

Body and Technology: Reframing the Humanistic Critique

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Technology critique, as taken up by humanistic psychology, has remained grounded in late Heidegger. This critique has had little practical effect on the development of technology and everyday technology use. I postulate reasons for this, which include that this critique regards technology in general rather than specific technologies, overlooking the multistability of any particular technology. I then discuss a different humanistic, phenomenological ground for technology critique from the position that human beings are at home with technology, meaning that technology does not threaten disembodiment or disengagement with any other important components of humanity. I draw inspiration primarily from Don Ihde's and Marshall McLuhan's phenomenological, descriptive works on the ways human beings are shaped and extended by technology. I end with a discussion of embodied experience in cyberspace which serves as a model for new humanistic, phenomenological techno-critiques.

Technology critique is an essential task in our technological era. Humanistic psychology, in its ongoing project of recognizing and elaborating human experience or the human world, has taken up the critique. It does so primarily through Heidegger's later work (I refer here mainly to "On the Question Concerning Technology"). This is not surprising, given that humanistic psychology is grounded in the ideas of existential-phenomenological thinkers like Heidegger. However, technology critique is one area where most of humanistic psychology has remained thoroughly embedded in this particular discourse and has not updated its view in a significant way since Heidegger. The Heideggerian discourse approaches technology broadly, as a sort of systematic worldview, thus leaving little room for practical action. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, the humanistic critique of technology has had little practical effect on contemporary human interactions with technology. In this paper, I will discuss an alternative existential-phenomenological humanistic critique that I believe offers solutions to the practical problems inherent in humanistic psychology's current major critique. I will begin by elaborating the Heideggerian critique, then discuss some hypotheses about precisely why it has had little effect on practice, and finally offer the alternative approach to critiquing technology.

The Heideggerian Critique of Technology

Heidegger and Heideggerian influenced thinkers on technology point out the non-neutrality of technology, meaning that technologies are not mere objects, but have the potential to shape and transform. As in much of phenomenology, Heidegger's major focus is on human relationality and experience. Technology is not neutral because it is in relation to humans. When discussing modern technology, however, Heidegger seems to regard this relation in one particular way (rather than recognizing the range of relationships or ways of being non-neutral offered by particular technologies). As Charles Sabatino (2007) stated in his article, *A Heideggerian Reflection on the Prospects of Technology*,

For Heidegger, technology does not represent merely the tools and equipment we make use of as we build and settle our world. More fundamentally than that, technology represents the manner in which humans have extended their reach to change, shape and thereby control just about everything we encounter within the world with practically no limit. Nothing has meaning or purpose except that it can be made available to be used. (p. 66).

Sabatino adds that Heidegger's reflections on technology constitute "a warning concerning the manner in which everything, including all within the natural realm, has become subject to human arranging" (p. 4). For Heidegger and the technological critics who follow him, this extended reach is dangerous, as well as a cause of some kind of human corruption. As Don Ihde (2002) explains, Heidegger regards technology as "a sort of transcendental dimension that posed a threat toward culture, created alienation, and even threatened a presumed essence of the human" (p. 113). Ihde (2002) calls this a "dystopic tendency" that appears with the focus on technology seen as a broad category, a kind of force or imposition that obscures other paths. Heidegger and Heideggerian critics discuss modern technology as a sort of massive force—as Ihde (2002) puts it, they portrayed "technologies as Technology" (p. 113).

Robert Romanyshyn, a technology critic in the Heideggerian tradition, elaborates the problems with technology. He writes that technology, or the viewpoint of the human being in relation to technology, distances us from a way of being in which we are embodied, present, and "in relation

to nature.” Instead, we “become an observer looking at [the world] from a distance” and we “[withdraw] our immediate presence” (1989, p. 67). Thus, technological human beings have lost some way of being that made us human or authentic.

