

PREFACE

ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLES AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS included in this volume span a period of more than twenty-five years, they are not to be seen as a defining retrospective; marking a time when the craftsman might contemplate closing the door to his workshop once and for all (having oiled and put his tools back in their proper places and brushed the workbench clean). On the contrary, the aim has been to see what has been built, choose those pieces the carpenter deems worthy of preserving, and to arrange them in order to see what common ideas may connect them. And all of this in order to gather the necessary courage to move on to more ambitious projects in the fine art of cabinet-making, if the writing of history can be described as such. Yes, why not something in rococo style and made in walnut, cherry, or even mahogany?¹ Employing none of the usual blunt hardwood pegs as fasteners (as in many of the chapters in this volume), but crafted with concealed dovetails.

One ought not to be too modest. Some of the pieces in this volume may have been made of standard-dimension softwood lumber and show signs of a less-than-perfect craftsmanship. Still, I believe they are worth publishing as they stand. The most important chapters are, I believe, the first and, maybe, the last.

The first chapter contains what I claim to be my single original contribution to the history of technology. It was, following several years of presentations, eventually published in a conference anthol-

¹ Cf. Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director: Being a Large Collection of the Most Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture, in the Most Fashionable Taste* (London, 1754).

ogy with limited circulation.² Although my students and many of my Swedish colleagues have read it, I am eager to have it republished today; placing this cabinet at the forefront as you enter the shop.³

The final chapter is an attempt to discuss the question of nationalism when it comes to scientific priorities; an issue that was very much on my mind during my twelve years at the Nobel Museum. This, too, was previously published in a conference volume with limited circulation.⁴

Perhaps I have been too reluctant to go through the pains of having my articles published in the major peer-reviewed journals? But I have never liked it when others fiddle with my texts. I mean: once you have finished a piece of furniture to your liking, you don't invite strangers into your workshop and allow them to rebuild it; e.g. change the tapering of the legs, exchange tassel feet for dolphin feet et cetera. Nor have I ever subscribed to the simplistic saying "kill your darlings." I love my darlings.

The period these articles span coincides with two developments: the establishment of the history of technology in Sweden, and the internationalisation of the (as it was called from the beginning) "The International Society for the History of Technology" (SHOT). I have been very much involved in both these developments.

In order to facilitate the awareness of the new discipline in my native Sweden, in 1976 I visited a dozen universities in Great Britain: collecting syllabii, interviewing teachers, and disseminated a report.⁵

² "Changes in the Technological Landscape: The Temporal Dimension in the Growth and Decline of Large Technological Systems," in: Ove Granstrand, ed., *Economics of Technology* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1994), pp. 271–288.

³ David Edgerton came up with a similar idea a few years later, and was only too late alerted to my article. He has, however, very kindly acknowledged it in the footnotes of his elaborations on this idea, see: David Edgerton, "De l'innovation aux usages. Dix thèses éclectiques sur l'histoire des techniques," *Annales HSS*, July–October 1998, Nos. 4–5, pp. 815–837; English version: "From Innovation to Use: Ten (Eclectic) Theses on the History of Technology," *History and Technology*, Vol. 16 (1999), pp. 111–136, esp. n. 1 on p. 129 and n. 9 on p. 130; *idem*, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2006), n. 4 on p. 213.

⁴ "The R & D Production Model: A Brueg(h)elesque Alternative," in: Guy Neave et al., eds., *The European Research University: An Historical Parenthesis?*, Issues in Higher Education (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 77–90.

⁵ Svante Lindqvist, *Teknikhistoria som läroämne vid universiteten i Storbritannien*, Stockholm Papers in History and Philosophy of Technology, TRITA-HOT-5001 (Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology Library, 1976).

Two years later I did the same in the United States: visiting twenty universities and once again published a report.⁶ All very similar to a journeyman who travels abroad to gain experience in various differing workshops; e.g. to learn how to work with unfamiliar tools and in other kinds of wood. Chapter 6 (“Lucky Jim Won a Fair Lady on Gaudy Night”) is a candid description of the early phase of trying to establish this new academic discipline in Sweden.⁷

I had the good fortune to come in contact with some members of SHOT in 1977 at a meeting in Sweden.⁸ The following year, SHOT kindly invited me to the conference, “Critical Issues in the History of Technology,” in Roanoke, Virginia. At that time SHOT was, as someone quite earnestly remarked, “an international society with a few foreign members.” From the early 1980s forward, however, I and many of my colleagues from Sweden, Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands, in particular, began appearing regularly at the SHOT annual meetings. SHOT, welcoming to newcomers as it has always been, provided companionship and intellectual stimulation. These annual visits had the same effect on me as periodic visits to Rome might have had on an early medieval monk who would have been sent by his bishop to the far north to preach the gospel to the pagans. After each SHOT meeting I returned to Sweden, awestruck and inspired, ready to teach the history of technology to engineering students for another year, and to continue the fight against deans who were hostile to the idea that the humanities should form a part of an engineering curriculum.

These two developments—establishing the new discipline in Sweden, and making SHOT truly international—coincided when we succeeded in inviting SHOT to hold its first annual meeting outside North America in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1992. Since then I have also had the pleasure to see my successor at the chair in history of technology at the Royal Institute of Technology, Arne Kaijser, assume the task of being the first non-North American President of SHOT.

⁶ Svante Lindqvist, *The Teaching of History of Technology in USA—A Critical Survey in 1978*, Stockholm Papers in History and Philosophy of Technology, TRITA-HOT-5003 (Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology Library, 1981).

⁷ Cf. Marika Hedin & Ulf Larsson, eds., *Teknikens landskap: Teknihistoriska uppsatser tillägnade Svante Lindqvist* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2008).

⁸ Cf. Sigvard Strandh, ed., *Technology and Its Impact on Society*, Tekniska Museet Symposium on the History of Technology 1 (Stockholm: Tekniska Museet, 1979).

My interest in long-term trends (“conjunctures” in the terminology of the *Annales*) may seem semi-deterministic (and at odd with current interest in micro-studies of actors and networks). But I believe that historians of technology must first contemplate the issues discussed for years by (proper, if you like) historians. When our discipline became institutionalised in the 1970s and 1980s, many of us were so eager to be seen as modern, “with-it” and theoretical, that we immediately jumped on the band-wagon of the sociologists of science that had just begun to move into our field. It would do us little harm to read Bloch, Braudel and the others first.

In those cases where the articles have been conference presentations (i.e., chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6), I have kept the informal tone. Likewise, I have avoided updating earlier articles; thus keeping this volume on history a piece of history in itself.

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This book is dedicated to my son Gustaf with admiration and respect.

Nälje, August 2010
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