

Engaging and developing community in digital spaces: Approaches from the Editorial Development Group

Abstract

Digital spaces establish diverse expectations among users, and our reliance on them suggests they are permanent fixtures. From a philosophical perspective, they become especially fascinating for their hidden features. For some, these obscurities are simply extensions of earlier technological inventions; for others, though, they indicate something new altogether.

In what follows, we interrogate digital spaces from several philosophical vantage points, inquiring into their agendas, their possibilities for renewed relationships in times of trouble, and their capacity to reveal other thought. The Editorial Development Group, working with this wide range of ideas, consists of scholars who have collectively decided that the theme of digital spaces - and their possibilities and drawbacks - is particularly relevant, given they are currently unavoidable and often desirable.

Introduction

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Despite the reservations of many, digital spaces are useful and are here to stay. Most of us have witnessed that usefulness in action over the last two years, since the outbreak of COVID-19, and many of us will witness the greater penetration of the digital space into our individual lives as vaccine passports, for instance, become a reality. It seems that digital spaces have become so embedded that infrastructures, education, and even lives, depend on their existence.

Yet, in philosophical thought nothing is ever quite final, and so in this article we return to some basic arguments. Despite their apparent indispensability, digital spaces still deserve philosophical critique in some fundamental ways. One such critique rests on the idea that a quality read by some as *humanity* is changed into data. 'Digital spaces', or more conceptually 'the digital space', is indeed a realm where human materiality is replaced by the immaterial (Englezos, 2020). It is likely this highly conceptual problem that defines most philosophical debates around - and individual likes and dislikes of - digital spaces. Other, perhaps more tangible, difficulties arise in terms of privacy and knowledge control (socially and philosophically).

The problems accompanying digital spaces, though, are predictably nuanced, with there being *liberating* possibilities (sometimes even in the downsides). Some of these are the following: that there is a useful anonymity that digital spaces promote in their lack of bodiliness; that, culturally speaking, digital spaces may offer surprising resonance with ancient metaphysics; and that there is room for dissidence in academic digital spaces. Digital spaces, it seems, may be so much 'what they are' that they become - or are immediately - their other.

Recognising the complexities of these issues, members of the Editorial Development Group explore the nature of digital spaces, along with the philosophical advantages and drawbacks that those spaces offer. We are also fortunate to have two highly interesting open reviews that reflect and expand on some of themes. Overall, our aim is not so much to draw a line through digital spaces but underneath them - to underscore their vulnerabilities as well as their potential conviviality with certain areas of philosophical thought.

Dwelling digitally: the technological transformation of nearness and place

Onur Karamercan

One of the important questions related to the meaning of digital spaces in our technological epoch is whether we could make sense of a digital space as a dwelling place, namely, whether it is possible to dwell in digitally determined 'sites' and 'frameworks'. For instance, social media networks (Facebook, Twitter etc.) and online communication technologies (Skype, Zoom etc.) offer a textualized experience of the world, where we can go about our affairs from distance, or as we also call it, 'virtually'. These online platforms bring the further points of the world nearer, while they also disconnect us from our closer environments, which, certainly yields to new correlations of nearness–distance and corporeality–virtuality. Reflecting on digital spaces means, then, reviewing the sense in which we understand the human body, dwelling and place.

Although the meaning of the expression of 'digital spaces' might seem self-evident, to have a better grasp of the way in which the digital and space are connected, it might be useful to remember that the word 'digital' originally derives from the Latin *digitus*, meaning 'finger', which implies the act of counting by fingers (Klein, 1971, p. 448). One could claim that the digital, as a manifestation of the calculability of the world via numbers, determines the essence of space in a particularly mathematical way. In other words, the geometric conception of space of modernity, which divides the world into a system of coordinates, seems to be a 'digitized' one. For instance, engaging with Martin Heidegger's early interpretation of the Greek experience of numbers (2006, p. 124), Stuart Elden (2006, p. 124) translates Heidegger as follows: "...we apprehend the spatial as much as number. Number becomes logos, 'concept', number makes possible the conceivable and definable nature of being" (Heidegger, 1993, p. 221).