Already, this discourse leaves discouragingly little available outlet for practical action. How are we to affect our relationship with technology if it is a problem of mass perspective and something already beyond our mastery? Heideggerians express a desire to re-enter an order prior to this latest shift in technology and our relationship to the technological. They are careful to state that this does not mean turning back time (Heidegger, 1966, Romanyshyn, 1989) (despite romantic visions of pre-industrialized, pre-Enlightenment life); rather, the Heideggerian claim is that modern technology is “early,” i.e., that it is beyond our grasp (Heidegger, 1966). They seem to characterize modern technology as a disruption or aberration of some course of human development. By re-entry, then, I mean that technological critics wish to return to a path that begins prior to a technological or scientific viewpoint. The only option they leave open for this feat is a particular kind of re-thinking of our relationship with technology. In any case, this way of thinking about technology leaves no room to change this relationship practically. Any action seems too minor, and any pragmatic approach pointless—the only solution is for us to collectively alter the Heideggerian-defined scientific-technological worldview (“attain an adequate relationship to the essence of technology” (Heidegger, 1966), and even if that were to take place, practical effects would remain to be seen.

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Because I discuss technology and embodiment later, I want to say a bit about how this technology critique views technology’s relation to the body as taken up by Robert Romanyshyn. Romanyshyn suggests that the effect of technology dualizes the body; the self is trapped inside an exterior “space suit” body, protected and abstracted from any context and surroundings. This self is not *of* its body, but *in* the body; the body is something the self can do without since the body is a mere means. He explains that technology turns the body into mere function, for example, the activity of the heart, which gives rise to the metaphor of the “broken heart,” is replaced with a functional heart as pump. Functionality implies that parts may be replaced, that body parts and eventually the body are inessential. They are also interchangeable (he cites the case of “Baby Fae,” who received an infant heart transplant with a heart from a baboon; instances of replacements using non-organic parts,

cyborg parts, seem to illustrate Romanyshyn's point even more clearly). The human body is currently (quoting Wentinck), "an almost inhuman abstraction, further removed from nature than at any other moment in our history." The body as we know it, or what Romanyshyn calls the "archaic body [...] a body in intimate connection with the earth" is "increasingly threatened by extinction" (p. 29). He sees the earthly body being replaced by "technical function," on the way to becoming an astronaut body (disconnected from earth and itself) and beyond that, cyborg. Romanyshyn explains that the astronaut's body is "still [...] a body of human activity within the layers of technical functions by which it is enshelled" (p. 28). This implies that the next phase of relating to the body, or the next body that we create and become, will not be human. For this critique being human means to be embodied and earthly, which is placed in opposition to the technological; that is, the human world and the technological world are distinct.

Problems with the Heideggerian Critique

As I already stated, the Heideggerian discourse seems to frustrate practical action by characterizing technology as a massive problem beyond the scope of human intervention (at least, on a level that is not equally massive). Ellen Rose (2003), a sociologist, offers four hypotheses about why technological critique in general has "had a disappointingly small effect on the way we, as a society, receive technology" and "technological development proceeds apace, regardless of the critics' protestations that human ends are becoming increasingly sublimated to the imperatives of the technological dynamo" in *The Errors of Thamus: An Analysis of Technology Critique* which apply to the Heideggerian critique. She elaborates why this critique fails to reach "social individuals coping with the contingencies and realities of the day-to-day use of technological devices." Her hypotheses are that technology critique has the following problems: 1) pessimism that seems to be less a response to technology but to techno-enthusiast rhetoric, 2) speaking at a distance from society at large, 3) interrogating technology as an entity that destroys or stands outside of culture rather than as an element of culture, and 4) constructing members of society at large as victims rather than agents of technology.

Technology critique often takes the opposite extreme of pro-technology discourse—a pessimistic extreme that at times seems to predict its own failure as contrasted with the enthusiastic (if not a bit manic) optimism of

its opponents. I am not suggesting that pessimism is unwarranted, but that, because technology critique aims to counterbalance the opposing narrative of technological utopianism, much of it is less of a response to technological developments than a reaction to prevailing pro-technology¹ narratives. Heidegger seems to write his critique with the disappointments and unpredicted effects of industrialization in the background, and the alarm in his discourse opposes the idealism of those who had expected industrial technology to produce, in essence, a utopia. Some have taken up the technology critiques of Heidegger and others to “[link] technologies to everything from warfare to the Holocaust” (Ihde, 2002, p. 115). This dystopian rhetoric is discouraging, as it presents the problem of technology as insolubly huge, and confusing, since we live with both positive and negative consequences of technology. Rose quotes Steve Mann (a self-described cyborg) as stating, “How many times can the alarm be sounded before we start to ignore it?” The alarm about the ills of technology clashes with the image of life without it—without, for instance, medicine, hot showers, electric lights, machines which relieve our muscles from lifting and digging, and so on. Technology critique loses the notion that technology does not merely create but also solves problems.

