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Idealising the System: The Machine as a Tool of Capitalist Control and Intellectual Conformity in E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to provide a profound commentary on how capitalist control structures can be found beneath the dystopian surface of E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*, which offers a prescient critique of technological advancement. This essay examines how the Machine operates as a hegemonic force that upholds social order and intellectual conformity through mechanisms remarkably reminiscent of those found in capitalist ideology, rather than just as a convenient tool. This study uses a Marxist perspective to analyse how the machine, which automates production, controls thought, and commodifies human experience, represents both the ideological superstructure and the economic base. The story shows how the citizens fall victim to a kind of false consciousness, mistaking conformity for wisdom and dependence for advancement, as a result of their alienation from nature, human contact, and real labour. By examining the machine as a system of ideological reproduction and a symbol of capitalist control, this paper contends that Forster's work foreshadows the social and psychological effects of uncontrolled technological capitalism. *The Machine Stops* is ultimately a warning against technological determinism as well as a foreboding critique of a society in which the system, rather than the individual, becomes the object of worship.

Research Significance:

This study is important because it places E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* in a Marxist context, revealing the story's deeper socioeconomic commentary that is sometimes obscured by its technological foresight. Although the machine has historically been seen as a criticism of an excessive dependence on technology, this study shows that it is a potent metaphor for capitalist control, showing how ideologies and production systems combine to control human interaction, behaviour, and thought. In an era of increasing automation, digital commodification, and surveillance capitalism, the story's themes are more relevant than ever. By connecting the story to important Marxist ideas like false consciousness, alienation, and ideological superstructure, this study adds to the larger conversation about how literature can reflect, challenge, and oppose repressive power structures.

Literature Review

Some scholars, such as Tom Moylan (1986) and Forster, criticise the complacency of a society tempted by convenience and comfort in *The Machine Stops*, placing it in the tradition of critical utopias. According to Moylan, the narrative reveals how utopian ideals can degenerate into dystopia when they stifle difference and dissent, particularly when implemented through centralised control structures. Another line of interpretation views the machine as a spiritual or religious creation. Frances Spufford (2002) talks about how the machine turns into a religious object, illustrating how traditional faith is being replaced by awe for technology. Using a Marxist framework, this paper expands on the idea that the machine imposes intellectual conformity by standardising knowledge and eliminating independent thought, which is supported by this reading.

Dystopian and Technological Critiques

Seed (1991) contends in *Dystopian and Technological Critiques* that *The Machine Stops* is an early and advanced analysis of the dangers of technological over-reliance, demonstrating how technologies intended to benefit humans progressively turn into tools of control. Similarly, Parrinder (1979) places the work in the context of early British science fiction, which echoes modernist concerns about urban alienation and mechanisation. This is furthered by Hale (1989), who emphasises how Forster's story questions the loss of human closeness and spontaneity through technological elements.

Ideological Domination and Estrangement

The story's portrayal of alienation and false consciousness has drawn the attention of Marxist critics. Forster's portrayal of isolated citizens who confuse mechanical support for true human flourishing eloquently illustrates how capitalism structures frequently conceal exploitation behind promises of comfort and ease (Eagleton, 1991). A helpful perspective for comprehending how the Machine operates as a comprehensive ideological framework that maintains conformity through education, ritual, and surveillance is Althusser's (2001) idea of the Ideological State Apparatus.

Hyperreality, discipline, and surveillance

Modern studies often reference Foucault's (1995) observations on surveillance and disciplinary cultures. Spufford (1990), for instance, contends that the Machine is an early example of a disciplinary society in which people internalise rules and surveillance is pervasive but imperceptible. This foreshadows current worries about algorithmic governance and Big Tech. Since critics like Bukatman (1993) have connected the Machine's mediated lectures and virtual contacts to the loss of actual experience—a problem at the heart of Forster's topic of intellectual stagnation—Baudrillard's (1994) concept of hyperreality is also pertinent.

Relevance to the Present: Surveillance Capitalism

Forster's vision has been reconnected with 21st-century advancements in digital capitalism by recent studies. According to Zuboff's (2019) theory of surveillance capitalism, digital platforms normalise ongoing data extraction and behavioural nudging, thereby commodifying the human experience. This is consistent with Forster's foretelling of people voluntarily ceding their

independence to a system that undermines free thought while promising convenience and security.

