

# The *Eigenwelt* of Technoculture

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## ABSTRACT

The discourse on technoculture reflects the relationship between humans and technology. Such a relationship is built upon an understanding that humans need technology to increase efficiency. In fact, technocultural discourse produces a way to see and understand the world from a different angle. Up to today, the technocultural life world remains largely unexplored.

### Key Words:

•*Technoculture* •*Technology* •*Invention* •*Discourse* •*Being-in-the-world* •*New media*  
•*'Newness'* •*Eigenwelt*.

Today, technology is ubiquitous. Ever since the prehistory, humans have developed tools to meet survival needs. As civilizations move on, an abundance of innovations are produced. The relationship between humans and tools, or technology, becomes over time tighter. Humans have to adapt continuously to the logic of technology. However, the human-technology-world is open to further investigations from different perspectives. As an alternative, existential psychology is an approach that offers an analytical perspective to investigate the position of the 'world' in the technocultural discourse. And such an alternative reading enriches the discourse on being-in-the-world.

**The technoculture, new media and 'newness'**

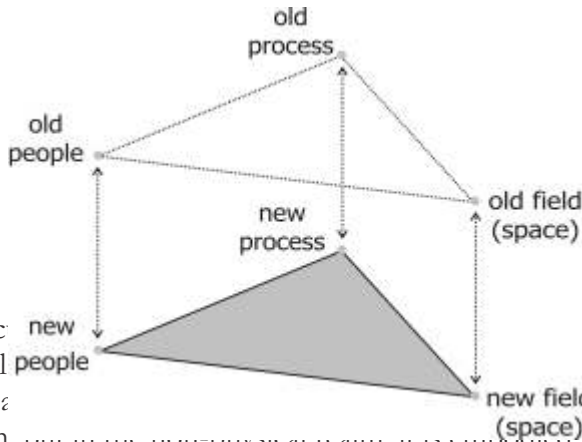
*Taz 'Rat' Finch: How many languages do you speak?*  
*Dr. Conrad Zimsky: Five, actually.*  
*Taz 'Rat' Finch: I speak one. One Zero One Zero Zero. With that I could steal your money, your secrets, your sexual fantasies, your whole life. In any country, any time, any place I want. We multitask like you breathe. I couldn't think as slow as you if I tried.*  
*(The Core, Paramount Pictures, 2003)*

The above dialog, although it has been taken from a fictional movie, reflects a situation that frequently occurs in our contemporary society, i.e. the successful existence of digital technology apparently relativizes the realm of human life worlds. The above dialog illustrates a situation according to technocultural issues. Technocultural issues emerge as a consequence of intensive usage of technology in everyday life. In fact, our society is already technocultural, as most of us are well acquainted with technological tools. However, not all products of technology form a technoculture. There should be a careful investigation of basic criterions of technological products that could be potentially significant for a technocultural discourse. The occurrence of a technocultural discourse requires the existence of new technology that contributes significantly to everyday life. Lelia Green notes that technoculture emerges from the usage of information technology, which changes human perception of space and time.<sup>2</sup> Green emphasizes the rise of technoculture in the last two decades, especially when the revolution of communication and information dissemination through computer networks began. Harold A. Innis and Marshall McLuhan argue that technology for communication directly influences the perception and the importance of space and time. On the other hand, Lars Løvlie argues that the invention of printing technology already lead to the above described technocultural symptom.<sup>3</sup> This argument is based on the fact that printing technology plays an important role in shifting the human perception of writing and language. Løvlie notes that from the mid fifteenth century onwards, printing governed our relationships to the word and transformed our relationship to language, for example by extending an oral tradition to a written one, a revolution in itself.

Technoculture is neither a mainstream culture nor a sub-culture; it is a cultural situation that accompanies both mainstream and sub-culture. Hence, technocultural issues can exist in a traditional culture as well as in a modern culture. What is implied above is the 'newness' of technology. It is the 'newness' that matters, which will eventually play an important role in a

technocultural discourse. In a broad interpretation, the 'newness' of objects is the alternative value of things that make them different. This 'newness' can embrace almost all attributes of an object: from visual appearance to the functional mechanism. It is the latent telic of technology, which also determines the degree of 'newness' in any kind of new technology. However, the 'newness' is not solely associated with such attributions. What was above referred to by Lelia Green and Lars Løvlie, presupposes the increasing complexity in contemporary life. Hence, the 'newness' also concerns how human beings see the world through technology and then how we determine our existence. In this case, the 'newness' lies in the 'newness' of human experience as well as consciousness. The 'newness' then equals with ramifications by which the complexity of life-experiences increases. The invention of the bicycle created a new experience of traveling and it increased the complexity compared to the experience of walking. The invention of machine-driven transportation, such as the motorcycle or the automobile, produces a new experience of traveling compared to muscle-powered transportation modes, such as the bicycle.

