



Seeing possible new worlds by looking at the current world through different lenses

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[es] Mundos posibles en el mundo actual vistos a través de otros cristales

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The focus of this edition of *Teknokultura* is “Ethics and Emerging Technologies”; the intent to provoke questions such as “What kind of future do we want to create”? Reading through this issue is like viewing our current world through a kaleidoscope – seeing the multihued, dynamic variations or maybe even seeing multiple versions. This edition is evocative of Cicero’s phrase “*Omne corpus mutabile est [Every body is subject to change]*” The law is no different, but it does take significant time for laws to evolve and catch up with social norms. Cultural change eventually leads to legal change; the power of the law is that it can actually shape behavior by creating social norms that people use to measure the morality and worth of their actions.

Since the first known code of laws – from *Ur-Nammu code* (written circa 1800 BC) to *Hammurabi’s code* (written about 300 years later) to Roman law to the Canon Law of the Middle Ages, the laws categorized items and entities into a dichotomy: persons vs property. This dichotomy reflected the medieval worldview, where everything in the universe had a divinely preordained place in a hierarchical order. This was based on the pre-Copernican and pre-Galilean convictions that the earth was the center of the universe, and that the stars and the sun and the moon all revolved around the earth; and that humanity was the apple of the Creator’s eye. If you were a person, you had rights; if you were property, you did not, and you could be bought, sold, discarded, and treated in whatever manner your owner deemed fit. Women, children, and slaves were considered property, rather than persons, starting with Aristotle.

Fortunately, humanity’s morals and laws have evolved, albeit slowly. American jurisprudence has grappled with the question of who is or is not a legal person from its very founding to today. The traditional person-property dichotomy forged in canon law and common law started giving way as the courts faced unique challenges in

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the new world. While the United States pushed forward to expand legal rights by outlawing slavery through the enactment of 13th and 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the pull to give economic interests greater power over individuals and society has been a countervailing influence. In a consummate law review article, Professor Dale Rubin (2009, p. 526) explains how the 1886 case of Supreme Court Case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* was a turning point. In the head-note of the report, Chief Justice Waite is quoted as saying:

The court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. *We are all of the opinion that it does* [emphasis added].

No rationale, no justification, no explanation, just a statement of opinion. Rubin (2009, p. 584) goes on to explain further:

The infamous holding in the Santa Clara case led not only to the exponential increase of corporate influence in American life but also, and more importantly, to the near elimination of the power of the state to regulate corporations in their exercise of First Amendment rights. Cases such as *Buckley*, *Bellotti*, and *Citizens United*, all of which unquestionably accept the “corporations as natural persons” mantra, have created a political atmosphere in which corporations can wield their financial power while the interests of the people has been relegated to the sidelines.

The result has been the expansion of powers and rights of an entity that has no expiration date – it is essentially immortal – without a corresponding increase in responsibilities. Currently, corporate law and governance is specifically designed to encourage corporations to pursue profit to the exclusion of other values. If an individual commits a crime, they can go to jail, lose their liberties. If a corporation breaks a law, commits a crime, engages in fraud, they get fined. In kindergarten, we teach our children if you make a mess, you clean it up; if you make a mistake, you apologize and make amends as best as you can; we teach our students the basic ethical principles of responsibility and accountability. And although ethics and law are not to be conflated, this glaring double standard that corporations can get away with things that individuals cannot, creates divisions and strife in society that are not sustainable.

Journals like *Teknokultura*, and particularly this edition, recognize that the world does not have to be this way; by tapping into human resilience and creativity, this issue challenges readers to create visions of a more just, equitable and regenerative world.

The opening piece by Javier de la Cueva phrases it: “se posibilitará un menor o mayor número de mundos posibles”. This article contains his proposal to rework cybersecurity protocols by demanding source codes (código fuente); he then argues that technological semiotic analysis may effectively result in three different “worlds”.

Seeing anew is also the theme of Steve Coulter’s imaginative thought-experiment: to think of young humans as cyborgs constantly under surveillance. Using the famous trope of Bentham and Foucault’s Panopticon, Coulter gives us a much-needed warning about “social control” allied with “corporate profit”.

Tackling capitalism head-on, Chris Gray, in his review of Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* employs the corporation imagined in Eggers's *The Circle*: Gray explains that this fictional company's "corporate principles are alive and metastasizing in Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple and beyond".

A similar concern about the over-use of social media connects "Feminist Standpoint on Social Media Sites and Internet Practices" by Ana Maria Gonzalez Ramos to Steve Coulter's concerns about control and profit. Ramos warns us that egobloggers and YouTubers can be categorized according to gender – and that gender stereotypes are much more prevalent than one might expect of young creative minds, that "patriarchy persists" even in what should be an area of personal freedom. Despite the ever-changing ecospace of social media, she finds the recurring persistence of stereotypes of old may reinforce the sexism and gender discrimination; she argues that a code of ethics is needed to effect positive change.

Taking a very different method but coming up with somewhat similar message, Laura Martínez-Jiménez, in "Post-machismo, gender violence, and opinion dynamics in digital media", discovers through data analysis that online comments about gender violence revealed that women are under-represented in Spain's media and that there is, in fact, online symbolic violence against women.

These arguments are balanced against "Submerged resistances: cartography of feminist technopolitics in Mexico," where Claudia Ivette Pedraza and César Augusto Rodríguez celebrate the emergence of digital technologies that are empowering Mexican women.

Taking on the recent move toward centralized, autocratic government, blockchains are offering an alternative currency and a new, decentralized decision-making model according to Christopher Tozzi. Blockchains' use of Proof-of-Work solutions to cryptographic puzzles amounts to a new paradigm – one that might possibly be used to develop decentralized, more democratic governance models. Andy Eric Castillo Patton reveals the conjunction of politics and technology is again the concern in a review of *Movimientos Sociales en el siglo XXI* which reveals the internal divisions within the progressive communities

Finally, back to thinking of "possible worlds": P.J. Manney makes a case for science fiction by claiming that it has been a driving force toward scientific advances (and simultaneously toward developing empathy with "alien" others) and at the same time that scientific advances have played a role in the creation of filmic and written narratives.

In sum, this edition of *Teknokultura* gives hope and cause of optimism – It serves as a reminder, as Martin Luther King (paraphrasing Unitarian minister Theodore Parker) said, "the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice" and that, together, we can create a better future.

References

- Rubin, D. (2010). Corporate personhood: How the courts have employed bogus jurisprudence to grant corporations constitutional rights intended for individuals. *QLR*, 28(2), 523-584.