Secondly, the way technological critique is situated also removes it from society at large. It stands over and against technological society, with the intent of making technology strange. The problem with this is that technological critique has a linear perspective on this buzzing world, viewing it from an uninvolved distance. Rose suggests that “the critics’ entreaties are largely lost in the wind because they are standing on an earlier shore, watching people flounder in rough waters that they refuse to test” (p. 152). Indeed, the critique seems to come from a privileged realm in which coping and purposeful action are replaced by detached reflection. The techno-critic response to the reason for the theory-practice gap seems to be that human beings lack enlightenment—they have not “attain[ed] an adequate relationship to the essence of technology” (Heidegger, 1966), a position which, presumably, the critics have attained, or at least understand. It heightens the polemic not only between the critics and the technophiles, but between the critics and the rest of the world.

Thirdly, this pessimism and distance also seem to contain an assumption “that culture is synonymous with tradition” (Rose, p. 150), meaning that the popular, the ordinary, or the “low” are excluded from culture. Another way to put this would be to say that technology critics believe “culture [is] severely degraded by the rise of technique” (Rose, p. 151). Contemporary

culture is seen as displacing the authentic, traditional, and to a degree, pre-technological culture. Heidegger implies that human beings lost some essential element of culture or humanity—roughly, poetry, spirituality, or an embodied sense of self, with the rise of modern technology. Heidegger states, “From our human experience and history, [...] I know that everything essential and great has only emerged when human beings [...] were rooted in a tradition” (1966). If, however, these critics were to leap into a more democratic perspective (the perspective much pro-technology rhetoric has claimed) and regard contemporary life not as an erosion of tradition but as also constituting culture (and not merely a partial culture or a culture veiling what ought to be), then technological devices would not be regarded as outside of culture. Rather, “computers, personal digital assistants, cell phones, and other technological devices do not stand outside of culture and impose on it but are, increasingly, part of it and should be regarded and interrogated as such” (Rose, 150).

Finally, the critique of technology leaves people with little agency. Human beings are seen as victims of technology; we are “prisoners of our own creations” (Romanyshyn and Brien, 2005), rather than agents who make use of and effect technology. In this critique, we are depicted as passive consumers and unquestioning participants in technology, or as carrying out technology as a mission from our collective unconscious. This viewpoint ignores how technology users are acutely aware of the ways technology affects their lives, as well as ways that people have taken up and transformed technology. Often, the consequences of a specific technology are not predictable because we shape technologies to our own ends; that is, we are in relation to technology rather than taken up by technology. Ihde (2002) argues that technologies do not have determinate directions, and that “possible uses are always ambiguous and multistable” (p. 131). As Heideggerian technology critics assert, technologies are not neutral, but enter into a relationship with human beings. As Ihde explains, using a gun as a sample technology, “the relations of a human-gun (a human with a gun) to another object or another human is very different from the human without a gun. The human-gun relation transforms the situation from any similar situation of a human without a gun” (2002, p. 93). The human and the technological object enter into a relationship that alters both, enabling capacities in each. This relationship, however, leaves open multiple possibilities.

This particularly interests me as a feminist when I consider the ways women have re-appropriated technology for our own purposes. For in-

stance, the telephone industry first marketed its product with the notion that it would be used by men for business and management purposes and conversations would be brief exchanges of information. When some users, primarily women, began using the telephone to keep in touch with family and friends and hold longer exchanges, the industry eventually adapted to this new use of their technology (for instance, by charging per minute instead of per call, and by advertising the telephone as a way to maintain social contact) (Van Zoonen, pp. 6-8). The internet, and social software communities² in particular, have followed a similar trend in which users expanded from small and fairly specific user groups consisting mostly of men until gradually, at the beginning of this decade, the user base became reflective of the general population (at least in the United States), meaning slightly more women than men are online. Women are the primary users of current popular internet social softwares (like MySpace and Facebook). As Rose puts it, "The critics would serve society better by acknowledging that people are agents, not victims, of this cultural transformation" (2003, p. 150). I would add that an emphasis on our conscious activity, rather than unconscious participation, would empower those within technological society to examine their relationships to their technologies.

