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Technologies and Sustainability – Challenges for Democracy and Education in Our Time

Technologies of Production

Point 1

Technologies of Sign Systems

Point 2

Technologies of Power and
Domination

Point 3

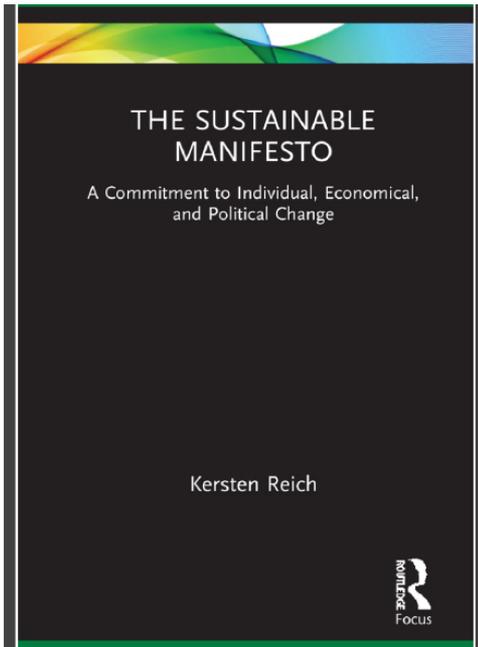
Technologies of the Self

Point 4

Technologies of production constitute the material foundation of all other technologies in culture. On this level, each society needs to create and sustain practices of production that provide things, resources, goods, and values which cannot only be consumed and exchanged, but also used as means and instruments for producing other things, resources, goods, and values.

With Dewey we might say that in our time – perhaps even more than in his –social life is characterized by strong tendencies of “compartmentalization” (LW 10: 26f) that threaten democratic communication and cooperation. Since successful sustainability can only be developed and realized as a common good, the social-ecological transformation of technologies of production is a challenge that presupposes the renewing of the democratic spirit.

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The Sustainable Manifesto

A Commitment to Individual, Economical, and Political Change

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In *The Sustainable Manifesto*, Kersten Reich describes in a concise and memorable way the necessary actions that humans need to take to live sustainably and combat climate change. Innovative and accessible. this book will be of

The sustainability agenda and the global goals of the UN as well as the wishes and political programs of many nations suggest that sustainability should conform to further economic development. But more and more it becomes obvious that this is wishful thinking, based on the contradiction that every growth in prosperity sets a new challenge for the planetary boundaries.

Technologies of Sign Systems

Point 2

Technologies of sign systems consist of “signs, meanings, symbols, or signification” (Foucault 1988: 18) that are indispensable in all cultural practices, routines, and institutions. They are essential for creating and organizing symbolic systems, represented in texts, discourses, all forms of media communication. They are the necessary symbolic basis of all other technologies in culture.

One may recall the Lippmann-Dewey controversy from the 1920s, in which the problem has already been discussed. Walter Lippmann advocated that an intellectual elite should rule (or: exercise power) in the general interest in terms of the common good and the reason of state. John Dewey sharply countered this notion with his approach to participatory democracy, pointing out that neither freedom of expression nor the grasp of information and its processing in a democracy should be sanctioned by class or class-specificity, and be it a class of democratically elected elites (cf. Dewey MW 13: 291).

However, for Dewey democracy can only function if the state ensures, through comprehensive education in the general interest, that all people can interpret the media critically enough.

Technologies of power shape “the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (Foucault 1988: 18). All societies build on technologies of power and domination because they are necessary for establishing patterns of order to coordinate social life, work organization, political and judicial decisions, economic development.

Michel Foucault has chosen the term *will to truth* to articulate the close connection between power and belief. In the current war we see how easily the will to truth is subjugated to the will to power even to the disadvantage of economic goals.

The success of sustainable behavior depends – as many studies show (Reich 2022) – on opportunities to experience sustainable self-efficacy in one’s own conduct and learning. These research results are very close to the Deweyan understanding of democracy and education and they warn us against reductionist and myopic concepts of sustainable behavior control. Sustainability can only succeed if the multitude is willing to support the necessary changes.

Foucault introduces the concept of technologies of the self as a reflection on questions of social and cultural identity. For him, the self is not a given essence, but socially constructed through cultural practices.

Sustainability is not an easy task. The fundamental challenge, of course, consists in the contradiction between human desires for growth and well-being, prosperity, and profit, and the global boundaries that show the limits of what the earth can bear. Yet, on the level of technologies of the self, this basic challenge involves not only individual recognition, but social action.

This is why social movements, like Friday for Future, with their power of establishing community bonds, are what we direly need on our local, national, as well as global ways towards more sustainability. They are not only instruments for achieving essential political goals, but they are also spaces of engagement and solidarity that give individuals the power to persist and be resilient to the attacks of “non-sustainable” people.

Overcoming some most urgent barriers

1

We have to overcome the expectation of the unlimited individual and social quest for prosperity

2

We must relearn to defend scientific research against selected interests of capitalist profit

3

Against neo-liberalism, we need a new balance between individualism and the common good.

4

A responsible democratic politics of sustainability includes long-term policies that balance social equity with environmental needs

5

We need to reconstruct and overcome the traditional dualism of thinking and action

For these and other aspects see: Kersten Reich: The Sustainable Manifesto