According to the critical consensus, *The Machine Stops* is a profound critique of systematic worship and intellectual apathy, as well as a cautionary tale about technology, which makes it transcend its period. By combining Marxist, Foucauldian, and postmodern ideas, this study expands on previous readings and makes the case that the Machine is best understood as an economic and ideological machinery that mimics and forecasts the workings of modern capitalist society.

Research Methodology

Marxist literary criticism serves as the foundation for this study's qualitative textual analysis, which is bolstered by multidisciplinary theories from philosophy and cultural studies. In order to analyse how narrative components—such as characterisation, setting, dialogue, and symbolism—illustrate the themes of capitalist domination and intellectual conformity, the methodology focusses on closely reading E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*.

Additionally, the analysis uses:

Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) is the main source.

- Scholarly works that analyse the story in the context of dystopian literature and critiques of modernity (e.g., Seed, Parrinder, Hale) are examples of secondary criticism.
- Theoretical sources: The topic of ideology, surveillance, commodification, and mediated experience is framed by key ideas from Shoshana Zuboff, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Karl Marx.

The study takes the following actions:

- Find textual texts that illustrate ritualised worship, societal control, and the repression of dissent.
- Apply Marxist theory to your analysis of these sections, paying particular attention to ideas like false consciousness, alienation, and the ideological state machinery.
- Expand the study by incorporating ideas from Zuboff on surveillance capitalism, Baudrillard on hyperreality, and Foucault on disciplinary authority.
- Make connections between textual results and current events to demonstrate how Forster's critique is still applicable to contemporary digital and capitalist systems.

This method offers a multi-layered reading that places the story in the early 20th century and as a foreboding criticism of modern technology capitalism by fusing textual interpretation with theoretical application.

Research Gap

Fewer studies clearly read the Machine as a Marxist metaphor for the capitalist superstructure and ideological machinery, despite the fact that *The Machine Stops* has been extensively analysed as a dystopian critique of technological dependence. Fewer studies directly relate Forster's story to contemporary ideas of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) and hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994), despite the fact that existing literature frequently emphasises technological alienation or loss of human interaction (Seed, 1991; Parrinder, 1979). In order to bridge that

divide, this study combines Marxist analysis with modern critical theory to investigate how the Machine uses intellectual control and commodification to impose compliance and conformity. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent in the current digital capitalism environment.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does Forster's portrayal of the Machine align with Marxist ideas of false consciousness, alienation, and ideological control?
2. How does the Machine enforce social order through surveillance, ritual, and mediated communication as an ideological and economic apparatus?
3. How can Forster's criticism of technology reliance be related to modern digital systems and platform capitalism using ideas like hyperreality and surveillance capitalism?

Introduction

The Machine Stops, a 1909 short story by E.M. Forster, has frequently been hailed for its hauntingly prescient foreshadowing of contemporary technology, such as distant lectures, instant messaging, and almost complete automation. Beyond its foretelling of technology dependence, however, the narrative presents a nuanced and comprehensive critique of intellectual conformity, institutional control, and capitalist ideology. This essay contends that Forster's Machine functions as a symbolic capitalist superstructure that both provides solace and imposes ideological obedience, making it much more than a nightmarish apparatus.

This study explores how the Machine reproduces social order, alienates people, and turns critical thought into passive consumption through the prism of Marxist literary theory and ideas from theorists like Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Shoshana Zuboff, and Jean Baudrillard. Characters such as Kuno and Vashti highlight the conflict between human resistance and ideological compliance. This study shows that Forster's criticism is still very relevant today by placing the Machine in modern settings that are characterised by surveillance capitalism, algorithmic control, and digital alienation. In its conclusion, the paper argues that *The Machine Stops* is more of a critique of technical or economic institutions that promise freedom while producing compliance and intellectual apathy than it is a warning against technology.

Analysis

E.M. Forster's story, *The Machine Stops*, gained significance in the post-industrial and digital age. The narrative is often hailed for its technological vision, showing automation, surveillance, and distant communication decades before these technologies were commonplace. However, it is also a complex indictment of intellectual homogeneity, control structures, and capitalist ideology. According to this interpretation, the machine functions in Forster's story as a metaphorical capitalist superstructure that governs behaviour, thought, and social order rather than only as a representation of technological dependence. Through an analysis of the story's themes, characters, and ramifications for the modern world, we reveal how the Machine is a comprehensive system of economic and ideological control that enforces intellectual uniformity under the pretence of efficiency and advancement.