Not only are there multiple ways of relating to a single technology, but there are multiple kinds of technologies which all imply different ways of relating. Based on his examples, Heidegger seemed to have in mind massive technologies (bombs, combines, hydroelectric plants, rockets) which he contrasts with old simple technologies (bridges, sails, windmills). The classes of simple technologies and monolithic technologies, however, overlooks the variety of contemporary technology. Contemporary technology takes many forms, many relations, and shapes our worlds and our bodies in multiple ways. For example, mobile technology shapes the environment differently and implies a different set of human actions than the looming, undemocratic technologies Heidegger had in view. Mobile technology is available without infrastructure (i.e., telephone lines), is relatively easy to use and to learn, and offers the same set of information to all users. Mobile phones have become quite popular and advanced in Kenya, perhaps because they bypasses the problem of having to build infrastructure, including banking infrastructure as cell phone credit has become a currency.

In sum, this critique problematically situates itself outside of the shared, day-to-day technological world and frames those in that world as lacking agency. It also tends to over-generalize and create a sharp division between

these two worlds. We should re-write humanistic technology critique from a perspective that is connected to the life world, from a place of action rather than from a perspective of dispassionate observation. Furthermore, human being (including embodied being) and the technological are not necessarily opponents; they do not ultimately stand to destroy or perfect one another. The category, “human” (a category which has historically excluded many individuals or at least labeled them inauthentically human) does not exclude technology: *techne*, those things we do to shape what we are, is no less human than *physis*, nature. Particularly for contemporary human beings, we are born into technology, we are always already in technology. The human and the technological are co-constituted; human beings are called by the world to shape it, and we are called to shape ourselves. We are technologists—the so-called authentically human or pre-technological human is a myth, as John Caputo indicated in his Simon Silverman address³ at Duquesne University in March 2008. The “technological human” isn’t a new breed, and the technological has always been a component of living with and in the world. Technology does not stand over and against us—rather, we are its agents, however far its reach. I would suggest that we never left home.

An Alternative Humanistic View of Technology

How, then, do we solve our problems as technological beings (as opposed to trying to stand outside of or see through technology)? I would suggest that in order to make change, the technology critique must refocus on specific technological developments and avoid the extreme of speaking only about dangers or potential dangers of technology. As techno-critic Neil Postman says, “Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that,” and “[I]t is inescapable that every culture must negotiate with technology, whether it does so intelligently or not” (1993, p. 2). This also implies that there are multiple ways to engage with technology and that human relating to technology is an ongoing process.

Ihde (1993) explains that Heidegger’s later work on technology is derived from earlier work appearing in *Being and Time* in which, beginning from the phenomenological principle that human beings are always situated in a body, he argues that when we use an object it “becomes the means to experience itself” (Ihde, 1993, p. 40). Heidegger describes appropriating the hammer as a “useful thing” in *Being and Time*, and explains that through actively using the hammer, we develop a greater relation to the hammer as a

useful object (1996, pp. 65-67). This relation is not “theoretically grasped” and we will not discover this relation of “handiness” by merely “looking at” the tool (Heidegger, 1996, p. 65). Rather, the hammer is not, or no longer, simply an object. It becomes a useful thing by means of which we accomplish our work, taken for granted as a kind of bodily extension through which we experience the world. Later on, Heidegger changed his view to refer to technology as “a systematic way of seeing the world” (Ihde, 1993, p. 41) as a useful thing for accomplishing work, and as a taken for granted (that is, invisible) means of experiencing the world. The invisibility of technology when it is this kind of bodily extension became the invisibility of the technological viewpoint, a view we hold to the unconscious exclusion of other views or other modes of human existence. My argument here is that being in relationship to technology does not limit but rather expands the range of human experience, and that it is not a simple or deterministic mode, either. I am making use of Heidegger’s earlier view to examine embodied relations to specific technologies (the relation we form with a hammer, for instance, is different than the relation we form with another technology), rather than seeing human relation with technology as a single, and imposed, way of seeing the world.

