Rachel Yu

PHIL 4380-90L

Angelika Potempa

Final Project

Nothing Left to Reveal

As we continue the trend of advancing technology, we have approached this

advancement with the question "what is next?" This can be seen in our intrigue and excitement

of what is yet to come but also in our fear and uncertainty of what will happen when we push the

limits of technology. Despite these concerns surrounding the increased influence and dependence

we have on technology, we continue to push forward with projects such as Tesla's self-driving

cars or making internet access more widely available, believing that such developments can

make life better for all. However, considering the experience caused by the COVID-19

pandemic, our daily lives have shifted even more so towards the use of technology as it is

recommended for the sake of safety. Prior to this event, technological and digital ways of

conducting one's daily routine could be seen as simply another option. However, with the need

for social distancing and quarantining, it was advertised as the preferred way of conducting one's

life. With the "return to normal" on the horizon with the distribution of vaccines, there are

indications that our adapted relationship with technology will not be changing.

Considering the increase in our use of technology and digital spaces, especially in our

allotment of personal time and social interactions, the question arises of how this could impact

humans and our experience. Prior to the events listed above, as someone who coached young

people in golf, I noticed a trend over the last several years that the children I was working with

were taking longer to become coordinated in their movements in comparison to those I had

coached several years before. I experience something similar with my peers and teammates as

the incoming first years seemed to be less aware of basic ideas surrounding awareness and how to assess situations in golf. An example could be one's awareness of a downhill lie that would impact one's stance, or the wind blowing into you rather than from the side. A commonality that both parties seemed to share was a heavy influence or reliance on technology and digital spaces for other areas in their lives outside of golf. To address this concern, I will be looking first at Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* to establish the importance of embodiment for the human experience. I will then use Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" to explore what technology is, and our relationship to it. After looking at these resources, I will highlight the way that we risk losing our ability to have human experiences and freedom if we continue this trajectory of our relationship to technology in the most extreme dynamic.

The Importance of the Body

Merleau-Ponty notes that we are "Obsessed with being, and forgetting the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat my experience as an object and I deduce from it a relation among objects. I consider my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world" (Merleau-Ponty 73). Our experiences as they happen and in retrospect can be viewed as purely the occurrence of our projects or the activities that we are engaged in. Insofar that we are invested in the experience, our physical body falls into the background of what we are doing as it is the thing that allows us to pursue our projects in reality. Our projects give us insight into what it is that we desire, and as a result, our experiences can give us an understanding of ourselves, all made possible due to our bodies. We are reminded of our embodiment when our projects are interrupted by our bodies such as when we trip or when one of our extremities hits an object that we were not expecting. Even though our bodies can get in

the way of what we want to accomplish, it is also is the thing that allows us to experience anything at all. In that the body is one of the other objects in the world, we are able to interact with the world, and its objects, not because we exist but that we exist in bodies. As Merleau-Ponty notes "What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body, such as it in fact exists, as a thing in objective space, but rather my body as a system of possible actions, a virtual body whose phenomenal 'place' is defined by its task and by its situation. My body is wherever it has something to do" (Merleau-Ponty 260). Furthering the importance of the body, not only does it serve as a medium for us to conduct our projects, but our ability to locate and define our experience is due to our body being situated in a world, not by our choice but how it relates itself to reality. It is from this context that the body has that our experiences can have meaning and without it, there would be no human experience.

Our Perception and the Physical World

We have explored the way in which the body acts as a type of medium for us to act in the world, as well as establishing the context of our reality, but what allows it to do so? Merleau-Ponty establishes that it is from our body's perception that it can become situated in the world which allows us to understand the rules of our reality, such as gravity. This can be seen in the way that "our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it that we have had or that we could have" (Merleau-Ponty 69). With objects in our world existing on the horizons of our awareness, our body's perception is what allows us to know what is possible for when the objects become our focus. Our projects are then shaped accordingly due to the body's perceptions of the rules that it must abide by. He notes that perception "is the essence of space and the only method that allows us to understand it. Space is essentially always 'already constituted,' and we will never understand space by withdrawing into

a worldless perception" (Merleau-Ponty 262). This not only means that we, through our bodies, must comply with the rules in our reality, but that we are not the sole source of meaning. The way that we come to establishing meaning in our personal experiences is formed from our projects and the meaning that is established outside of our bodies. We know that there is a world that is objective outside of us as "if the body provides the ground or the background to the perception of movement, that perception needs to establish itself" (Merleau-Ponty 291). In the constant engagement with the world through perception, we can see how our bodies fall into the background as our interaction with objects reflects our projects. As our bodies need to follow the rules of our reality, we must acknowledge that we, and our projects, are not only shaped by our individual bodies, and their unique talents, but by the world that pushes us to act in certain ways. While there are laws of nature that act on all objects, the personal experience of one's life is shaped by the way the body exists in the world and the world outside of it.

