Sociotechnical Imaginaries: Fabricating Power through Technological Visions

The concept of sociotechnical imaginaries refers to the complex interplay between social, technological, and cultural factors that shape our understanding and expectations of technology. These imaginaries are not simply reflections of the present, but rather active forces that shape how we envision and develop new technologies. By examining sociotechnical imaginaries, we can gain insights into how power is fabricated and maintained through technological visions.

One of the key ways that sociotechnical imaginaries shape power is by defining the boundaries of possibility. By establishing what is considered to be feasible or desirable, imaginaries can limit or expand the scope of technological development. For example, the dominant sociotechnical imaginary of the 20th century was one of progress and innovation. This imaginary led to the development of powerful new technologies, such as the atomic bomb and the computer. However, it also led to a neglect of the social and environmental impacts of these technologies.

Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power by Sheila Jasanoff

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ 5 out of 5

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Sociotechnical imaginaries can also be used to justify and legitimize the use of power. By presenting a particular vision of the future, imaginaries can create a sense of inevitability and desirability. This can make it difficult to challenge the status quo or to propose alternative visions. For example, the sociotechnical imaginary of the "smart city" has been used to justify the widespread adoption of surveillance technologies. By presenting a vision of a more efficient and convenient city, this imaginary has made it easier for governments to implement controversial technologies, such as facial recognition software.

However, sociotechnical imaginaries are not static. They are constantly being contested and renegotiated. New imaginaries can emerge as a result of social movements, technological innovations, or changes in the political landscape. For example, the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1970s led to the development of a new sociotechnical imaginary of sustainability. This imaginary has had a significant impact on the development of environmental technologies, such as renewable energy and green building.

The study of sociotechnical imaginaries is essential for understanding how power is fabricated and maintained through technological visions. By examining the ways in which imaginaries shape the development and use of technology, we can gain insights into the power dynamics of our society. This knowledge can help us to challenge the dominant imaginaries and to envision alternative futures that are more just and sustainable.

Examples of Sociotechnical Imaginaries

There are many different examples of sociotechnical imaginaries. Some of the most common include:

- **The "smart city":** The smart city is a vision of a future city that is highly interconnected and efficient. This vision is often associated with the use of surveillance technologies, such as facial recognition software and predictive policing.

- **The "internet of things":** The internet of things (IoT) is a vision of a future in which everyday objects are connected to the internet. This vision is often associated with the use of sensors and other devices to collect data about our surroundings.

- **The "singularity":** The singularity is a hypothetical point in the future at which artificial intelligence (AI) becomes so powerful that it surpasses human intelligence. This vision is often associated with the idea that AI will eventually become self-aware and independent.

These are just a few examples of sociotechnical imaginaries. Many other imaginaries exist, and new ones are constantly emerging. As technology continues to develop, so too will the imaginaries that shape our understanding and expectations of it.

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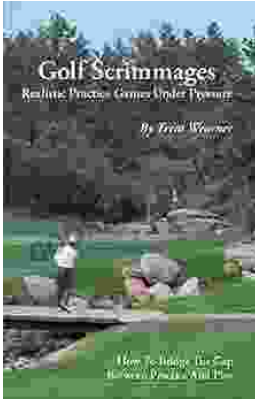
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