Humans are being-in-technology, and this sets the task of contemporary phenomenologists to unfold the manifold complex relations we have in technology. I am not suggesting we give up the task of technology critique nor that we fail to examine (and respond to!) the destructive potentials of technology. I am suggesting that because we are already in a technological state of mind, that we must find a solution within technology that is more complex than getting rid of new technologies or adding more. Ihde (2003) discusses ways of solving environmental problems that involve technology, explaining, “the solutions to technoenvironmental problems that have worked call for better technologies rather than older, simpler, or no technologies” (p. 121). A friend offered the situation in Haiti as an example of this principle. Haiti has been torn apart for energy. The country is severely deforested, as their trees have been burned for cooking fires. Solar ovens present a potential technological solution to this technoenvironmental problem in the direction of sustainability. Technologies can be friends of the earth and of humanity.

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Now, I want to provide an alternative way to discuss technology, with a specific focus on technology and the body. In this section of my

paper, I provide an example of viewing a technology specifically, not a broad and vague category, not from a distance, and not as something out of human reach. Rather, I start from the position of being at-home with technology. I hope to give a more “optimistic” account of some technology-enabled potentialities without going over the top and becoming a utopian. My stance is like that of Don Ihde, who states that, “Unlike our forefathers in philosophy of technology, I am not a dystopian (nor am I a utopian)” (2002, p. xiii), avoiding both the pessimistic tone of Heideggerian critique and the extreme of total technophilia. My stance is also like that of Marshall McLuhan, who transcends the divide between the distance and abstraction of most anti-utopian technological critique and the technophilic innovators by staying close to technology with a critical eye. The task of technological critique, then, is to take the relationship between humans and technology seriously and to get close enough to it to see what’s going on.

I am particularly interested in media and communications technologies, that branch of technology that seems the most disembodied, and among these, especially computers and the internet, those technologies which have really taken off and seem to be what people mean now when they talk about new technologies. By means of these technologies, claims Scott Kaper in his Romanyshyn and Heidegger inspired paper, *The Future of Dream Bodies in Virtual Reality*, “The conversation that goes on over the modem is between two interiorized subjects, between whom all traces of bodily interaction have been etched away into words on a screen” (p. 3). This self is a “cybernaut” with a “spectator consciousness” (p. 2).

Contrast this with Mey Elbi’s discussion in her paper *Playing in MUD: How Cyberspace and the Internet Can Change Our Identity?* [sic], in which she describes the sense of being embodied during online interactions: “The majority of the people feel a sense of ‘being there’ when an intense interactivity and communication process is happening. Several cases have proven that cyberspace is an existing physical world where people can be hurt, can have sex, even can be raped.” By her characterization of cyberspace as a “physical world,” Elbi seems to mean that members of online communities are in some way embodied and communicate in embodied ways. One could even say that cyberspace simply extends our individual realities (which, insofar as they are perceived, subjective and particular, could be called virtual). Indeed, Ihde (2002) notes that the term virtual reality is an oxymoron, suggesting that this “reality” is as real (or as virtual) as any other.

Researchers Judith Sixsmith and Craig Murray in their paper *The Cor-*

poreal Body in Virtual Reality, which provides a phenomenological account of the experience of embodiment in virtual reality applications, argue that in virtual reality the mind is not “freed from the body” but that VR “brings [...] embodiment with it” (p. 319). They explain that “VR technologies become all-embodiment or even re-embodiment” and are not “characterized by a disembodied gaze—that is, a projection of our selves into an optic panorama” (pp. 317-18). In other words, they conceive of VR (and perhaps cyberspace generally) as embodied spaces.

