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The Spinning Jenny

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The invention of the spinning jenny in 1764 sparked a movement that would change the lives of people worldwide. The economy had been stagnating for centuries. Eighty percent of the world's population was working in the countryside; many were malnourished, with an average life expectancy of 28 years. However, the rapid mechanization of the textile industry spurred a period of growth, shifting the focus of economic and social life from the countryside to the expanding cities. This trend continues today: by 2050, 80 percent of the population will be living in cities, especially in southern Asia, Africa, and South America. These enormous changes require new solutions for supplying energy and developing infrastructure. Sustainable urban development would be a big step toward a sustainable Anthropocene future.



Spinning Jenny by James Hagreaves, Inv.-Nr.: 1910/25202
Milena Bassen

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The spinning jenny

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Spinning Jenny: How a spinning machine gave impetus for capital- and industrial society.
"The weavers needs more yarn. I can't keep up with spinning!"

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"Here comes the next company for the spinning work..."
In order to compensate the industry's demand for yarn, Germany ordered its soldiers to man the spinning wheels.

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In 1761 in England, a contest was held to invent a spinning machine.
"This cannot go on like this! We need to do something!"

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"In this house, someone invented a machine which can spin eight times the amount wool than any of us!"
1764, house of James Hargreaves, a weaver from Stanhill

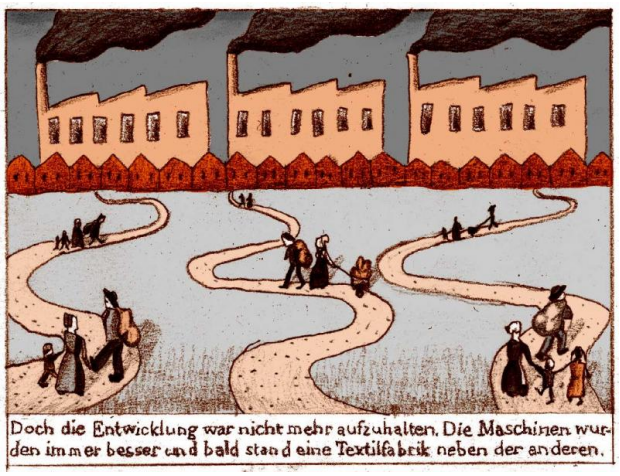
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"This machine won't be replacing anyone anymore!"

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But development could not be stopped. The machines got better and better, and soon one textile factory was built after another.

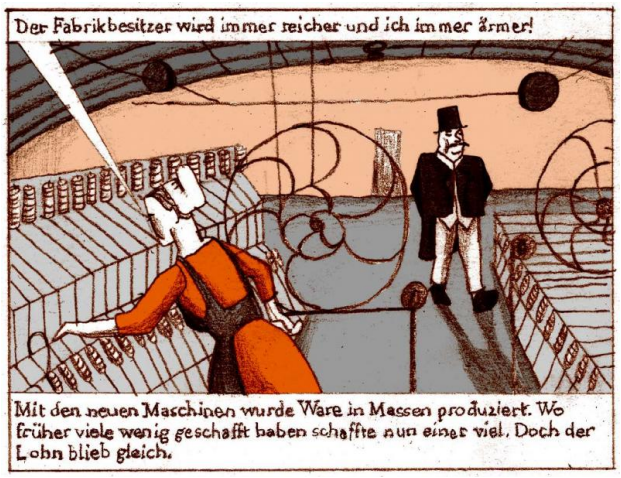
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The spinners had to move to their work into the cities. There they lived in inhumane conditions.

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"The factory owner is getting richer and richer, and I get poorer!" The new machines produced goods in masses. Whereas before, many people could make only a little, nowadays one person could make a lot. But the wages stayed the same.

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Artist's comment

As I researched on the spinning machine, it quickly became clear to me that one single invention can completely overturn a centuries-old craft and the way of life associated with it within a few years. In this case, an invention that gave rise to a new era: the industrialization. Textile workers are still having to cope with the consequences of this innovation today.

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Further readings:

- Sources and Literature for the Anthropocene Milestone Comics

Related links:

- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Special exhibition at the Deutsches Museum http://www.deutsches-museum.de/en/exhibitions/special-exhibitions/archive/2015/anthropocene/
- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Virtual exhibition on the Environment & Society Portal https://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6354
- Comic-Anthology, Deutsches Museum Website http://www.deutsches-museum.de/sammlungen/entdecken/comics/

Websites linked in image captions:

- http://www.deutsches-museum.de/sammlungen/meisterwerke/meisterwerke-iv/spinning-jenny/