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A FAUSTIAN EXCHANGE: WHAT IS TO BE HUMAN IN THE ERA OF UBIQUITOUS TECHNOLOGY?

Cultural visions of technology

Paradoxes of panoptic and interactive perspectives and methods

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Abstract The essential premise of the human-centered technology paradigm was clearly formulated by Howard Rosenbrock in the 1970s: technology should enrich rather than impoverish people's work and life conditions. The increasing influence of technology in modern societies has been seen by some as offering great promise for the future, but by others as creating the electronic surveillance and/or manipulation of human genes, minds and beliefs. This paper approaches technological worlds as cultural visions in order to discuss and reflect the paradoxical process of viewing technology as part of a hope for a more sustainable and human-centered future as well as part of an apocalypse of surveillance, violence and catastrophes.

1 Introduction

The intention of this paper is to approach technological worlds as cultural visions. The essential premise of the human-centered technology paradigm was clearly formulated by Howard Rosenbrock in the 1970s: technology should enrich rather than impoverish people's work and life conditions (Rosenbrock 2008/1980). This statement should be obvious to agree upon. But "enrichment" and "impoverishment" are still burning issues despite the

rapid development of technologies in production, and private and public services within education, healthcare, communication and transportation. The despair and violence of the depressed groups of people in European metropolis and cities have not been counteracted by advanced technological surveillance systems. Technology has enhanced the promise as offering great prosperity, but also surveillance, manipulation and annihilation of human genes, minds and lives. Recognizing the interconnectedness of our political, economic, social and environmental challenges, the context of developing and using new technology has changed. Cultural visions of technology, however, are still firmly rooted in images of control, prosperity and hope. But the reverse sides of these images are also present in form of metaphors of surveillance, exploitation and apocalyptic dreams of destruction and annihilation. They occur as paradoxical processes in our dreams, thoughts and actions in our everyday life as well as in scientific and political endeavors to meet the complex challenges of the world (Hanson 2011; Borup et al. 2006; Corbett 1998).

In this paper, especially two cultural visions of technology are presented and discussed, namely the panoptic and interactive visions. However, first the concept of cultural visions and related scenarios of the future are framed in order to be reflected more deeply during the process of paradoxes emerging throughout this paper.

2 Cultural visions

2.1 The concept

Cultural visions are shared constructs created through linguistic or visual acts. Their purpose is to articulate certain

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