In Marxist theory, the superstructure comprises the cultural, ideological, and institutional expressions that reinforce the economic base of a society. In *The Machine Stops*, the machine

embodies both the means of production and the ideological framework that ensures the population's obedience. Everything from knowledge acquisition and communication to religion and aesthetics is mediated through the machine. The inhabitants, isolated in underground cells, no longer produce anything meaningful or engage in labor; they merely consume information, services, and comforts supplied by the Machine. This echoes Marx's concept of alienation, where individuals are estranged from the products of their labor, from nature, from each other, and ultimately from themselves.

The narrative depicts a society where the system absorbs human agency. The Machine creates a false consciousness, a state in which individuals are unable to acknowledge their own oppression, much like contemporary capitalism. The people love, trust, and even revere the Machine, which is upheld by consensual consent rather than explicit oppression or violence. This is comparable to how capitalism frequently uses individualism, convenience, and consumer choice to pass off control as freedom. Forster's dystopian society is notable for its standardisation of information. Although all thoughts are repeated, pre-approved, and machine-moderated, citizens think they are participating in intellectual activities. Vashti, the protagonist of the story, takes great satisfaction in providing "lectures" from the comfort of her cell, but her arguments are shallow, repetitive, and lacking in critical analysis. As she states, "There aren't really any first-hand ideas." They are merely echoes,

This intellectual stagnation is an indication of what Louis Althusser refers to as the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which consists of establishments (such as the media and educational system) that propagate the ideology of the governing class. The machine replaced autonomous inquiry in Forster's universe with a limited information flow that fosters inactivity. Even resistance is pre-programmed into the system as a form of iniquity, an argument that is easily pathologised and disregarded rather than posing a real threat. Kuno, Vashti's rebellious son, serves as a foil to this intellectual conformity. His curiosity about the surface world and his emotional hunger for direct experience position him as the Marxist revolutionary figure, one who attempts to break through the ideological fog. Kuno's insistence that "we must get back to the Earth" is a plea not just for physical freedom but for spiritual and intellectual liberation.

The inhabitants' adoration of the Machine reflects Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, in which social structures and power dynamics are projected onto material objects and processes. The machine is not merely used; it is deified. It has a Book of the Machine, doctrines, rituals, and taboos. To question its authority is heretical. Forster notes, "You mustn't say anything against the Machine." This careless veneration demonstrates how the system is often elevated to a hallowed thing by capitalist ideology. The story foreshadows neoliberalism's traits, like algorithmic control, individual privatisation, and the opacity of power structures, even though it was written before the neoliberal movement. People in Forster's world have given up their freedom for ease, their inventiveness for efficiency, and their social ties for security. By doing this, they depict a society where veneration of the system takes the place of belief in human action.

The machine upholds order by isolating itself rather than by uniting. Every person lives alone, and screens and other gadgets serve as a medium for communication. People view physical contact as repulsive and even harmful. Marxist conceptions of urban industrial life, in which people become estranged from their communities and identities in addition to their Jobs are consistent with this. The way that capitalist institutions discourage emotional and physical intimacy in favour of hyper-efficiency and control is reflected in Vashti's fear of firsthand experience and her terror at Kuno's bodily resistance. This reflects contemporary feelings of digital alienation, in which screen-mediated communication takes the place of community and technical ease breeds emotional detachment.

Big Tech ecosystems, such as Google, Amazon, Meta, and others, that concurrently offer infrastructure, content, communication, and data-driven governance can be interpreted as a forerunner to Forster's Machine in the twenty-first century. Today's platform capitalism, in which algorithms filter information and mould perception, is reflected in the Machine's function in structuring life. According to Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism and Michel Foucault's, Forster's inhabitants unwittingly participate in a surveillance society. Similar to modern social media users, they are monitored, forecasted, and prodded in the interest of service and optimisation. Their quest for efficiency and fear of discomfort are the driving forces behind their voluntary adoption of conformity. Furthermore, a fundamental contradiction of capitalism is highlighted by the machine's collapse at the end of the story: it promises unending progress but is not sustainable. The machine's eventual collapse reveals the system's fragility and the extent to which mankind had lost its ability to be resilient, form communities, and exercise critical thought.

