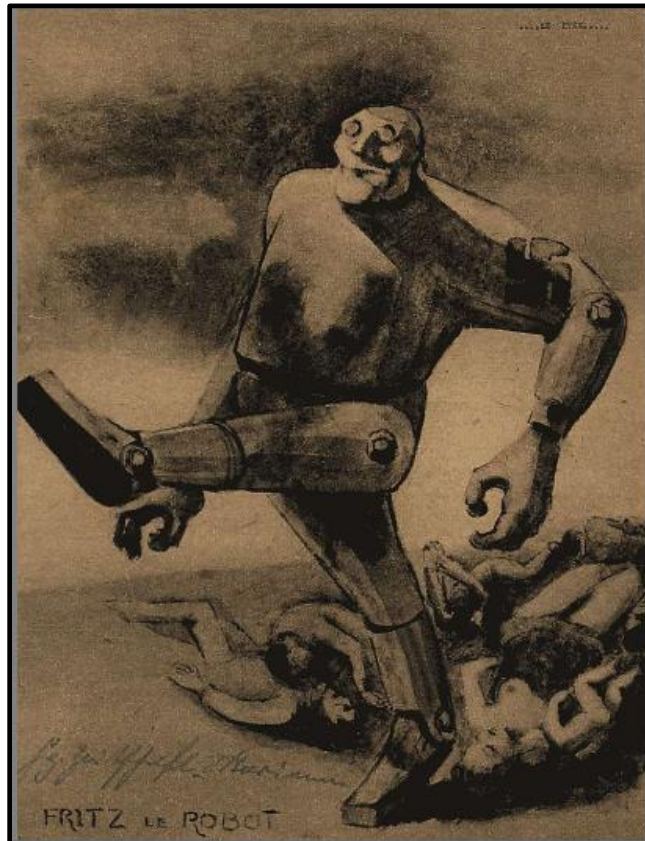


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If you have something to announce please mail to: abatzeli@he.duth.gr



Fritz le Robot.

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1. ICOHTEC News

1.1 Interview with Stefan Poser (ICOHTEC President, 2021-2025)

1. Can you share what first drew you to the history of technology as a field?

The History of Technology offers a way of discussing contemporary societal issues based on historical knowledge. I am therefore very pleased that our next symposium in Alexandroupolis is dedicated to this approach. The deepest changes in society over the last 150–200 years are linked to technology. Although this makes HoT one of the most attractive fields of history, there is still much research and teaching to be done in this area. This was fascinating from the outset and remains so. A second positive aspect is that artefacts can easily be integrated into research – in this respect, HoT is similar to the history of art and archaeology. When I decided to specialise in the history of technology during my university education in Berlin and Vienna, I combined studying history with mechanical engineering in order to gain technological expertise. My main field of research, “Playing with Technology“, developed from subjects such as automata and the extraordinary experiences at funfairs that I dealt with in the 1990s. The main results are published in the German book “Glücksmaschinen und Maschinenglück: Grundlagen einer Technik- und Kulturgeschichte des technisierten Spiels” (2016). However, an ICON special issue on “Playing with Technology: Sports and Leisure“, guest-edited together with Hans Joachim Braun (Vol. 19, 2013), provides insight in English. My most recent article on playfulness is dedicated to graffiti (ICON 30, 2025), analysing the act of spraying graffiti as an example of a subversive technology-based game that has influenced societal values over the past 40 years. I am now the proud owner of some spray cans, which have helped me to gain a sense of spray painting.



2. You have supported the International Committee for the History of Technology in various roles (President, Secretary General, Newsletter Editor). How do you see the organization advancing the field globally, and which milestones or experiences within ICOHTEC have you found most valuable?

My most valuable experience is meeting colleagues from all over the world in the pleasant atmosphere of ICOHTEC Symposia, and to learn about quite different approaches to our field as well as to life in general. Secondly ICOHTEC has invited to several quite interesting places in Europe and around the world, which I thus have visited. Attending our symposia means meeting friends since many years.

With the next ICOHTEC anniversary approaching, I would also like to highlight some milestones from before my time in the organisation: the establishment of an international society in 1968 and the bridging of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War era were significant and challenging undertakings. ICOHTEC and a few other international societies contributed to improving understanding and calming tensions. The next ICOHTEC milestone was creating ICOHTEC's journal ICON. Until 1995, the results of our symposia were published in various journals and proceedings. ICOHTEC's journal has increased our visibility. Additionally, thanks to ICON, it is easier to research our own history, focusing on periods after 1995.

Another milestone was the first concert of the ICOHTEC Jazz Band, 'E-Mail Specials' in Budapest 1996. The musicians have contributed to the friendly atmosphere of our symposia, as well as to the academic discussion of technology and music, for over two decades. At our Lisbon symposium in 1998, the Kranzberg Lecture was inaugurated. A few years later, the Turiano-ICOHTEC Prize and the Maurice Daumas Prize were introduced. These three academic highlights, alongside the jazz sessions, have provided an appealing framework for our symposia.

