

Reading Task: Technology and Education

Lambeir, Bert. "Comfortably numb in the digital era: Man's being as standing-reserve or dwelling silently." *Heidegger, education and modernity* (2002): 103-121

Reading Guide

At the centre of Lambeir's article is the relation between humans and technology, as it was problematized by the 20th century German philosopher Martin Heidegger (Lambeir mostly refers to Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" from 1954). Lambeir's article was published in 2002 as a part of a collection of articles about Heidegger and education, and although he mentions the internet and the possibilities it holds for interaction, many features of the internet as we know it today are noticeably missing from his account (especially social networking in the likes of Facebook, Twitter and so on...).

Lambeir begins by pointing out the possibly beneficial aspects of online education- overcoming geographical distances and physical disability and opening educational opportunities to people who previously could not attain them. However, the technological possibilities in education carry other significant meanings which Lambeir unfolds by referring to Heidegger's treatment of the way technology affects human being: "For Heidegger, technology is not so much something with wood or iron or fuel, but is a way of doing things, a way of being in the world, or a form of life." (Lambeir, 107) Technology presents us with a way of understanding reality; it is through technology that we engage with the world (this is also referred to by Lambeir, following Heidegger, as **revealing and unconcealment**). Heidegger points to technology as the way in which we put our life and everything around us in some order - things are what they are *because* they play a part in some technological order.

So the relationship between technology and humans is not as one directional as we would sometimes like to think- technology conditions us and determines the ways in which we can understand our world (this is referred to in the article as **enframing**). It continues to add words into our language, for example the verbs "to twit" and "to google" which only have a coherent meaning to people living within this current technological world. This is why our world seems so fragile when the overarching technologies are threatened (Lambeir gives as an example of this the widespread fear of a "millennium bug" before the 2000 New Year, but we can each think of more personal crises when consider to prospect of losing our smart phone...). The reflexive and dynamic nature of computer technology is different from previous technological advancements, because it offers us wide channels of communication, rather than just ways of material production. Computer communication opens up a "virtual reality" in which we can view the world, and choose the information most suitable for us. Following from the previous points, Google's search algorithm (one example) is not only a tool we *use* to know about the world, but is also a way of conceiving that world.

This reduction of the world to an **ordered** set of things at our disposal in their technological roles (what Heidegger calls **at-hand**) influences not only our perception of the world, but also of the humans within it. Humans are a "resource", to be mined, cultivated, used and finally discarded. For Lambeir, this means that not only do we not control technology as we would like to think, but that in certain ways we are now thinking about ourselves and others in a technological way. In an educational context the implications are that: "...students are no longer encouraged to participate, persuade, and to produce. Rather, a technologically innovated education aims at the creation of effective consumers of education." (pg. 113) This has major implications on the way we perceive the role of the teacher, who is no longer someone who has an original contribution to the education of her pupils through "interaction, communication, and productive practices" (113).

Computers have changed our language in another more fundamental way- writing and reading have changed dramatically since word processing and online text have become widespread. We now: "...experience language as if it is raw material to us, ready to be molded in a desired shape." (115) Lambeir, following Heidegger, emphasises the

way in which the language itself has become an instrument in a digital technological setting. The danger Lambeir refers to as a formalized language, is one which is unable to break terminological meanings in order to create a new way of being in the world. Consider the temptation, whenever we write, to copy-paste from online sources; or the supreme status of the Wikipedia entry. Lambeir ends his article by assuming that there is no way to turn back the presence and influence of computers on our lives, and asking how it might be possible to lead original, productive lives alongside it (**to dwell**)? The answer, according to Lambeir, is in adopting a “more risky use of the computer” (119) which does not treat the curriculum as an ordered, technological “production of skilled people who are able to survive in a computerized world.” (119)

Questions:

1. An interesting point, which Lambeir does not really go into, is the implication of his point about education in a digital age to the moral aims of education. Referring back to the discussions in earlier sessions about moral education, how do you think this relates to some of the criticisms made by advocates of both directive and non-directive moral education? This could also lead to an interesting discussion of the influence of media (TV, film, Youtube clips, video games) on moral education.
2. Preparing children for the 21st century and beyond is a favoured cliché in educational reform. Considering the arguments in this article, how would you prepare them? What are the objectives of “digital literacy”, and how would you recommend new technology be integrated into the school system?
3. Consider the notion of a formalized language- what does it mean in an educational setting. Oakeshott might be useful in considering the tension between socialization and education.