The Machine as the Superstructure of Capitalism

According to Marx and Engels (1970), the Machine serves as both an intellectual superstructure and an economic foundation. Marx's idea of alienation is reflected in the fact that citizens consume lectures and services rather than creating anything significant (Marx, 1844). As demonstrated by Vashti's conviction that "first hand ideas do not really exist," the Machine's promise of ease obscures the loss of agency and creativity (Forster, 1909). This is similar to capitalist civilisations where freedom is a front for passive consumerism (Eagleton, 1991). E.M. Forster creates the Machine in *The Machine Stops* not just as a cutting-edge technological tool but also as a symbolic embodiment of the superstructure, as defined by Marx and Engels (1970): the institutional, cultural, and ideological frameworks that support and uphold society's economic foundation. According to Marxist theory, the prevailing economic system is legitimised and people's consciousness is shaped to accept it as normal by the superstructure, which both reflects and reinforces the material conditions of production. This function is embodied by the Machine in two ways. First, it centralises and controls all kinds of social production and consumption, dictating how everyday life is organised, including housing, communication, education, and entertainment. Instead of working creatively and productively, citizens now live as passive consumers of the stuff that the Machine produces and disseminates. Marx's (1959) concept of alienation, in which people are cut off from the results of their labour, from one

another, and eventually from their own capacity for critical thought and creativity, is reflected in this change. Second, by persuading people that their solitary, mediated lifestyles are indicative of advancement and enlightenment, the Machine creates false awareness. The epitome of ideological conformity, Vashti rejects her son Kuno's wish for firsthand experience as heresy because she cannot fathom a world apart from the Machine's reasoning. Marxist criticisms of capitalist ideology, which normalise structural injustices and hide exploitation under claims of comfort, efficiency, and progress, are reflected in this. Furthermore, by establishing what constitutes acceptable thought and penalising departure, the Machine serves as a tool of intellectual control. Lectures that rarely generate new ideas—rather, they essentially repeat what the Machine has already approved—are the centre of citizens' intellectual lives. This mechanised knowledge reproduction is a reflection of capitalist societies, where prevailing ideas maintain their hold by stifling opposition, restricting creativity, and influencing conversation. In modern terms, the Machine foreshadows the surveillance capitalism Zuboff (2019) theorises and the platform capitalism outlined by academics like Srnicek (2017). A few number of corporate players now hold unparalleled economic and ideological power thanks to the centralisation of communication, trade, and information flow provided by modern digital infrastructures. Similar to the Machine, these technologies incorporate surveillance, commodification, and subtle behavioural control while offering ease and freedom. Finally, Forster's Machine shows how human-serving systems can develop into totalising superstructures that reshape society, stifle free thought, and maintain their own power through ideology. Freedom is threatened not just by technology but also by the economic and ideological structures that influence how technology is created, applied, and revered. Forster's story delivers a timeless warning by criticising the Machine as a capitalist superstructure: when systems demand compliance in return for comfort, they run the risk of turning free people into passive, alienated subjects whose world is defined and constrained by the very structures they established.

Ideological control and intellectual conformity

The Machine centralises culture and education by using Althusser's ISA, standardising ideas and suppressing opposition (Althusser, 2001). Instead of questioning preexisting beliefs, Vashti's teachings serve to strengthen them. Kuno, who represents critical consciousness, on the other hand, looks for truth outside the Machine's dogma. However, because of the way that systems pathologise dissent, his resistance is dismissed as hazardous. E.M. Forster eloquently demonstrates in *The Machine Stops* how a dominant system monopolises the means of communication and cultural output, leading to intellectual conformity. This dynamic is quite similar to Louis Althusser's (2001) idea of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which consists of non-coercive behaviours and institutions like religion, media, and education that maintain social cohesiveness without resorting to overt violence and covertly replicate dominant ideology. The Machine serves as the ultimate ISA in and of itself. It controls residents' thoughts, questions, and values in addition to the day-to-day operations. Vashti and other citizens deliver and attend quick lectures on "second-hand ideas," seldom questioning the framework that governs their intellectual environment. This supports Althusser's assertion that ideology functions best when