What is technology?

When we first consider technology, we often approach it as a "means to an end" or that "Technology is a human activity… For to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity… an instrument" (Heidegger 312). This can be seen clearly in the ways that we have used technology to automate work and manage mundane or complex tasks as we assume that it will increase efficiency. However, in looking at the essence of technology, Heidegger demonstrates that modern technology is not simply an instrument for human projects. This can be seen in the ways we think that "we will master it" or that it needs to be controlled (Heidegger 313). But if it is simply a tool to reach an end, we would not have the situation where our "will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control" (Heidegger 313). Heidegger comes to the conclusion that modern technology does not just function as an

instrument for the tasks we are trying to complete but rather it reveals a certain kind of world that allows technology to fulfill a function that is outside of us. It is important to note that technology reveals a world that is outside of us in that humans are also able to reveal truths about the world. He notes that "Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing" (Heidegger 318). For Heidegger, revealing is to uncover a type of truth, not in the sense of right and wrong, but a type of trueness to the nature of something. With modern technology, the possible truth that it reveals is that the world is standing-reserve, where "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for further ordering… standing-reserve…Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object" (Heidegger 322). This can be seen in the ways that technology helps in making things more readily available to the point where everything can be seen as a type of supply that meets a demand.

Human's Relationship to Technology

In looking deeper into the essence of technology Heidegger delves further into the influence of revealing that technology has. He demonstrates that the influence of technology goes beyond the individual instances of revealing that we experience. It is more so that modern technology "enframes" our existence. He notes that "Enframing means that gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man" (Heidegger 325). While humans are able to reveal truths themselves, in being surrounded by technology, truths are being revealed for us rather than humans finding the truths in the world themselves. When defining the kind of beings that humans are, Heidegger notes that we are the kind of things that can be free in our ability to reveal. He notes that "Freedom is the realm of destining that at any given time starts a revealing on its way" (Heidegger 330). It can be understood that there is a world of possible truths that come from

revealing, but within a world that is enframed by technology to reveal the world as standing-reserve, humans effectively give up their freedom for convenience. In choosing the destining that is provided by technology, we remove the possible truths that could be revealed by us. This can be seen in the case of science and technology being pushed forward as we approach them with the idea that they will bring us to the future that we want. It is not us who are revealing the possibilities with the aid of technology, rather technology choosing what will be next and what possibilities will be there in the future. This enframing is all-encompassing where we come to see everything and even other people as standing-reserve. There is nothing that exists in this world enframed by technology that is not standing-reserve, demoting us to being organizers for the stock created by technology.

Bodies in Digital Spaces

As seen above, we have addressed the way that the body exists in the world, as well as the importance of the world on the experience of the body. In that "the body provides the ground or the background to the perception of movement, that perception needs to establish itself" meaning that the physical world is essential in creating an experience to have and reflect on (Merleau-Ponty 291). Insofar that our projects are reflective of what we can accomplish in the world through our bodies, being unable to perceive would be detrimental to our ability to experience. In being pushed and pulled by the nature of the space we inhabit, we come to know the possibilities of our body, our reality, which shapes who we understand ourselves to be. It can be argued that digital spaces do not provide that same kind of friction that we can experience in the physical world. In comparison, digital spaces are designed to guide us through particular events (such as the plot of a video game) or cater to bring us what we want (looking up information on Google). The physical world presents challenges that require us to embody the challenge in a physical way, or in an

intellectual way of revealing some truth that is unique to us and our experience. To have our engagement located in digital spaces would alter human experience, as the body is no longer the primary medium for us to enact our projects. In doing so, the influence of the body and the world in shaping the exploration of ourselves is diminished. While we may take action in the physical world through our bodies to enable us a particular imagine online, someone who is into working out or interested in Indie music, the focus of the experience is no longer in the physical world. It could then be implied that our knowingness of ourselves and our world becomes less clear as we are no longer relying on the body and space the in same way as when we engage in digital spaces.

