

Panel Proposal: The Necessity of Critique II

Organizer: Darryl Cressman, Maastricht University

Functionalization and the World – Causality, Culture, and Planetary Technology

Jochem Zweer

University of Twente

My contribution focusses on Feenberg's recent rearticulation of his widely discussed *instrumentalization theory*, in which the pairing of primary and secondary instrumentalization is addressed in terms of *causal and cultural functionalization*. First, I show how this conceptualization of functionalization *aligns* with existing approaches in contemporary philosophy of technology and STS inasmuch as it departs from technological artefacts, but *contrasts* with such approaches inasmuch as it attends to how such artefacts reveal a *world*, which is to say a political world of formal biases, operational autonomy, and democratic potential. Secondly, in following Feenberg's explicit association of philosophy of technology and environmental thought, I inquire after his understanding of the technological world as an outcome of social conditions. Via a phenomenological interpretation of the Anthropocene and associated planetary functionalization, I argue that Feenberg's treatment of *causal functionalization* tends to reduce to *cultural functionalization*. While the resulting critical constructivist account of is both urgent and worthwhile in light of today's ecological emergency, I suggest that it does not exhaust the implications of the advent of the Anthropocene. I therefore conclude by discussing *causal functionalization* in light of the analysis of causality that Heidegger develops in the Question concerning Technology, thereby drawing attention to the ontological conditioning of functionalization. I suggest that attending to such ontological conditioning must have a place in the critical constructivist project of uncovering the biases of contemporary functional rationality.

Bio

Dr. Jochem Zwier has a background in electrical engineering and philosophy of technology. His research and teaching focus on philosophy of technoscience, particularly in relation to ecology. His work is situated in the fields of phenomenology, post-phenomenology, hermeneutics, philosophy of technology, philosophy of science, and further concerns ecological and economic thought in the context of the Anthropocene. He published in internationally peer-reviewed journals such as *Philosophy & Technology* and *Human Studies*, and edited special issues for journals such as *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* (2017) and the *Journal of Environmental and Agricultural Ethics* (2019).

Technocracy & Critique

Dr. Darryl Cressman

Maastricht University

The object of a critical theory of technology is not technology per se, but rather a certain type of rationality that organizes and legitimates technological function and meaning. This rationality has been called instrumental rationality (Horkheimer), technological rationality (Marcuse), and in the work of Andrew Feenberg, technocracy. For Feenberg, technocracy is realized in an approach to technology that is both ideological and organizational. As ideology, technocracy posits technologies as pure function and autonomous from both history and contexts of use. This ideology, in turn, legitimates control over the trajectory of design to a small cadre of self-

appointed experts. Resistance to technocracy occurs through the actions of everyday users who, drawing from their localized experiences, imagine and realize sociotechnical potentials that were unimagined by engineers, designers, and policy makers.

For critics of Feenberg's work, the focus on technocracy is outdated and old fashioned, reproduces an essentialist (and predictable) dualism between democracy and technocracy, and overlooks the consequences of everyday users who realize sociotechnical potentials that are deeply problematic for a democratic society.

In this presentation, I want to examine in more detail the history of technocracy as an object of critique from the 1960s to its waning influence amongst critical philosophers of technology working in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Tracing this history, I will attempt to address the question of what place, if any, should technocracy take within a contemporary critical philosophy of technology.

Bio

Darryl Cressman is an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at Maastricht University. He received his PhD from the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University in 2012. He is the author of *Building Musical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Amsterdam: The Concertgebouw* (University of Amsterdam Press) and has published essays and book chapters in the philosophy of technology, critical innovation studies, and sound studies.

Technology between Ontology and Politics: Life, History, and Technicity as Concrete Objectivity for a Concrete Philosophy.

Taila Picchi

My paper concerns the extension of the ontological frame of life and historicity to Herbert Marcuse's representation of technology. I'll present Marcuse's shift from his dialectics of life to the dialectics of technology by analyzing the notions of historicity and technicity. I'll show his conception of historicity in his early writings and I'll focus on a pivotal text – the 1958 conference in Paris – where the notion of technicity appears as the new ontological structure of reality, allowing for the shift from ontology to technology. This will finally provide a speculative understanding of Marcuse's reading of Gilbert Simondon, still rooted in the inner relation between historicity, life, and technicity, founding a specific kind of objectivity. This objectivity – an intermediary between subject and object, like technology is an intermediary between nature and society – is rooted in Simondon's "concretization" and represents a feature of Feenberg's contemporary definition of Technosystem as the technically rational multilayered field of social operations, disciplines and knowledge.

Bio

Taila Picchi is a Ph.D. student in history of philosophy at the University of Pisa and Florence. She is working on a dissertation between French Philosophy of Technique and Critical Theory of Technology, focusing on a comparison between Simondon' and Marcuse's Thought on technology through the notion of technicity. Her research interests are history of philosophy, French critical epistemology, philosophy of technology and political thought.

Critical Constructivism and Heideggerian Phenomenology

Lars Botin

It is a well-known fact that Andrew Feenberg was a PhD Fellow of Herbert Marcuse, one of the founding fathers of Critical Theory, and it is also a well-known fact that Herbert Marcuse was student of Martin Heidegger from 1928-1932. Theodor W. Adorno was in his sincere depreciation of Heidegger of the opinion that Marcuse was just a renegade and never really embraced the ideological and philosophical ideas of Marxist Critical Theory.

In this paper, I shall discuss whether Feenberg is still enmeshed in this dispute that took place over several decades in between Adorno and Marcuse, and try to show how Feenberg's take on phenomenology is highly inspired by Marcuse, and furthermore how this inspiration can be seen as some sort of re-elaboration of original Heideggerian conceptualizations in relation to *things*, and what a *thing* is.

It is the assumption that the turn from Critical Theory of Technology to Critical Constructivism in Feenberg's work from the late 1990's till now, is not just a turn towards various constructionism's of the past five decades, but also a turn towards constructionist movements of the 1920's and 1930's which in many cases transcends the first generation of Critical Theory; i.e. the Frankfurt School. It is the claim that Heidegger's focus on action, process and construction is continued in both Marcuse's thinking, and re-elaborated or re-reified in Feenberg's more recent work.