Not a milestone but a kind of challenge was linked to the Covid pandemic: how to manage a symposium under such conditions? Our President in 2020, Sławomir Łotysz, and I (acting as Secretary General and Chair of the Program Committee) agreed with the local organizers in Eindhoven, Jan Korsten and Eric van der Vleuten, to held one of the first international conferences online. Before deciding for this solution, we contacted the Executive Committee and the contributors of the Eindhoven symposium to hear their opinion and to find out, who would be intested in giving a paper online. Eighty colleagues decided to participate, whereas more than 200 had been accepted for the in-person conference. This result makes clear how difficult and uncertain the undertaking was. Looking back from today it is nothing special that the symposium was a success, but in those times it was an adventure. ICOHTEC survived the Covid-period without problems. Thanks to Peeter Mürsepp's invitation, we celebrated our 50th symposium and our 55th anniversary in Tallinn. To celebrate this event, I invited colleagues and friends from allmost every continent to discuss the future of HoT. Based on this roundtable discussion we published a paper together in ICON. This marked the beginning of a further

period of internationalisation of ICOHTEC. Following Nelson Arellano-Escudero's invitation, our meeting in Chile in 2024 became a triple milestone: Vina del Mar was our first meeting in Latin America without the ICHST, and our second joint meeting with SHOT. Our first PhD school outside Europe took place in Santiago de Chile, linked to the symposium. As the ICOHTEC symposium was followed by the ICHST congress in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 2025, the last few years have been characterised by a new drive to internationalise ICOHTEC. During my time as Secretary General and President, I had two key objectives: to organise democratic decision-making and to promote an open-minded, inclusive approach to internationalisation within ICOHTEC. In a world that seems to be reverting to the political systems described by Thomas Hobbes in "Leviathan" in the 17th century, both aims are increasingly important. I am therefore very happy and would like to thank Nelson and the new ICOHTEC board for continuing to pursue these goals.

3. You guest-edited the *ICON* special issue on Robots and AI (*ICON*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2022). In your article "[A Complicated Love Story? Human–Robot Interaction in Popular Culture: A Case Study on Technology-Linked Emotions](#)" you explore emotions connected to human–robot interaction in popular culture. What does popular culture reveal about societal hopes and fears surrounding robots that technical or scientific sources might overlook?

The idea behind publishing a special issue of *ICON* on robots and AI was to consider historical perspectives and contribute to contemporary debates. AI appears to be in a transitional phase, leading to a greater degree of integration into society. Now is therefore the right time to discuss the goals of this technological development and to influence its direction.

"A Complicated Love Story" is an article about the 1960s youth book "Nur zwei Roboter/Hour of the Robots" by Karl Bruckner. It is about two anthropomorphic robots, one male and one female, who were built by the Soviet Union and the USA to compete at a World Fair. According to the plot, they were more intelligent than humans. This enabled the author to reflect on how crazy societies were acting during the Cold War. In some ways, this book is representative of how robots are generally portrayed in literature and popular culture. Following these descriptions, robots are far more advanced than their human counterparts: they are stronger and more intelligent. Thus, they are both admired and feared. Culture provides a space for emotions and reflections on technical developments. It can serve as a tool to familiarise people with technology. It also shapes our perception of technology to an astonishing degree: we interpret robots' output as similar to human

behaviour, and the anthropomorphic or zoomorphic shape of many robots may be linked to popular culture's interpretation of robots. Is this helpful in understanding artificial intelligence, or does it get in the way of meaningful assessments?

4. In [“Riskante Spiele? Bezüge von Theater, Spiel und Risiko aus technikhistorischer Perspektive”](#) (*Zeitschrift für Theaterpädagogik*, 2022), you connect play, theatre, and technological risk. What makes risk such a powerful element in both technical systems and staged performances?

The role of risk is quite different in play and in life outside the sphere of play. Whereas risk makes play more exciting and thus more attractive, it is something to avoid in normal living conditions. Normally, we protect ourselves in order to reduce risk and avoid accidents. However, when it comes to playing, we want both: we want to be protected, but we also want to experience fear, for example when riding a roller coaster. This combination enables us to experience the anxiety of pleasure and ilinx (Balint/Caillois). Therefore, risk is staged and controlled to create appealing playing environments. This practice, which is described here in the context of roller coasters, can be found in various forms of play. In theatre, excitement is generated or even provoked in a similar way: visitors may enjoy being immersed in the story and being scared, for example, while sitting in a comfortable chair; even the revolver is fake. Since roller coasters and theatres offer different forms of play, it can be expected that they have similar mechanisms for generating emotions and optimising play. The combination of staging risk and avoiding dangerous situations is a central element of play.

5. In your contribution [“Histoire et perspectives des musées industriels issues de la désindustrialisation: exemples en Allemagne”](#) (Paris, 2023), you discuss industrial museums shaped by deindustrialisation. What challenges arise when former industrial sites are transformed into museums, particularly in regions affected by industrial decline?

When visiting places of former heavy industry over the last 30 years, I noticed that some were in better condition just after regular production ended than they were decades later, even after being converted into museums. Since these museums are extremely large and their artefacts were not designed to last, they are constantly battling oxidation and decay. This development can be described as the oxidation of cultural heritage. This raises two crucial questions, especially in relatively poor regions of deindustrialisation: Firstly, are societies able to protect industrial heritage, especially from the 20th century (characterised by huge

constructions), and thus inform future generations about the enormous influence of coal and oil on the development of consumer societies? Secondly, while we know that such buildings provide insight into important historical developments, would it be worthwhile for future generations to preserve these buildings and the knowledge they mediate?

6. What is your current research-topic?

At the moment, I am working on the history of plastics. Last year, Florian Bettel and I organised an ICOHTEC/ICHST session on 'Plastic Environments' in Dunedin. Building on this, we are working on a guest-edited special issue of ICON. The volume will combine historical analysis with discussing contemporary developments. It will analyse the rise of plastic-based consumer societies in the 1950s–1970s, changing public opinions concerning plastics, the production of this material as well as the application and the pollution of the environment. A follow-up session on 'Plastic Environments' is scheduled for the ICOHTEC Alexandroupolis symposium in October.