it is ingrained in daily life, marginalising other ideas while making some seem "natural." Forster's story illustrates how intellectual uniformity results from this kind of ideological control. People confuse repetition and recital with real inquiry; ritualised intake of pre-approved knowledge takes the place of originality. Kuno is viewed as dangerous and even insane when he dared to express autonomous thought, challenging the Machine's infallibility and pursuing firsthand experience of the world. This is in line with Marxist criticisms of false consciousness, which hold that because ideology distorts language and perception, people are unable to recognise their oppression. Additionally, citizens are psychologically disciplined by the Machine, which enforces the fear of dissent internally rather than externally. In addition to being social, Vashti's disgust at Kuno's disobedience is profoundly intellectual; she finds it impossible to envision a world free from the Machine's rule. This illustrates how successful ideological control is because it produces people who voluntarily self-censor and absorb the reasoning of the system until opposition becomes unimaginable. Forster's portrayal speaks to the function of algorithm-driven platforms in the modern digital age, which favour particular discourses, mould cultural norms, and ignore complexity or opposing viewpoints. Echoing Althusser's theory that ideology not only distorts reality but also shapes the very conditions of perception and debate, what seems to be a free flow of information is actually shaped by economic and ideological interests. In the end, Forster's tale serves as a warning that strong systems, acting via the normalisation of thinking and experience, are more effective than censorship or fear in enforcing intellectual uniformity. The Machine guarantees that obedience is chosen rather than coerced by turning the quest for knowledge into a ritual that upholds systemic stability rather than critical awareness. This process is as applicable to Forster's imagined world as it is to modern societies shaped by digital capitalism and algorithmic governance.

Commodity Fetishism, Ritual, and Worship

Marx's commodity fetishism is demonstrated by the Machine becoming hallowed (Marx, 1844). The Book of the Machine is revered by the populace, and maintenance procedures acquire a sacred connotation (Forster, 1909). A false consciousness that keeps individuals from realising their own dependency is produced by this faith in the Machine, which conceals its coercive force (Spufford, 1990).

E.M. Forster skilfully demonstrates in *The Machine Stops* how technical systems can transform from useful instruments into objects of almost holy devotion. Karl Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, in which manufactured goods are given social authority and seem to have inherent value separate from the human labour and social relationships that created them, is strongly related to this change (Marx, 1959). Originally created to fulfil human needs, the Machine is worshipped by the populace, who compose the Book of the Machine, repeat its lessons, and plan their lives around its upkeep and customs. This ceremonial adoration illustrates how ideology works covertly to compel submission. By integrating ideology into routine activities, institutions—including those that appear to be secular or technological—shape behaviour, belief, and cognition, according to Louis Althusser's (2001) theory of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). Daily routines, such as clicking buttons to call lecturers, mechanically repeating

well-known concepts, and denouncing "unmechanical" thinking, serve as ideological acts in Forster's narrative. They normalise the power of the Machine and portray opposition as dangerous or out of place. Because they revere the very system that controls and limits them, citizens have a psychological and spiritual affinity with the Machine. Vashti's dedication is founded on faith that is bolstered by societal consensus and frequent repetition rather than a logical evaluation of the Machine's advantages. The Machine is portrayed as a nearly all-powerful, all-pervading god whose operations are unquestionable, reflecting the false consciousness (Marx, 1959) that prevents enslaved people from realising their true state of oppression. This change serves as another example of how systems can translate ritual into dogma. Rather than critically analysing the effects of the Machine, residents participate in performative rituals that mimic intellectual work while obstructing true cognition, such as lecturing and repeating statements that have been authorised. Ideology, as Althusser argues, works because it is lived subconsciously; worshippers see their faith as natural fact or common sense rather than ideology. The monetisation of digital platforms and gadgets, which frequently become more than just utilities but also objects of identity, prestige, and even devotion, is reminiscent of Forster's portrayal in the modern world. In addition to fervently defending corporate brands and queuing for new models, users also structure their daily lives around algorithmically driven routines like publishing updates, checking notifications, and keeping up a digital "presence." The unquestioning adoration of the Machine by the populace is reflected in this digital ritualism, which both demonstrates how performative practice and shared beliefs can make control systems self-sustaining. In the end, Forster demonstrates that the threat is not just the Machine's technological prowess but also the way people start to revere the system. Citizens give up critical thinking and agency by ritualising acquiescence and normalising reliance, changing from being the Machine's creators to its obedient servants. This critique, which warns that any system—technological, economic, or ideological—can turn repressive when dedication takes the place of critical analysis, is still incredibly important today.

