

HOPES AND HYPES IN [...] SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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CIRCUMSCRIBING HYPES

- Literary perspective:
 - If the economy runs on fictions (Beckert 2016), Hype specifically runs on “sensations” (i.e. furors)—Hypes build on, and are eased by (institutionalized) mechanisms of, spectacle (Debord 1967)
- Ideological perspective: Hypes are the result of “entrepreneurial storytelling”
- The more intense the Hype, the higher the profit
 - Through Hypes, entrepreneurs valorize (i.e., they extract profit from) not the technology, but the enthusiasm
 - They valorize normative-cognitive matrices of their social environment (cf. commodity fetish)
 - Radical perspective on the (extractive!) relations between markets and social structures
 - Critical Theory of Entrepreneurship (Ogbor 2000), etc., Critical “Economic Sociology of Innovation” (Reale 2024)

LOCATING HOPES

- Hopes: Cure for cancer; nuclear fusion...
 - Hope (Def.): A collective or shared hope (of indeterminate concreteness) that a technology may solve a collectively accepted problem (of certain severity)
 - Very wide-spread e.g., in contemporary “grand societal challenges”
- Hopes develop w/o (i.e., before) interaction with the entrepreneur/innovator
- A relatively small effort of entrepreneurial storytelling suffices to draw a full-grown matrix of ready enthusiasm—“focusing” the Hope (“breakthrough” narrative)
 - Hopes have the potential to self-amplify if addressed accordingly
- Hypes: promise-requirement cycle—Hopes: requirement-promise cycle (path. dep.)
 - The main component of understanding Hypes typically is communicative
 - The main component of understanding any given Hope is historical

ANALYZING HOPES

- Contemporarily, Hopes are collective or shared hopes that a technology solve a certain problem (challenge)
- They are probably translatable into, they are a psychological transmutation of, the fear from which they stem
 - Often: existential fears (illness, death, extinction, ...)
 - This suggests a metaphysical thread at the core of Hopes
 - ...and (the rudiments of) a messianic subtext to entrepreneurialism in Hopes
 - (Hype as prophecy?)
- Through Hopes, entrepreneurs valorize faith and belief
 - Suggests a critical study of Hopes informed by a Theology of economic progress and novelty (cf. Godin 2021)

ANALYZING HOPES (SEQ.)

- Choosing technology to project hope on (and not someone/-thing else) is a culturally bound phenomenon
 - Particular historical variation of this in current capitalist context
 - Question: are Hopes currently projected onto technology or onto novelty? (Innovation fetish?)
- Innovation fetish at least leads to an overconfidence in/overenthusiasm for novelty
 - Libidinous core of present collective relations to innovation (Barber 2004)
 - This is generally the case for Hypes across the board (susceptibility for Hypes)
 - For Hopes specifically?

CONCLUDING PROPOSITIONS

- I. It is profitable for the entrepreneur (like for a doctor) to deliver on promises (meet requirements) while maintaining the basic fear behind the Hope they are exploiting
 - Result: double-binding for “hoping” constituency towards entrepreneurs as a corollary of the profit motive
 - A general pattern for Hypes? Equivalent to e.g., planned obsolescence?—In any case, particularly problematic in conjunction with existential threats (+ public procurement)
- II. Role of TA: demystify/deconstruct candidate technologies
 - Profane the anticipated technical capabilities, question the inherent value of novelty
 - Not to dim lights or poop parties but to “rationalize” technological progress
- III. Critically reconsider the role of hope and of Hopes, incl. consequences and implications, in dedicated or “mission-oriented” innovation governance
- IV. (Re-)Arrange hope as a source of (or motivation for) cultural-technical evolution rather than of profit

THE END

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