They quote Marcel Mauss’s idea that “the body is our first and most natural technical object,” and add that “techniques of the body work not only upon the body-object, but also upon the body-lived, producing our embodied experience” (p. 319). An example could be the way wearing high-heels changes the body gestalt, or Merleau-Ponty’s example of a person with a feather in her hat. The person navigates herself through a doorway without hitting the feather on the door-frame, she has an awareness of the boundary of the feather like her awareness of her body boundary; the feather is a bodily extension. A more familiar and comparable experience for us might be driving a car through a tunnel. Merleau-Ponty explains that “the hat and the car have ceased to be objects” and are “no longer perceived for [themselves]” but “[extend] the scope and radius of touch” (cited by Ajana). This is like Heidegger’s analysis of tool use, referenced above, that “the tool can become a means rather than the object of experience” (Murray and Sixsmith), becoming a part of bodily experience. As Donna Haraway asks in the *Cyborg Manifesto*, “Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?”

Murray and Sixsmith suggest that VR is a similar phenomenon in which the body is immersed and body boundaries become ambiguous until “the separation between biological and cyber-bodies [...] becomes invalid” (p. 325). Btihaj Ajana, in her paper, *Disembodiment and Cyberspace: A Phenomenological Approach*, takes up the idea of technology as extension of body with specific reference to the apparent disembodiment of cyberspace, calling the problem an “ironic dialectic.” She summarizes it thus:

In light of the technological rhetoric, new technology is suggested to be partly the “instrument” by which we may override our bodily limitations and reach the transcendental moment. Yet, this instrument is but an extension of the body itself and as such, its *raison d’être* can only be realized through an embodied experience. In cyberspace, this embodi-

ment is, in fact [...] a spontaneous prerequisite for communicating in it and interacting with its interface, which is by no means a pure mental construct but a myriad of sensory dialogues (seeing, hearing, feeling, etc.). *As such and insofar as the body is the basis for our interactions and perceptions, virtual space can only be seen as a symbiotic synthesis of technology and corporeal phenomena* (p. 9). (emphasis added).

The critique of technology seems to have lost this phenomenological sense of technology as instrument, or technology as the result of a world infused with care, instead arguing that this sense of the technological either no longer exists or never existed. Marshall McLuhan provides an example of how to bring this sense back into technological critique. He takes up the strand from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty directly—indeed, just note the title of his book: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. This book focuses on shifts in human perception as clues to the new human environment created by any new technology, all the way back to writing, what some people think of as the first technology. In other words, McLuhan agrees with Heideggerian critics that our present consciousness constitutes a particular kind of perspective, but looks more intricately at specific technologies to understand how they change perception (he thinks of this literally, calling technologies “electronic extensions of our central nervous systems” (1964, p. 4). For example, from his chapter on television (1964, p. 308):

Perhaps the most familiar and pathetic effect of the TV image is the posture of children in the early grades. Since TV, children—regardless of eye condition—average about six and a half inches from the printed page. Our children are striving to carry over to the printed page the all-involving sensory mandate of the TV image. They pore, they probe, they slow down and involve themselves in depth. This is what they had learned to do in the cool iconography of the comic-book medium. TV carried the process much further. Suddenly they are transferred to the hot print medium with its uniform patterns and fast lineal movement. Pointlessly they strive to read in depth. They bring to print all their senses, and print rejects them. Print asks for isolated and stripped-down visual faculty, not for the unified sensorium.

Btihaj Ajana goes so far as to call the body itself a medium in connection with technology. That is, the body isn't a “container” of the mind, nor is it merely a tool for using technological apparatuses (e.g., “typing on a keyboard, seeing the screen”), but is “the very parameter for constructing

cyberidentities and performing instances of gender bending and identity play” (2004, p. 9). The technological, as Don Ihde notes, traverses both the body as “being a body [...], our motile, perceptual, and emotive being-in-the-world” and being a body “in a social and cultural sense” or body as culturally endowed with significance. Indeed, technology (at least the communications technologies I’ve been taking about—I don’t think this statement applies to all technology, not bombs and probably not rocket ships) does not represent an attempt to escape one’s body. The body as technology is an attempt to add presence, to bring oneself more into the world, to become more human.⁵

