

Reclaiming Technology

Throughout history, technology has often encountered resistance and scepticism in spite of all the advantages it provides. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to dismiss these reactions as a simple conservative knee-jerk reflex. At a closer look, we recognise the fact that such scepticism often aims at the decisional instances that determine the direction of technological developments and implementations, rather than at the technologies themselves; or to put it more specifically, it aims at the models employed as the basis of these decisions.

Logically, one would expect large-scale and impactful decisions to rely on the contributions of all scientific disciplines: the partial models they provide in their respective domains, along with the awareness of the limitations and uncertainties involved in these models. And given the fact that we are all part of an intricately entangled ecosystem, rationality would demand the decisions to serve the high purpose of safeguarding the stable functioning of this system and the quality of life on the planet for all components.

Unfortunately, the existing situation is far from being logical or rational. Under the prevailing socio-economic policies, all disciplines are subordinated to a reductionist economic discipline operating on the basis of generic models where most aspects of the overall system, including local conditions and needs are underrepresented, if represented at all. Such reductionist models generate decisions that impose upon all disciplines restrictive dicta like standardisation, algorithmisation and automation, as if new laws of nature. The reductionist economic discipline, having usurped the throne of philosophy—the former queen of all sciences—, now seems to claim the sole privilege of rationality and use technology as its main operational field. The activities of other disciplines are confined to their respective domains such that their collaboration cannot go beyond working on the same assembly line as specialised workers fulfilling their assigned roles.

The aim of this talk is to bring this state of affairs to the attention of the audience, propose a few criteria and open the floor to a collective reasoning on how technology can be reclaimed as a platform for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary solution-generation.