Today's new media illuminates this situation. The new media can be considered as digital media,<sup>4</sup> it is the existence of bits (0 and 1) that contribute to the elaboration of the human consciousness of life world through the usage of digital technology. Through this 'language', the virtual world is constructed and exists as a counter-part to the 'real' real world. As Marshall McLuhan notes, the new media are not so much ways for us to relate to the old, 'real' world; they are the real world and they reshape the old world.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in the twenty-first century, civilized urbanity will be grounded upon the flow of information, electronic connectivity and intelligent management.<sup>6</sup> It can be concluded that the current life world will flourish by the negotiation with the world and digital technology. Furthermore, the digital media, which allows the flow of information, the electronic connectivity and the intelligent management (the intelligent working process),<sup>7</sup> should be seen as the process of creating a complexity where a new paradigm in life overlaps the existing one, as presupposed by McLuhan. Contemporary technocultural society will have to keep on negotiating with the logics of digital technology to obey the latent telic of digital technology.<sup>8</sup> Henceforth, the situation of this overlapping reality is illustrated in figure 1:



Through individual occurrence, individual will occupy a 'new' body, space

embodied) However, this will occupy a embodied in the

physical realm, but in the non-physical realm, it is embodied in the mind or cognitive dimension. Moreover, the realm of digital technology seems to emphasize what Bruce Sterling calls the 'Line of Empire'.<sup>9</sup> In a broad sense, the 'Line of Empire' is a 'boundary' that is created by technology. It is a sort of a techno-standardized realm that can only be entered by those who possess some standard capacities 'demanded' by technology itself.

**Three modes of the 'world'**

Within the field of existential psychology, analysts note that there are three modes of the world, which characterize the human as being in the world.<sup>10</sup> The three modes of the world are *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt*.

*Umwelt* literally means 'the world around'; this is the biological world, i.e. the natural environment. *Umwelt* is waiting to be anticipated by humans. In this sense, there is a distance between humans and the surrounding world; this distance emphasizes that neither humans nor the world possess different characteristics. As an illustration: when we visit a new place, we feel strange and alienated. We feel the distance between the surrounding environment and ourselves. In this case, adaptation and/or anticipation will be the only processes that will help us to synchronize with the natural the world. In another context, culture, as we commonly use it, can be described as *Umwelt*.<sup>11</sup>

*Mitwelt* literally means 'with the world'; this is the world of interrelationships, where human beings put themselves into the world. Hence, the world is not merely interpreted as biological or natural environment. The way we try to familiarize ourselves with a new

environment may become the first step to a mutual relationship with the environment. Here, we begin to internalize the environment, i.e. we give meaning to the environment. The world is seen as a system where humans can establish a relationship with the objects and attach meaning to them.<sup>12</sup> Human beings may begin to experience their existence as a part of a systemic object constellation within the *Mitwelt*.

*Eigenwelt* means 'one's own world', *Eigenwelt* is an idiosyncratic world; it is established based upon the meanings as well as interrelationships of each individual and the world.<sup>13</sup> If each individual experiences the world differently, then the *Eigenwelt* will be embodied with references to particular experiences. In everyday life, we may encounter and experience the same situation. However, the sensation of this repetition of everydayness will deliver a different sensation in each individual. With regard to episodic memory, someone will enjoy the sensation of sitting on a couch, to have an afternoon coffee break while staring at an abstract painting hanging on the wall as a spiritual refreshment, while another will see such an activity as meaningless. In short, *Eigenwelt* is the peak consciousness of our own interrelationships with the world.

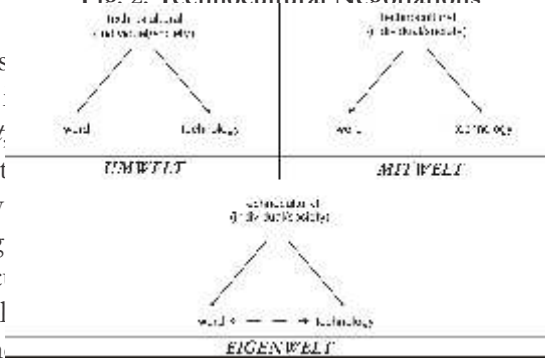
Human beings do not experience these modes in phases. These three modes of the world are actually inseparable and are intertwined with each other as a solid world.

