

Technological Veil as Ruling Ideology: Adorno's Social Analysis of Technical Rationality/Domination in Late Capitalism

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Abstract

This paper argues that, in contrast to Marx's dialectical and optimistic view of technologies, Adorno claims technologies do not liberate social relations from capital and its economic determinacy. Technologies not only reinforce and serve the interests of capital, but also sustain the exploiting capitalistic relations of production by concealing the class struggle between capital and labor. One of the major tasks of social theory, in his view, is to understand how technical and mechanical reproduction confirms the existing relations of production. In this way, Adorno poses a significant sociological question in the Kantian style: how is society made possible through technological re-production? It is mechanical technical reproduction, argues Adorno, presupposes production, not the other way around. Both technical and economic reproduction make social integration and social order possible. With technology, "the long arm of the human race reaches to distant and barren planets yet is unable to ensure eternal peace on earth." Technologies have constructed a veil which disguises the exploitive capitalistic relations of production and makes the economic/class domination invisible. The visible technological domination and veil has replaced the invisible economic and class domination that characterizes late capitalism. Technologies have contributed to visible mediation in society, which naturalizes the real social mediation of capital. Adorno indicates that this economically fettered technical re-production won't expose the contradictions in the capitalistic relations of production but will hide the repressive mediations of capital in social spheres. Eventually, social illusion makes capital and technology as one. As Adorno eloquently put it, "technical rationality as the rationality of domination per se" has "regressed to myth and become a new form of ideology." Technology alone has constituted the ruling ideology of our time.

Keywords

Adorno, Ruling Ideology, Social Analysis, Technical Rationality, Technological Veil