

Since my inventory is composed primarily of eastern teachings, I was eager to explore my next artifact from a western perspective: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, by Martin Heidegger.

We talk about Heidegger a lot in class, but I knew little about him. I wanted a proper introduction to Heidegger, so I conducted a little research. He was born in Southwest Germany on September 26, 1889 with a Sun and Moon in Libra, his early life was marked by preparation for priesthood. Heidegger's life took a sharp turn at 17 when he read *On Manifold Meaning of Being according to Aristotle*, by Franz Brentano. Apparently this was the book that inspired Heidegger on [his lifelong quest for the meaning of being](#). He briefly attended seminary at Freiburg University but shifted his concentration to philosophy, mathematics, and natural sciences. He completed his thesis in 1915 and became a lecturer at Freiburg. In 1918 during the crisis of WWI, he was called to serve in the military and spent three months on the western front. I imagine this experience must have impacted him deeply, perhaps it informed his decision to leave Catholicism and inspired his new body of work. When he returned to lecture at Freiburg on phenomenology and Aristotle, many recognized his [new, insightful approach](#). His academic career continued with great successes until interrupted again by another, malicious national crisis: the rise of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), which Heidegger joined on May 3, 1933.

LK: Out of curiosity, why did you decide to include that he was born under a Sun and Moon in Libra? I'm not as familiar with astrology so I was curious about how this contributed to the context you've presented?

This blog was not intended to be a biographical accounting of Heidegger's life, however, once I started reading about his involvement with Nazi Germany--a surprising detail indeed--it seemed incumbent upon me to include this fact alongside my reading of his essay, *The Question Concerning Technology*. How could I not? In Bitzer's words, this became the rhetorical situation I couldn't escape, my exigence. Knowing my audience may also not have been aware of this surprising detail--namely you my fellow classmates!--I struggled to reconcile the fact of Heidegger's involvement with Nazism in relation to my inclusion of him in my research.

DK: Indeed, as any who tread further than the surface with his work must do. That's why Heidegger scholar Michael E. Zimmerman wrote the Afterword for the book, to provide the ethical context necessary to grapple with the intersections of his method of inquiry with Werner Erhard's pedagogy.

Sticking with Bitzer's lingo, I had the constraints of my own field of research to align with. I was not willing to halt my momentum to turn fully in the direction of Heidegger's past, but I had to find a way to deal with it. After a little Googling, I found contradictory information that wrestled with Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis, was he a Nazi? Was he trying to turn the movement into a beneficial direction? I don't know, I leave it to those aligned with Heidegger to deal with. Still, it felt incumbent upon me to contend with this surprising detail in this blog.

After much journaling, it came down to a personal reflection. Who we are can not be held separate from our writing and our ideas. Especially in relation to social media, it seems practically impossible to separate authors from their works. Writing under a pen name is more challenging now--readers want to know who the words they read are coming from. This is a fact I struggle with and makes me a hesitant writer. My words are mirrors to myself, they will inevitably bring a microscope into my life, for me and for others to peer in.

JD: When you said “Who we are cannot be held separate from our writing and our ideas,” it made me think of the classic question “Can you separate the art from the artist?” So Heidegger’s work and Heidegger’s involvement in the Nazi party are one example, but in a more present day sense, I have struggled with my relationship with Eminem as an artist ever since I realized I was queer. Growing up, I was obsessed with his music and I have always considered him one of the greatest lyricists in rap music. Of course, a whole lot of his earlier work uses gay slurs and talks about violence against women (and that’s putting it quite mildly). He has changed his style a bit and has openly discussed his support of the gay community, but as a queer person, and a person who considers him a masterful lyricist, I am caught in that weird spot of “can I still appreciate the art separate from the artist?” Do you think there are circumstances where you *can* separate the two? (I know from reading on that this is not quite the direction you were going in, but I think it’s an interesting concept to consider.)