### **Towards technocultural *Eigenwelt***

Based on the previous brief investigation on technoculture, it is obvious that the technocultural discourse can be contextualized within each of the three modes of the world from the field of existential psychology. In this case, the technocultural discourse will be equated with the process of negotiation with the world towards the achievement of an *Eigenwelt*. Through technology, humans do not only establish relationships with the world, but also with technology as a 'new world' that is only owned by the user of technology.<sup>14</sup> Since humans will always deal with internalization and externalization processes,<sup>15</sup> the negotiating processes of individuals with the world and technology will never cease. In short, for technoculture, the negotiation processes with either the world or technology is a simultaneous process, not a linear scheme of human-technology-world. Once technoculture successfully integrates the world and technology, then finally an *Eigenwelt* is achieved.

The process of technocultural negotiations exists as *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* begins to internalize the technology giving meaning to the world. At the final phase, technocultural relationship of the human-technology-world can understand technology, the contextualized technology and the world. In other words, a technoculture has to reach simultaneously the *Eigenwelt* quality with the technology and *Eigenwelt* with the world; or, at least, reach the *Eigenwelt* with technology and then *Eigenwelt* with the world.

Fig. 2: Technocultural Negotiations



starts when a world, which is a body. Then, a person begins to internalize technology and by doing so, the world. At the final phase, the relationship of the human-technology-world can understand technology, the contextualized

**Conclusion**

The relationship between human-technology-world is not only a practical relation in which technology mediates so that humans can play a particular role in the world. In fact, it is the synergic relationship that will help human beings to discover both technology and the world towards the full embodiment or *Eigenwelt*, i.e. the peak consciousness of the world.

**End Notes:**

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<sup>2</sup> Lelia Green, *Communication, Technology, and Society* (London: Sage, 2003), xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> Lars Løvlie, "Technocultural Education," *International Journal of Media, Technology and Lifelong Learning* 2, nr.1, <[http://www.seminar.net/images/stories/vol2\\_issue1/files/lars\\_lovlie techno\\_edu.pdf](http://www.seminar.net/images/stories/vol2_issue1/files/lars_lovlie techno_edu.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Flew, *New Media* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan* (Ontario: Anansi, 1995), 272.

<sup>6</sup> W.J. Mitchell, *E-topia* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 155.

<sup>7</sup> Digital media encompasses forms of media content that combine and integrate data, text, sound and images of all kinds, which are stored in digital formats and are increasingly distributed through networks such as those based upon broadband fiber-optic cables, satellites and microwave transmission systems. Flew, *New Media*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Don Ihde notes that the latent telic of technology has a tendency to determine the direction of scientific research movement. Francis Lim, *Filsafat Teknologi* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2008), 126. In a broad interpretation, this idea on latent telic of technology may also be contextualized in the understanding that technology possesses a tendency of utilization in everyday life. Hence, it is related to the notion of 'medium is the message' offered by Marshall McLuhan: "the form of each medium is associated with a different arrangement, or ratio, among the senses, which creates new form of awareness." McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> B. Sterling, *Shaping Things* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 8-14.

<sup>10</sup> Rollo May, *The Discovery of Being* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 126.

<sup>11</sup> One common definition of culture derives from an understanding that culture is formulated from the anticipation efforts of human beings towards the environment. In this sense, the world may appear as the reflexive field for humans before he or she produces a culture.

<sup>12</sup> May notes: "For world includes the structure of meaning which is designed by the interrelationship of the persons in it. Thus the meaning of the group for me depends in part upon how I put myself into it." In this sense, the *Mitwelt* concerns the meaningful interrelationship aspect of objects within it, including humans and objects. May, *The Discovery of Being*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Eigenwelt* may appear as the result of human relationships with the *Mitwelt*, as May notes: "but it is not merely a subjective, inner experience; it is rather the basis on which we see the real world in its true perspective, the basis on which we relate." Hence, it can be understood that there will be no exact similarity of *Eigenwelt* for everyone. It is the world of our own, which derives from our own perception, experience or consciousness of the world. May, *The Discovery of Being*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall McLuhan notes that the new media are not bridges between humans and nature; they are nature. If this new media is considered as tools or technology in a very broad sense, then the term 'world' for technocultural society might be connoted as technology and as biological, natural environment. McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, 272.

<sup>15</sup> F. Budi Hardiman emphasizes that human beings will form a physical nature (a

nature outside one's body), which is known as the objectification process or externalization and the result will be an objective reality. F. Budi Hardiman, *Melampaui Positivisme dan Modernitas* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2003), 91.

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