

Tripreport E.W.Dijkstra, Copenhagen 10-12 Nov.1976.

A short report on a short trip. Together with Ria --my wife-- I have been for three days and two nights in Copenhagen as the guest of UUA/E (Univac Users Association / Europe), at its Fall76 Conference, where I was one of the leading speakers for the general session.

We left on Tuesday evening and returned home on Saturday morning, travelling by nighttrain (12 hours). On our way up North we did not sleep too well, for our cabin was too warm to be really comfortable. (We had turned off the heating, but it was the corridor along the cabins that was too hot.) Our journey back was much better. (In contrast to previous trips, however, I noticed both times when the train went aboard the ferry.) I can recommend this way of transport: the travelling costs for both of us were less than if I had travelled alone by air, and the train trip is much more peaceful.

Copenhagen is not a town to live in on "Five dollars a day"! The official price of our --excellent-- hotelroom was \$ 83,-- a day! (I did not pay it, for we were there at Univac's expense, and Univac did not pay it either, as Univac had a reduced rate of \$ 33,-- a day, but that is quite another matter.) A pair of leather jack-boots of \$ 150,-- , for instance, was no exception at all.

It is, however, a nice town to walk through and to do some shopping. (Friday was for me a holiday and the two of us did just that.) "Den Permanente" and "Illum's Bolighus", although not so exceptional on the European scene as ten years ago, are still worth a visit when you are near: they are very beautiful shops.

The visit to the UUA/E Conference was no disappointment because I went with very few expectations. The public seemed very much of the same type as I had observed at an ABCU Meeting (Association of Burroughs Computer Users) in Amsterdam, the Univac officials present seemed less qualified than their Burroughs counterparts. I attended one sales presentation: the obligatory slides with text were adorned with colour pictures of nice young ladies(!), looking lovingly towards a Univac 1100/80 cabinet or an "intelligent terminal". It was worse than just offensive, it was sickening. And, of course, we were offered lunch by a few of the high Univac officials --directors of various software development outfits-- but I was not impressed by the gentlemen. (As a matter of fact I was depressed, because in view of their position, their apparent superficiality was a little bit alarming. Ria, who attended the lunch as well and observes other things, thought that one of them was very nervous, so we may give him the benefit of the doubt.) I must make an exception for dr.George Champine (Univac, Roseville, Minnesota), who gave a nice and instructive talk on how external influences could cause hardware malfunctioning and on precautions taken with the aim of reducing the frequency of such undesirable occurrences; after his talk the two of us went back to our hotel, where we talked for about two hours, and on hardware he seemed to be very knowledgeable, on software much less so, but eager to learn. (While in Zurich he had tried to contact Niklaus Wirth, as he had recently(!) heard interesting things about PASCAL, but Niklaus was already in Palo Alto.)

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I gave essentially the same talk (EWD566: "Programming: from craft to scientific discipline.") as I had given in Japan. This time I could estimate the extent to which it served its purpose, viz. to explain to managers the nature and the significance of the development in programming methodology as

had taken place during the last, say, eight years. Judged by the number of questions posed to me during the discussion period the next day, the impact has not been impressive. (Michael Jackson --of "Michael Jackson, Inc!"-- , the other invited speaker for the general session, had the same lack of noticeable reaction, and that amazed me much more, for he has great experience in presenting an overview of his methodology in such a way that people want to hear more about it, and I thought that he had done very well.) Was the problem that in view of the conference theme, we both spoke about programming while the majority of managers don't know how to do that?

Friday evening in the train, before I went to sleep I have been pondering. Perhaps I should write a text --even without being invited to talk on the subject!-- on something like "What management should know about scientists". (The writing of a --perhaps equally necessary!-- complementary text "What scientists should know about management" I think I should leave to someone else.) I don't expect a manager to be a scientist, the manager who has been a scientist doesn't present a problem either. The problem starts with the manager who has not an inkling of what scientific thought implies, and who hasn't the foggiest notion of what a "mental quantum jump" means, because he has never made one himself. I was reminded of my experiences with the Dutch Bank, where the directors (all of them with a training in Law) behaved like the chief of the primitive tribe, who objected to modern medical treatment against smallpox for his subordinates, as the experience would weaken their faith in his witch doctors.

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Perhaps I had been given too favourable a picture of the average participant when the UUA/E Chairman invited me half a year ago. This time I learned that (male) participants preferring to join the Ladies Program are at these conferences not unusual. (On account of earlier experiences, this was now forbidden for Italians.....)

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My growing impression that a larger and larger fraction of the computing community is getting more and more "innovationproof" --a development of which I have received lately a few alarming indications-- has not been contradicted at the UUA/E Conference, and that, of course, is a little bit sad. But apart from that, it was a very nice trip that has been sufficiently instructive not to regret it. On the contrary.

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There has been a time that I did not know yet the meaning of the verb "to enhance". Then came a period during which I thought that I knew its meaning. As a result of the Univac sales presentation, that second period, I am afraid, has now ended.