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I am seated in front of my laptop, my fingers moving over the keyboard, eyes on the screen. The screen displays my Facebook profile page. I tap out, “at a coffeeshop in Shadyside, writing.” I check the home page for updates—my eyes tick from one item to the next, up and down the page, the way I might check out a party room, scanning for significance, taking in a general sense of what everyone in my social network is doing/ thinking/ feeling/ expressing to their social circles. The image of Ian, a good friend, appears next to the statement, “Ian is working with double-plus diligence.” An ambient sense of Ian working in his focused but playful, Montessori-like way fills the room. Ian lives in Toronto. I see that an old college friend has rewritten himself as class clown, adopting a goofy picture, a new middle name, and lists his political views as “eco-fascist.” I smile at how well he executes his role. My attention is called by a flash at the bottom of the screen—my index finger follows my eye toward the urgent icon. My partner says, “How’s the writing going?” I respond spontaneously, typing out a reply as quickly as I would speak it. The feeling is one of connection and containment, that I am supported and involved. These technologies are not replacing, distancing, nor eliminating the body, but extending body. Technology may even be conceived as a way of embodying the world, or *incorporating*—actively bringing the world into the body schema.

Conclusions

So, what’s next? Based on the criticisms I outlined above, I suggest that future technology critiques should take a phenomenological approach. These critics may argue that their work is phenomenological, but their critiques are dualistic and contain value-laden assumptions that are neither withheld

nor made explicit. They should start from a new standpoint that is outside of both technological utopianism and the technology critique I discussed above. They should reject the dualistic premise altogether and begin from the position that mind and body are not separable (indeed, only those in extreme positions on either side of the debate agree, either with horror or jubilation, that these are separable). This is a critique for a post-Cartesian world in which we are, a priori and irrevocably, our bodies. Critiques should be specific and concrete, interrogating particular technologies, the effects and intentions of their use, and the ways they are *in-corporated* by users. This means our task is to become more involved in the proactive rather than reactive work on technology. Ihde suggests that the new job of the philosopher of technology is to become involved in the “research and development” (Ihde, p. 125) of technological solutions.

It seems that this also involves exploration. For instance, to explore the phenomenology of cyberspace, I think a number of first-person accounts must be collected (perhaps more elaborate than the personal one I began writing above).⁶ This is a task suited to the next generation of humanistic researchers, unless we withdraw from society to an ethereal realm without technology, or simply continue to use it reluctantly, avoid developing competence, and with a sense of denial and feeling of subjugation. I think this is especially important for us humanistic psychologists in our roles as clinicians as we begin work with a generation of patients whose realities include cyberspace—our attitude should, as always, be one of understanding before anything else (e.g., before pathologizing, resisting, or imposing pre-packaged interpretations of what their worlds mean and how they experience them). I think we’re up for it.

Notes

¹ We might call them Cartesian, modern, or Enlightenment perspectives.

² Online social networks (which I refer to interchangeably as internet social software networks, social software, internet communities, etc.) is a broad term I have adopted to cover a range of places on the internet in which people express identities to one another in some way. I refer to everything from early text-based internet communities called “MUDs” (multi-user dungeon) to massively multiplayer online role-playing games (such as “World of Warcraft”) in which users build characters to participate in the game with other players, to internet social network services (Friendster, Facebook,

MySpace, etc.) in which users network in a virtual community. Though these are different sorts of networks established for different purposes, they have some features in common; each provides a medium for users to communicate, in some way, with other users, and each requires users to build some kind of an identity (or character, profile, etc.).

³ On the Wings of Angels: Post-humanism and Info-techno-theology (unpublished)

⁴ That is to say, pro-technology rhetoric, but what she says is also true to a degree also technology critique.

⁵ As radically stated by an eighteen-year-old interviewed by danah boyd (2007), “If you’re not on MySpace, you don’t exist.”

⁶ Ideas for those who wish to take them up: someone’s experience of browsing profiles on a dating site, someone (perhaps a psychotherapy client) constructing a social software profile, the experience of getting to know someone by reading her blog, micro-blogging and instant messaging throughout the day, tracking progress on goals online in a supportive community, seeking advice online, videoconferencing with co-workers or with loved ones, the experience of being “friended” on a social software network, receiving a public message on an online social network, experimenting with gender identity via an online social network, coming out online, experiencing a sense of community in an internet group, keeping in touch with a deployed partner via internet communication (including love and sex through the web), meeting a romantic partner on the internet, transgender experiences of exploring life in a differently-sexed body on the internet, googling someone you know, finding out about one’s therapist on the internet, high school students using the internet post-Columbine as a new safe space.

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