

## **A History of Technology for an Age of Crisis**

The International Committee for the History of Technology's 47<sup>th</sup> Symposium in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, 13 – 18 July 2020

Hosting institution: Eindhoven University of Technology, TU/e

### **Deadline for proposals is Sunday, 5 January 2020**

Technology and crisis are linked in multiple and paradoxical ways: although technological developments have precipitated many crises, technology has just as often been proposed as a proper way out. Resistance against new technologies (such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Luddite movement or the 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-nuclear movement), subversive uses of mainstream technological solutions, and some instances of user-innovation and appropriation can be studied as indications of crisis as well as strategies to cope with crisis. In general, members of industrialized societies seem to have a very strong belief in technology and innovation as key to manage and solve crises: in case of the long lasting crisis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, labeled the “Social Question”, there was demand for new technologies solving social problems as well as those of industrial health and safety. Although the expression is linked to 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Social Question is on display until today – now combined with the Environmental Crisis.

Politics mirror the paradoxical relation of technology and crisis: although democratic and authoritarian regimes, and political parties of very different stripes, might disagree fundamentally about the causes and nature of crises and the issues at stake, they have often converged in favoring technological solutions to major societal challenges. Attempts to deal with the Environmental Crisis (which is largely technology-made in the sense that anthropogenic climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion followed the expansion of the human-built world) seems to follow a similar path: technological fixes are

discussed, ranging from renewable energy, AI-based efficiency, sensor technologies, electric cars, smart homes, and other 'sustainable', 'responsible' or 'smart' innovations. Such approaches often sidelined non-tech solutions such as zero-growth. It remains an open question whether technology will provide solutions.

This raises the question if and how historians of technology should engage with present-day debates on the ambivalent roles of technology in today's global crisis—the so-called grand challenges to humanity, society, and the environment. The paradox of crisis and technology rises questions such as:

- In which way have crises influenced technological change, and conversely, how have technologies shaped crises?
- What's the role of technology to predict, avoid, or manage crises?
- How can we study the geography of crisis, taking into account transnational and (post)colonial relationships and global North-South interactions?
- In which way did different societies and societal groups cope with technology-related crises?
- How has the historic pursuit of innovation by technology companies and designers contributed to the creation of technological crises?
- What role(s) did protests and resistance against technology play in avoiding or managing technology-related problems or crises?
- How have media representations shaped narratives of technological crises and/or technological redemption?
- Do crises "reveal" how deeply technology is embedded in society?
- What (and whose) histories do the imaginaries and historiographies of technological crises highlight and obscure?

We invite sending in paper- and session proposals on technology & crisis for a broad range of historical periods, geographies, and crisis domains—including political conflicts, social and civil rights, colonial practices, health epidemics and health care, economic depressions, environmental disasters, and so on, along with the crises of collective identity that are often related to both technological crises and technological solutions. Contributions which examine the correlations of crisis and technology are welcome, as are case studies of specific technologically-related crises, and presentations which explore the implications and interconnections of technological crisis in media representation, art, and legislation for example.

Beside contributions to the main theme of the symposium, paper and session proposals on different topics of the history of technology are welcome.

### **Proposal Guidelines**

The symposium welcomes scholarship on all periods of history and all areas of the globe, especially contributions from beyond Europe and the United States, and presentations on regions that have been less extensively covered by historians of technology. In keeping with a cherished tradition of the field, the meeting is open to scholars from all disciplines and backgrounds. The conference language is English.

Although we invite to submit individual papers as well, priority will be given to proposals of whole sessions.

INDIVIDUAL PAPER proposals must include:

- (1) a 300-word (maximum) abstract and
- (2) a one-page (maximum) CV.

Abstracts should include the author's name and email address, a short descriptive title, three to five key words, a concise statement of the thesis, a brief discussion of the sources, and a summary of the major conclusions. If you are submitting a paper proposal dealing with a particular subtheme in this CfP, please indicate this in your proposal.

In preparing your paper, remember that presentations are not full-length articles. You will have no more than 20 minutes to speak, which is roughly equivalent to 8 double-spaced typed pages. For more suggestions about preparing your conference presentation, please

consult the guidelines at the conference website <http://www.icohtec.org/w-annual-meeting/proposal-guidelines/>. Contributors are encouraged to submit full-length versions of their papers after the conference for consideration by ICOHTEC's peer-reviewed journal *ICON*.

PANEL proposals must include:

- (1) an abstract of the panel (300 words maximum), listing the proposed papers and a session chairperson;
- (2) an abstract for each paper (300 words maximum);
- (3) a one-page CV (maximum) for each contributor and chairperson.

Panels should consist of three or four speakers. Several panels may be organized on one topic. We encourage creating panels which examine history of technology in different parts of the world, enabling international comparisons, and contributing to an emerging transnational historiography. Please note, the programme committee reserves the right to make adjustments to proposed panels, relocating papers to different themes and/or adding papers to panels, as required.

POSTER proposals must include:

- (1) a 300-word (maximum) abstract; and
- (2) a one-page CV.

Abstracts should include the author's name and email address, a short descriptive title, a concise statement of the thesis, a brief discussion of the sources, and a summary of the major conclusions.

The programme committee also encourages submission of ALTERNATIVE FORMATS for sessions: round tables, the presentation of an important book or film, etc. If you wish to submit a proposal for a session in an alternative format, please contact the Chair of the Program Committee, Stefan Poser, [stefan.poser@kit.edu](mailto:stefan.poser@kit.edu).

Please consider joining ICOHTEC. **Members of ICOHTEC pay reduced conference fees.**

Additional benefits of membership and subscription information can be found at <http://www.icohtec.org/a-homepage-section/join-or-renew-icohtec/>

## **Proposal submissions**

The final deadline for all submissions is **Sunday 5 January 2020**.

Instructions on submissions can be found on our website: <http://www.icohtec.org/>

Please submit your session, individual paper, or poster, online: <http://www.icohtec.org/annual-meeting/cfp-system/2020-eindhoven/>

The submission form will guide you through the submission process. If questions arise, please consult the pdf document 'Technical instructions', which can be found on the opening page of the submission form and downloaded.

## **The Program Committee**

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