Critical Theory, Pragmatism and Philosophy of Technology: Thinking About the Relations Between Technology and Democracy

Craig Hanks, Associate Professor of Philosophy
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Craig Hanks, Associate Professor of Philosophy was awarded a REP award for summer 2004 for Critical Theory, Pragmatism and Philosophy of Technology: Thinking About the Relations Between Technology and Democracy. The goal of the project was to ask, “What is the relationship between technology and democracy?” and explore three dominant traditional answers to this question:

- There is no relationship; technology is neutral with respect to human activities and values.
- There is a positive relationship; more technology will bring more democracy.
- There is a negative relationship; technology is a cage of our own making.

The project focused on two schools of philosophy that take this question quite seriously, while rejecting all three of the traditional answers: American Pragmatism, and Critical Theory. These intellectual traditions are also interdisciplinary, and explicitly aim at not merely intellectual, but also practical outcomes.

The work proceeded in two stages. First, the founding representatives of Critical Theory of Technology (Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse) and Pragmatic Philosophy of Technology (Dewey, Peirce) were analyzed and their theories explicated and evaluated. Second, contemporary versions of Critical Theory (Habermas, Feenber) and Pragmatism (Hickman, Light, Thompson) were analyzed and evaluated.

The results include:

- Critical Theory and Pragmatism have much ground for dialogue, more than even their contemporary adherents admit.
- Together they offer grounds for lines of empirical research into the implications of technological change for individual and collective self-determination (the heart of democracy). The first avenue of empirically informed research the PI will follow is to investigate architecture, planning and democracy through the lens of Critical Theory and Pragmatism.
- Each offers compelling critiques of the existing answers, but the answers might be more complete and compelling in a new philosophy of technology that draws on both traditions.

Publications
Work Accepted for Publication:


**Submitted for Review:**


**Presentations**

1. “Politics, Aesthetics, and Cities,” to be presented to The Association for Political Theory, St. Louis, MO, October 2006.


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