transnational history-- *beyond national comparisons*-- is both problematic and important. The investigation and writing of history beyond the level of the nation-state is easier said than done. Even when developments are clearly international or transnational, it remains difficult to analyze them outside of the national contexts. One possible method would be to follow concrete technologies *and* the people--producers, consumers, political, and social actors--involved in their development and use. However, if their actions were limited to their own national contexts, the problem remains.

Since most of the research presented in Lappeenranta explored technology in its specific social context, the debates and discussions were familiar to me. The approaches and concerns regarding the history of technology are, in fact, comparable to anthropological studies on material culture. One important difference, however, struck me. Whereas anthropologists usually investigate relatively small and limited areas, and tend to focus their analyses primarily on social relations, normative issues,

and meaning, scholars in Lappeenranta were concerned with the relationship between technology and the national, international, and transnational political and economic domains. Due to this larger scale and different focus, I felt that participants often failed to take the "last step" concerning the social embeddedness of technology, that is: they paid insufficient attention to the meanings of the developments they had studied in the daily lives of the people concerned.

Only a small minority of the presenters addressed the relation between technology and/or material culture and everyday life, and even then, it was often in indirect and loose ways. Yet the uses of technologies usually emerge from both the characteristics people (rightly *or* wrongly) ascribe to them and from their symbolic roles. Therefore, I wonder why most ToE participants paid so little attention to the imaginary, symbolic, and otherwise meaningful role of technology in human life. It is well known that people's representations of each other's cultures are, to a large extent, founded on their symbolic reading and interpretation of significant objects or technologies. Even the American and Russian politics during the Cold War were partly modified on the impressions the inhabitants of each

country had of each other's societies. And in these processes, the mutual imaginary reading of visible technologies as icons, for example the Soviet-style *Plattenbau* and the American refrigerator, played an important role.

I experienced the Lappeenranta ToE Second Plenary Conference community as very stimulating. This was certainly due to both the intellectual level of the discussions and the congenial and constructive atmosphere created by the magnificent organization. The conference and all the extra-conference activities were extremely well organized. The huge smoked salmons will stick in my mind forever, just as the line of serious looking academics sitting on the podium of a Finnish stage, trying to look like actors, whose main role was to toss down a

glass of vodka as quickly as possible. The way some of the participants danced the tango was just as impressive as the Russian customs officers, determined not to be photographed. Whether they were repudiating the potentially integrating role of technology, or merely trying to serve the Russian tourist industry by confirming *our* stereotyped representations of *them*, will remain in doubt until someone ventures on comparative/international/transnational research on the techniques and meanings of border photography in pre- and post-1989 Europe.

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