DK: One difficult argument I have struggled with on this matter is the larger academic arguments concerning critical appropriation: to wisely discern the value of a rhetorical artifact, especially when it is networked throughout our cultural and intellectual traditions, and yet contains within it deep connections to ethical flaws that we have to deal with when they emerge. Derrida, for instance, one of the most skilled critics of the late 20th century had his work cut out for him when he discovered that his friend, Yale Literature professor Paul de Man was revealed (after his death) to be a Nazi collaborator in occupied Belgium. This on top of the impact Heidegger had on his own thinking and writing. The thing is, the intellectual/intertextual background, in just a few steps, brings us to Heidegger. So knowing something of the world and tradition within which he wrote and worked is important because at some point anybody researching ethically will discover to what degree all things are interconnected, going all the way back even to Plato, some of whose students sought to carry out their teacher’s vision of the state, which included the exercise of tyranny (the “Thirty Tyrants”), not to mention the practice of slavery, racism, chauvinism, classism, everything. I’m afraid we cannot just send Frodo to dispose of the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

As a default introvert, I’m constantly up against this fact. It is why I was thrilled to work with an organization that allowed us to write and publish as a group and why I’m terrified to publish anything with myself on it. I don’t want the attention--introverts don’t. I want the work to stand alone (as if that’s possible).

This class is the first opportunity I’ve had to really explore this rift and start to move in a direction that can generate new momentum for me as a writer. What I’m finding is that there are surprising details in my own life that I *do* want to include, the discourse I want to create from the stories of my past that no longer feel disempowering because I can reverse the rhetorical imposition of cause and effect through self-deconstruction, an act that “involves the

demonstration that a hierarchical opposition, in which one term is said to be dependent upon another conceived as prior, is in fact a rhetorical or metaphysical imposition and that the hierarchy could well be reversed” (Culler 183). My past isn’t the cause that has made me who I am, I am the cause that is constructing my own life, start to finish. I am grabbing my surprising details by the throat, breathing new life into them, reclaiming who I am. The order is mine to make.

JG: That’s such an interesting notion to grapple with, the slippery cause-and-effect of time. When you say “my past isn’t the cause that has made me who I am, I am the cause that is constructing my own life...”, it makes me think that maybe for you (and many of us), the past is often our controlling value, and we measure it in terms of what’s going on in the present (the opposing value), but you can easily flip them, as you’ve done, and recast all that’s come before through the lens of your present line of inquiry. By doing this, do you feel more or less detached from your past and these events you mention? In instances like these, is elapsed time always necessary to not feel disempowered by such events?

LK: Additionally, I think there is a control not only in projecting into your past, but projecting outwardly to others. You’ve mentioned early that you are cautious about publishing and sharing your work with others. What you described with Culler, reminds me of Rabinowitz’s audiences, how the narrator is calling someone to be a very specific reader or person when they read a text. Have you considered who you would call your reader to be? Or could your writing have the effect of creative destruction on someone else by calling them to ditch their current chair (their opinions/views/identity) to sit in your chair?

What Heidegger’s past brought forth was the reminder that all that is hidden will come to light, sooner or later. His past involvement with the Nazi movement felt like an exigence that I was supposed to follow in a specific way (ie research the fact if it is true or not!). But Consigny dispelled the idea of the exigence, he said “Bitzer errs in construing the situation as determinate and predetermining a ‘fitting’ response” (Consigny 178). There is not a single way for me to respond to this exigence, rather “to be able to *ask* good questions and to formulate or *discover* relevant problems in an indeterminate situation” (Consigny 177). Instead of asking and pursuing a discovery about Heidegger’s past, I proposed it to my future self: Are you, present Isha, responding to the current historical situation in a way that future Isha will look back on and approve? Are you involved with organizations that compromise or reinforce your integrity? Are you being the person you want to be?

And ironically, constructing a path of questioning is what Heidegger is all about.

DK: the path of questioning Heidegger the thinker and writer has opened new possibilities for thinking and writing, however, Heidegger the man made a fatal mistake and never owned up to it. It’s a contradiction lots of smart ethical people have wrangled over. Richard Polt in his introduction to Heidegger, I have found, provides the most excellent summary of the controversy, the variety of perspectives that contend there, and I encourage you to look there for an ethical treatment of the matter (I will give page numbers when I am in my office, or in class).

