

Critical Theory of Technology and STS

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Abstract:

Long before contemporary Science and Technology Studies (STS), Marxism, pragmatism and various theories of modernity were associated with the study of technology. These were broad and often speculative theories that related technology to a social and political context. STS sought to supplant these competing approaches and has been largely successful. Today few look to Mumford or Dewey, Heidegger or Marcuse for insight into technology. However, when STS took what Wiebe Bijker called “the detour into the academy” to focus on empirically based case histories, it gave up the political concerns that had inspired these earlier approaches. This renunciation was easier to justify before the widespread controversies over medical care, the Internet and the environment directly implicated technology in so many different aspects of contemporary politics. Some STS researchers have now also become aware of the more politicized approaches favored in the developing world, especially Latin America. But how can the achievements of STS be preserved in the context of politically charged investigations of controversial issues? This talk proposes one way of doing this, the critical theory of technology.