Revealing, Enframing, and Digital Spaces

As technology is the medium that allows us to access digital spaces, the aspects of revealing and enframing can be applied here as well. Technology reveals a world of standing-reserve, and humans have become organizers of this standing-reserve. In perpetuating technology's function of revealing in digital spaces, it would stand to reason that they result in producing a type of standing-reserve as well. In the artificial nature of these spaces, they are designed to fulfill a particular function such as providing information or entertainment. From algorithms that monitor behavior on Google and social media to video games and augmented reality, there is a predetermined end or goal that is being shaped for the individual who is using it. Heidegger notes that "The thinker only responded to what addressed itself to him" in so far that we do not often look past or question the things that are presented in front of us (Heidegger 323). We can be seen to perpetuate the concept of enframing with technology dominating the revealing the physical world but making space for this kind of revealing in digital worlds. We are then left with the destining of technology in every space that we have, and every space we create, leaving us with no opportunity to reveal on our own. From ZOOM meetings to TikToks, the lack of being able to establish a context of

where we are located in time and space makes us less able to situate and come to know our experience. Even though we are engaged, the embodiment is not the same. Instead of a world that shapes and locates us through our perception, digital spaces like social media platforms do not provide what is needed to have this kind of knowledge of one's self and their surroundings. Everyone is allowed a blank template to be whatever one desires. There is no friction in these spaces and if there is, one is always allowed the option of restarting. With the inability to create personal meaning against the background of the world through the required experience of embodiment, the ability to experience is lost.

What is Our Future?

It is clear that the influence of technology will not decrease in the future as we are enamored by the progress we have experienced from it, and the convenience it provides. With children being introduced to it at younger and younger ages, the incentive to experience the world through embodiment becomes less appealing. A society that places the experience of the body as secondary to the experience had with the assistance of technology or in digital spaces runs the risk of losing the human experience. As digital spaces do not provide the same kind of friction that appeals to our body's perception, we not only diminish the embodied experience but our possibilities for revealing. Limited perception would not only lead to a lack of awareness to one's self and their projects, but to their surrounding and others. There would be a lack of knowing how to be in the physical world, encouraging the retreat into the malleability and predictability of digital spaces. There would be nothing to truly experience in these digital spaces as they would be manufactured for the individual in contrast to embodied experiences that face the challenges presented by the rules of reality. Personal relationships would also suffer as the enframing caused by technology would make other people appear as standing-reserve.

Compounded with the inability to experience, and reflect on similar experiences, it would be unlikely that people would be able to have an authentic recognition or understanding of another person. In the same way that enframing by technology removes the ability to reveal truths about the world, we would also lose the ability to reveal truths about our bodies and projects due to the lack of embodied experience. We will continue to become more disconnected from ourselves as our experience is not the one that is unique to our body which allows us to have our personal meaning. In every sense, we would be without the freedom to reveal as we become disconnected from the body that anchors us to a world that we chose to not participate in.

Conclusion

From the perspectives of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, we were able to shape an understanding of embodiment and technology. We established that the body not only serves as the medium for which we are able to act in the world, but it is also the point where the world can act on us. Combined with perception, we are able to have human experiences that we can reflect on so that we can better know ourselves and the world we live in. To address the impact of digital spaces, we looked at technology as it is the way we gain to access these spaces. We observed that digital spaces also reveal truths to us in a way that encourages us to not attempt to reveal truths ourselves. In the most extreme circumstance, the increased used or invested time with technology or digital spaces would mean losing our human experience and any chance of having the freedom to reveal. As our embodied experience can be seen as a way of us revealing on our own, the lessening of this experience would push us further into the enframed world that technology provides. In that we would be less aware of our bodies, one can assume that we will also become less aware of our surroundings and those who share reality with us.

Works Cited

Heidegger, Martin, and William Lovitt. The Question Concerning Technology, and Other

    Essays., 1977. Print.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception. Routledge, 2012.