# Article information:

Cynical technical practice: From AI to APIs - Sam Hind, Tatjana Seitz, 2022  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13548565221133248>

# Article summary:

1. The article examines the use of critical thinking and design in the tech industry, focusing on Philip Agre's concept of critical technical practice (CTP).

2. The rise of "cynical" technical practice is discussed, where justifications for AI systems and APIs often disguise organizational and economic reasons for their development.

3. The article provides case studies of Comma's driver assistance products and Facebook's Graph API to illustrate how cynical technical practice is used to accumulate organizational power.

# Article rating:

Appears moderately imbalanced: The article provides some useful information, but is missing several important points or pieces of evidence that would be required to present the discussed topics in a balanced and reliable way. You are encouraged to seek a more balanced perspective on the presented issues by exploring the provided research topics and looking at different information sources.

# Article analysis:

The article "Cynical technical practice: From AI to APIs" by Sam Hind and Tatjana Seitz provides a critical examination of the use of critical thinking, methods, and design within the tech industry. The authors use Philip Agre's concept of critical technical practice (CTP) to analyze the rise of cynical technical practice in the development of AI systems and APIs.

The article argues that tech firms often justify their AI systems as ethical, contextual, situated, or fair, while APIs are presented as privacy-compliant and offering greater user control. However, these justifications are often used to disguise the organizational and economic reasons for developing these technical systems and features. The authors suggest that different forms of technical critique are used by software engineers to evaluate and contextualize these justifications.

The article draws on Agre's work on CTP, AI planning, grammars of action, and empowerment to examine how critical thinking is used within the tech industry. The authors argue that technical practitioners are not necessarily uncritical in their approach but typically compare the utility or performance of such according to a golden ethic: 'does it work?'.

However, the article suggests that narrow and cynical forms of technical criticality are increasingly being used by tech firms to legitimize corporate strategies. The authors provide two cases exhibiting different depths, kinds, and orientations of this cynicism: Comma's driver assistance products and Facebook's Graph API and permissions architecture.

While the article provides valuable insights into how critical thinking is used within the tech industry, it has some potential biases. For instance, it focuses primarily on negative aspects of technical critique without exploring its positive effects. Additionally, it does not consider possible counterarguments or alternative perspectives on AI development or API management.

Moreover, some claims made in the article lack sufficient evidence or support. For example, when discussing Comma's driver assistance products' cynical use of technical criticality to convince users of empowerment while cherry-picking performance metrics to sell the device itself, the authors do not provide any specific examples or data to support their claims.

Overall, the article provides a thought-provoking analysis of technical critique within the tech industry. However, it could benefit from exploring alternative perspectives and providing more evidence to support its claims.

# Topics for further research:

* Positive effects of technical critique in the tech industry
* Ethical considerations in AI development
* User control and privacy in API management
* Corporate strategies in the tech industry
* Performance metrics in driver assistance products
* Alternative perspectives on critical technical practice

# Report location:

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