



Blast from the Past BB (Boring)

Out of the Barn by Dick Morley

Reviewed by Nick Sands

Down memory lane, that is the journey Dick Morley takes us on in his book *Out of the Barn*. The book is a compilation of columns written for *Manufacturing Systems* magazine from 1992 to 1997. Morley, who is credited by some with inventing the programmable controller or PLC, is a genius and a self-proclaimed futurist. But after reading all 69 articles I still do not understand how his favorite emergent technologies will impact instrumentation and automation.

The articles take the reader, at least those of us who worked through the 90's, back to a time when there was a war between PCs and MACs and VAXs ruled the earth. Morley advocated the cutting edge technologies of the day, like neural networks and fuzzy logic. His favorite topics are chaos theory and autonomous agents which were going to revolutionize manufacturing and are mentioned in almost every column. Curiously enough, ladder logic and PLCs were also part of the advanced future of manufacturing.

The articles are divided in to topical sections; floor level control systems, industrial computing, software, managing manufacturing, enhancing corporate wealth, global reports, evaluating entrepreneurship, and "we have meet the enemy; they is us". The difference in the focus of the articles is subtle enough to be lost on this reader. It is clear that Morely has rules for projects, rules for investing, and rules for managing. He is also a believer in skunkworks for development.

Morley is certainly an interesting character and ahead of his time, like every good futurist. But the future he predicted is not our reality. That makes *Out of the Barn* mostly of historical value. Even at the low price of \$25 from ISA, unless you enjoy reliving the 90's this book could be a bit boring (BB).