

## **TEC 154 2014S, Class 09: Engineering (3)**

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### *Overview*

- Preliminaries.
  - Note takers, phase 1.
  - Admin.
  - About our students.
  - Note takers, phase 2.
  - Questions.
- The Tacoma Narrows Bridge.
- Petroski - Main Points.
- Petroski - What is Engineering?
- Petroski - Lens.
- Petroski - Blinders.
- David Pye - Designs Conflict.

## **Preliminaries**

### **Note takers, phase 1**

- New goals: Five important things to remember from the class.
- Today: LG, PG, and JV.

### **Admin**

- Apologies for Wednesday
- How do we eliminate the crud on campus?
- The next set of readings is now available.
  - Jackson and Krebs for Monday.
  - Chaudhry et al. for Wednesday.
- Extra credit:
  - Basketball Saturday at 1pm
  - At least 60 minutes of next weekend's swim meet
  - Others?
- Can we move the reading deadline to 10:30 p.m.?
  - Yes. But I may not read your Q's before class.
  - We may play with how I respond.

## Belated Introductions

- Who are you?
- What is your (intended) major?
- Why are you taking this class?
  - Exploring something new to me
  - To learn more about the societal effects of technologies
  - To study ideas and how they affect society
    - Technology is the physical manifestation of an idea
  - Another prospective tech studies concentrator [x2]
  - Likes being on Noyce 3rd
  - A different look at technology.
- What do you bring to this class?
  - An intense desire to learn
  - A sociological perspective (imagination?)
  - Skills at contextualization
  - Openness to new ideas
  - Sarcasm

## Upcoming Note Takers

### Food

- Monday - CO, TD
- Wednesday - FC, JV
- Friday - SA, LY

### More from Teich

- Monday - ZS, EL
- Wednesday - EG, DP
- Friday - AF, DB

### Donald Norman - The Design of Everyday Things (Usability)

- Monday - CC
- Wednesday - DS
- Friday - PG, LG

## Questions

## Notes from PG

1) Petroski claims engineering is a very human activity and it is tied to our development. Due to this, Engineering exhibits many human traits.

2) Studying engineering failures provides more knowledge than successes. This knowledge is important to students of engineering as well as engineers themselves.

3) There is not a perfect design because technology is ever evolving. Also, technology has to live up to many requirements which by completing one requirement makes it impossible to complete another. Some of the most important requirements are price, beauty, safety, and complete the task it was designed for.

Questions that Petroski would ask of new technology

4) How might this technology fail? What types of failure have the engineers not considered?

5) What goals was a technology designed to meet? Does it meet those goals? How might this technology be redesigned to better meet its goals? How is this technology better than its predecessor?

## Notes from JV

Important things that Petroski would want you to remember:

- Studying engineering failures can be helpful; they may be more important than success.
  - They contribute to advances in society by detailing what designs do not work.
  - The purpose of engineers is to "obviate failure", therefore, failures must be studied
  - There is no perfect design, but there is always a possible design
- Engineering is a human activity
  - It exhibits human traits: failure, hubris, etc.
  - It changes and evolves as humans change and evolve

Important questions to ask in evaluating successful technologies:

- What compromises have been made/ What improvement could be made?
- What are the possible modes of failure that this design did not predict?
- Does the technology achieve its goals (technological and other)?
- What design does this build upon? What has it tried to improve?

## An Exercise

- Grab one of the pieces of scrap paper.
- List three points that you think Petroski would want you to remember from *To Engineer is Human*.
- List two things you've learned about engineering from reading *To Engineer is Human*.
- Lenses: What are two new questions you might ask about a new technology you encounter?
- Blinders: As Petroski notes, peoples' vision can be limited. What issues might Petroski have missed in his analyses?

## Petroski - Main Points

- Studying engineering failures provides lessons that are as important as studying successes
  - Who studies? Researchers? Engineers? Students of engineering.
  - Tell you what not to do.
  - Gives you knowledge about kinds of failure that are possible.
  - Failure may be more important than successes ('as or more')
- Engineering is a human activity, tied to our development
  - Claim: An essential part of our nature.
  - We express ourselves by building new things, just as we express ourselves in art/music/writing/etc.
  - Because it's a human activity, we don't think that anything we do is final; we build upon past work
  - It exhibits human traits, like failure and accepting and moving on, dealing with risk
- While failure is necessary and perhaps inevitable, it's not a goal
  - How much should we blame engineers who fail?
- There is no perfect design, but there should always be a possible design
  - Why not perfect? Usually too many design requirements: Cheap, Safe, Beautiful, and serves its purpose
- Technology will always evolve. No one expects a final avante garde, no one expects the final bridge. We will always improve on the previous technology.
- Capitalism seems to play a huge role in the failure of technologies. We are always trying to make things cheaper, and that adds risk.

## Petroski - What is Engineering?

- Accessible

## Petroski - Lens

What questions might we ask as we look at a technology that seems successful?

- What compromises might have been made?
- What are possible modes of failure that the designers did not predict?
- How might we improve upon this technology?
- What were its design goals? (Not just technological, but economic, social, etc.) Does it achieve its goals?
- What designs does this build upon, and what has it tried to improve?

## **Petroski - Blinders**

## **David Pye - Designs Conflict**

*The requirements for design conflict and cannot be reconciled. All designs for devices are in some degrees failures....*

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