Monitoring, Control, and Mediated Reality

The Machine upholds order through monitoring and isolation, which is explained by Foucault's disciplinary power (Foucault, 1995). How mediated interactions take the place of real experience is made clear by Baudrillard's hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994). By promising efficiency and personalisation, contemporary technologies such as Forster's Machine commodify human behaviour, as demonstrated by Zuboff's surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019).

Forster creates a universe in *The Machine Stops* where discipline and surveillance are so ingrained in day-to-day existence that they seem normal, even helpful. This foreshadows Michel Foucault's (1995) idea of contemporary disciplinary power, which is a type of control that functions through ongoing monitoring, normalisation, and internalised conformity rather than overt repression. By confining people in identical hexagonal cells, the Machine imposes discipline while eliminating any chance for unplanned group resistance or outright human solidarity. The Machine dictates the rituals that Vashti must follow on a daily basis, and any departure from these expectations, like Kuno's wish to travel to the Earth's surface, is greeted with societal

derision in addition to official rejection. This illustrates Foucault's theory that power works best when it is internalised and diffused: people control themselves out of dread of upending the system they have grown to respect. The Machine mediates all facets of reality, even when it is physically isolated. Instead than interacting with one another in person, citizens only communicate via mechanical tubes and bright screens. Jean Baudrillard (1994) refers to this dependence on mediated experience as hyperreality, a condition where simulations and representations supplant or even replace the actual. The triumph of mediated reality over genuine presence is illustrated by Vashti's revulsion at direct experience—her conviction that meeting Kuno in person is archaic and repulsive. This mediated environment serves an ideological purpose in addition to influencing personal preferences. Ideology, according to Louis Althusser (2001), is not just about overt teachings but also about the customs and systems that influence what people consider to be typical or natural. By structuring language, beliefs, and even emotional reactions, the Machine turns into the ultimate Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), guaranteeing obedience without overt acts of violence. Systemic obedience is transformed into spiritual devotion as a result of citizens' worship of the Machine, represented by their solemn lectures and the Book of the Machine. Forster's portrayal strikes a deep chord with algorithmic surveillance and digital mediation in the modern world. Contemporary platforms constantly gather, examine, and profit from personal data, influencing people's behaviour and the material they view—often without anybody noticing. According to Zuboff (2019), this surveillance capitalism normalises commercial intrusion into private life, encourages self-censorship, and incentivises self-censorship in order to enforce discipline. Similar to Forster's universe, users may view these technologies as instruments of empowerment, but they may be blind to the ways in which they stifle disagreement and mould thought. Therefore, *The Machine Stops* reveals a timeless truth: when monitoring and mediation systems become totalising, they undermine direct experience, stifle critical agency, and turn people from engaged members of society into submissive, orderly objects. Forster's tale serves as a reminder that genuine freedom is impossible in a world where life is governed by structures intended to subtly mould and restrain the human spirit in addition to observing it.

Contemporary Significance

Platform capitalism, in which digital platforms centralise production, distribution, and consumption, is foreseen in Forster's Machine. Citizens' mediated lives are similar to the algorithm-driven social media and data platforms of today. Zuboff (2019) echoes Forster's criticism of conformity masquerading as freedom by arguing that users feel autonomy while systems subtly influence choices. Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) theory of surveillance capitalism, which describes how digital platforms profit from human experience by gathering behavioural data, forecasting behaviours, and subtly influencing user behaviour, shows one startling similarity. The residents of Forster voluntarily cede their autonomy to the Machine in exchange for its assurance of convenience, efficiency, and safety. In a similar vein, automated curation, tailored suggestions, and the convenience of continuous connectedness are traded off by contemporary users for privacy and independence. Many people now find it almost impossible