“The Question Concerning Technology” is an essay that grapples with the essence and meaning of technology. Delivered as a section of a four-part lecture in 1949 and published later in 1954, the technology in question then was obviously worlds away from our current technology--still, the argument is as valid now as it was then. Heidegger presents technology as a mirror of human essence, a reflection that shows us something deep about ourselves.

LK: This reminds me of what you articulated earlier in your blog, “Who we are can not be held separate from our writing and our ideas. Especially in relation to social media, it seems practically impossible to separate authors from their works.” Do you think that Heidegger's ideas about technology parallel our relationship with our writing?

Heidegger opens the essay by declaring that “Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is a way of thinking” (3). He seems to push Jane Gallop away from table, advising against reading too closely.

DK: hmm. I would offer that he is closely reading, attending closely to, a specific phenomenon: our relationship to technology.

IE: I agree that Heidegger is demonstrating close reading, but I find it fascinating that in the opening few lines of his essay he advised his own readers *not* to “fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics.” Jane Gallop argued that there is an ethical obligation to close read--somehow this irony was not lost on me. Heidegger seems to say *do as I say not as I do*. *Oh, and don't mind my affiliation with the Nazi's as I lecture on methods of “revealing and unconcealment...where aletheia, truth, happens” (13)*. To my mind, this is a perfect example of what appears to happen in our research. We look deeply into a topic, but that topic isn't separate from us, that topic is a deep reflection and magnification of aspects of ourselves--some that are, frankly, difficult to stomach. This has definitely been a part of my research experience. It doesn't turn me off from the process, it draws me closer, like an true looking glass.

JD: Do you think the way Heidegger suggests you read is anything like the idea of “listening for” we discussed in class last week? Did you feel you were “listening for” something specific or projecting in any way when reading?

In my first read, I accepted the challenge and surfed the waves of his long, convoluted sentences. I pretty much wiped out, walked away with no sense of having understood anything at all. With Dr. Kopp's help, I climbed back on board and proceeded slowly, lingering on sentences and diving deep into specific topics. This was contrary to what Heidegger had suggested, but yielded deep and interesting insights. Questioning indeed constructs a way of thinking that is methodical, and applied to technology this method lead to a new relationship and mastery with it.

Heidegger is warning us of the dangers of technology, but not in an obvious way. He's not proposing the doomsday scenarios of an IA takeover, he seems to be warning us not to become bound in the limitations of technology. Technology is an example of something--something

bigger and far more amazing. And as Dr. Kopp has repeated in class again and again, the example is *not* what it is an example of.

“Technology itself is a contrivance, or in Latin, an *instrumentum*. . . . a means to an end” (5). Technology isn’t an end unto itself, but can carry us toward a possible realization of ourselves. Perhaps it is a bit like Consigny’s concept of a *topic*, an instrument and a realm in which possibilities are born. Maybe all technology, including the human instrument, is a tool of creative destruction? A potential tool that aids us to transform from one level of understanding to another? Heidegger points out that “Only at the point where such an uncovering happens does the true come to pass. For that reason the merely correct is not yet the true. Only the true brings us into a free relationship with that which concerns us from out of its essence” (6). In other words, potentiality doesn’t guarantee actuality--technology may be capable of delivering realization but it is our responsibility to awaken that potential, to enliven it through recognition.

JG: I’ve long been fascinated with the metaphysics of technology. It seems we often think of it in terms of this thing we’ve created that’s somehow separate from our own reality. It’s hard to talk about this notion, but when we interact with technology and the virtual worlds it manifests, it seems as though we’re looking through a portal into something that isn’t part of our reality, a paradoxical artificiality that simultaneously is how most of us now interface with the wider world and gain our understanding of it. In material terms, all technology is simply a combination of elements already present on Earth, and over time, we’ve happened to combine them in the correct way in order to access what was potentially always there for accessing (so rather than creating technology, as it seems, maybe we discovered it, or realized the potential, as you’ve mentioned). This ties back into the above about the slippery cause-and-effect understanding of time: “the past isn’t the cause that has made me who I am, I am the cause that is constructing my own life” . . . your phrasing here could be tweaked slightly to recast our relation to technology, which maybe isn’t a thing but a way of looking at the world . . . “I am not the cause that has made technology what it is, but technology is the way of being that is constructing my own life . . .” By technology here, I don’t mean in the sense of wires and computers, but the idea we discussed in class of screens and projecting, that even our conscious experience and what we see before our eyes seems as if it’s coming to us via a screen we’re watching. This observer-observed relation can always be flipped in light of our current controlling value, or whatever level of conscious experience we’re recognizing as technology/within tool-world.