to fathom living without digital networks, just as Vashti cannot imagine life outside the Machine. This illustrates the ideological potency of systems that pass off control as empowerment. The narrative also foreshadows what Baudrillard (1994) refers to as hyperreality, a state in which direct reality is replaced by mediated experiences. Today's reliance on social media, video calls, and carefully managed digital feeds is foreshadowed by Vashti's distaste for actual travel and her preference to watch Kuno through the Machine's screen. Forster illustrates the loss of authenticity and depth that results from the abstraction and commercialisation of interactions that once needed presence. Like Forster's citizenry, modern people run the risk of becoming passive observers of simulations and pictures rather than engaged participants in the real world. According to Marxist theory, the Machine is a combination of technological infrastructure and an ideological superstructure that stifles opposition and standardises knowledge (Marx & Engels). These days, international platforms frequently work in a similar way, promoting some discourses, sifting others, and influencing what seems legitimate or "trending." Algorithm-driven information bubbles that promote conformity and stifle critical thinking run the risk of displacing intellectual variety. Forster's inhabitants take great satisfaction in delivering lectures that are ultimately repetitious and superficial; this is a recurring theme in the performative digital discourse of today. In addition to technological infrastructure, the Machine represents an ideological superstructure that standardises knowledge and stifles opposition, according to Marxist theory (Marx & Engels). Global platforms today frequently operate in a similar manner, promoting some discourses, censoring others, and influencing what is legitimate or "trending." There is a chance that algorithmically generated content bubbles that promote conformity and stifle critical thinking will supplant intellectual diversity. It is a common occurrence in today's performative digital discourse that Forster's citizens take delight in delivering lectures that are ultimately repetitious and superficial. In the end, *The Machine Stops* cautions that if systems that promise advancement and connection are not critically evaluated, they can turn into tools of control, alienation, and intellectual apathy. Forster's message is more relevant now than ever in a world of smart devices, algorithmic curation, and pervasive data tracking: human freedom and creativity cannot flourish in a world where automated convenience takes the place of critical thinking and where systems that were once created to benefit humanity are now worshipped. Forster's writing pushes readers to reconsider the systems they live in and to regain power beyond the alluring but ultimately constricting comforts of digital capitalism by exposing these modern connections.

Conclusion:

The Machine Stops is still a potent indictment of intellectual passivity, systematic control, and capitalist dogma. This study has demonstrated how the Machine represents both comfort and control, transforming originality into ritual, using Marxist and cultural theories. False consciousness is represented by Vashti, and brittle resistance is symbolised by Kuno. The fall of the Machine highlights the perils of emancipation-promising but worship-demanding systems. Forster's tale serves as a reminder that genuine freedom necessitates human solidarity and critical thinking in an era of algorithmic control and digital surveillance. The narrative well

exemplifies Louis Althusser's theory of the Ideological State Apparatus: the Machine moulds people's perceptions, thoughts, and emotions, ingraining conformity into routine behaviours until systemic obedience is internalised and invisible. This interpretation is strengthened by Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power: people self-police their interactions and ideas because they are afraid of departing from the Machine's standards. In the meantime, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality shows how mediated interactions take the place of direct experience, rendering the real world unthinkable and undesired. Vashti's unwavering conviction and Kuno's brittle opposition highlight the human costs of ideological control: the repression of imagination, curiosity, and genuine connection. In the era of surveillance capitalism, where digital platforms centralise authority, monetise behaviour, and subtly mould cultural norms while posing as tools of empowerment, this tension is still remarkably relevant (Zuboff, 2019).

More than just a story about technological excess, Forster's *The Machine Stops* serves as a literary cautionary tale about the allure of systems that require obedience yet offer convenience. The story criticises not only the invisible machinery of capitalism but also the machinery of technology through its portrayal of idolatry, intellectual decline, and artificial uniformity. Marxist analysis of the Machine reveals that it is a metaphor for capitalist ideology, an all-pervading power that relies on ritualised obedience, alienation, and delusion to maintain itself. Characters like Kuno embody the perilous but essential road of resistance, curiosity, and rebirth, whereas Vashti represents the complacent beneficiaries of this system. Forster's story challenges us to consider the following important question in an era dominated by algorithmic thinking, data capitalism, and screen-mediated life: What happens when the system we revere is the one that causes us to lose sight of what it means to be human?

Forster's criticism ultimately targets the economic and ideological structures that turn instruments into objects of worship and compliance rather than just technology. The Machine Stops cautions that when institutions value control and commodification over critical thinking and real experience, intellectual freedom and human dignity cannot endure. By showing how ritual may turn into ideology and comfort become a means of discipline, Forster's story nevertheless challenges readers today to think critically about the institutions they rely on and to envision a future other than one of acquiescence.

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