LK: Isha, you’ve already addressed the question I had earlier. So if I am following right, “technology” is just a means or tool. So writing would be included in this line of thinking, whether you see it as a tool or a disclosive space that transforms us. I definitely identified with one of the quotes you selected: “Only at the point where such an uncovering happens does the true come to pass.” People write “to discover” as they say. I know that I’ve written things where the what a piece is changes by the end, or myself has changed by the end. Do you think this connects with your earlier comments about delving into your own experiences through writing in this class?

To dig a little deeper into this essay, I read Hubert Dreyfus’s analysis, “Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology.” He clarifies that Heidegger’s warning of technology’s “greatest danger” is actually “a restriction in our way of thinking--a leveling of our understanding of

being.” Maybe Heidegger is warning us that technology will dumb us down instead of open us up to the possibilities of being alive? Maybe technology will seduce us into a disposable culture that is divided and devoid of meaning. Dreyfus used a practical example to convey this concept:

Normally we deal with things, and even sometimes people, as resources to be used until no longer needed and then put aside. A styrofoam cup is a perfect example. When we want a hot or cold drink it does its job, and when we are through with it we throw it away. How different this understanding of an object is from what we can suppose to be the everyday Japanese understanding of a delicate teacup. The teacup does not preserve temperature as well as its plastic replacement, and it has to be washed and protected, but it is preserved from generation to generation for its beauty and its social meaning. It is hard to picture a tea ceremony around a styrofoam cup. (Dreyfus 27)

Technology, like a disposable styrofoam cup, can create a dangerous disconnect from the sacred nature of life. We can become lost in our fascination and use of the tools, and forget the purpose and meaning of life. What that meaning *is* remains open to discovery, but where there is danger, there is also possibility. This is wrapped in a concept called *enframing*.

“Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” (24). Enframing is a way of seeing the possibility of something, a way of looking deeper at its appearance and purpose.

DK: it's the way of disclosing the world we have inherited in which the equipment and beings within the world get disclosed as standing-reserve, that is, standing by as a resource we use up in order to accomplish our agendas. It's not the only way of being, but it appears to be dominant, well-nigh inescapable.

JG: This exchange reminded me of the in-class discussion wherein the idea emerged that to humans, everything can be thought of as a tool. That was a controlling idea put forth by Drew, and Isha countered with enjoying flowers/nature for their own beauty that speaks to the soul (my own sloppy paraphrasing of your words) and not as a means to anything. Then, Drew put forth that the perceived bliss gained from appreciating nature makes flowers/nature into a tool for human enjoyment, or for achieving an idealized attachment to all things. I guess these values can go back and forth forever.

[DK: Yes, exactly, and even the effort to prove an exception falls prey to the technological way of being. Trying to get out of the trap is part of the trap. At the same time, being in the presence of truth as discovery--*aletheia*--and letting it be itself without subordinating it to some form of usefulness or aggrandizement, where the flower gets to be the flower, that is a hint at a way of being human that is not already and always “technological.”]

Isha, since you're heavily informed by an Eastern worldview, how would Buddhist/spiritual ideas speak to those put forth by Heidegger regarding technology? Does the use of technology

magnify the illusory sense of self, or do “we” fade away into its toolness (for lack of a better word)?

Like the Japanese teacup, the object is both an instrument for use and a realm of meaning. Technology, enframed, reveals itself as an instrument to be used and mined for larger meaning. Instead of submitting to technology as helpless bystanders, we assume the “position to reveal the real” when we step into our discursive power.