The growing interest in the idea of digital spaces in contemporary humanities is manifest especially in educational philosophy and philosophy of technology. Anna Kouppanou's recent work (2018) specifically problematizes the correlated questions of education, space, and technology in terms of metaphoricity— as the site of the bringing near of that which is distant. While agreeing with some of the tenets of Heidegger's critique of *Gestell* —the enframing essence of technocracy and our world of exploitation— Kouppanou turns the Heideggerian interpretation of 'metaphors' against itself, conceiving it as that which allows the near and the distant to be emplaced in a dynamic relationship of techno-poetic revelation (2018, p. 129, 158). Could one, then, argue that the Internet, or World Wide Web, by definition, is not only a metaphorical space, but it has become a proper 'place' that from which various spaces emerge? Jeff Malpas suggests that places "always open up to disclose other places" (2018, p. 172), implying a dynamic interplay between boundaries and intervals. Accordingly, place (*topos*) is both open (freeing) and bounded (particular), while space appears to be lacking the

same character of distinctiveness. Would that simply mean that digital spaces are non-places? Dealing with the question of the digital-virtual spaces in Heidegger's middle thought and drawing on Michel Foucault's thought, Golfo Maggini offers that digital space amount to 'heterotopias', as opposed to 'utopias' and 'atopias' (2017, p. 466). Maggini's account is important for reminding us of the possibility that the kind of dwelling that most existentialist and phenomenological writers have elaborated thus far might be fundamentally different from the sort of dwelling that emerges in and from digital spaces—considering the transformed experiences of intersubjectivity and embodiment of our epoch.

Pacific relational ontology and the non-human presence in the digital vā.

Jacoba Matapo

This section starts by framing Pacific conceptualisations of vā and then shifts towards the mobilising of vā as a relational continuum through digital modalities otherwise known as digital vā. The Pacific Indigenous concept of vā is one shared across the Pacific and is conceptualised by Pacific scholars as a central feature of relationships and connection (Airini, et al, 2010). Vā as a relational continuum is multidimensional and multifaceted as it positions the corporeal and incorporeal environment as part of the relational assemblage. The vā is shaped by the context and inter-play of relationships. It is always present, in, through and around us (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2012). Pacific peoples share deep-rooted connections through ancestral ties to people and place, inclusive of the environment and cosmos. Pacific Indigenous knowledge systems, ground genealogy as a construct that connects people as kin with the world, unlike the hierarchies of 'man' presented in the great chain of being. The relational ontology of vā in Pacific Indigenous knowledge systems, positions the human position as co-existential and co-evolutionary with world, thus genealogy sustains an ecology of worlded relations (Matapo, 2021). The vā continuum generates a powerful and agentic process that brings the noa (opening up of sacred knowledges) between human and non-human worlds (Matapo & Enari, 2021). Non-human worlds are constituted by both the natural world and material world, such as cultural symbols, practices, artefacts and cultural technologies. The vā as a relational ontology with world (non-human) offers up different ways to think relationship through contemporary modalities, and in this context through digital modes or digital vā (Tielu, 2016).

In the context of digital technologies, postdigital theories works to critique and reconfigure the complexities, application and the perception of digital technologies, including the 'human-technology' relationship (Knox, 2019). Postdigital theories assert the importance of understanding the shifting, changing and novel relations between human and non-human worlds, particularly its implications upon social systems and institutions for which digital technologies are embedded. So how can thinking 'digital vā' as a relational ontology contribute to the theories of postdigital inquiry? I propose that the digital vā offers an alternative to humanist-centred critique in postdigital inquiry, particularly in privileging non-human worlds and ecologies to ethically confront the pervasiveness of digital systems in local and global society. The digital vā offers a different perspective to the generalised constructions of the humanist position as it evokes us to think through digital entanglements of human and non-human worlds in a flow of energy, information, sensory exchange and inter-subjectivity of relations. The context of social relations through digital spaces is not the

only priority of digital vā, it is also concerned with how the digital ecologies become ethically and collectively entangled with worlded-ecologies of past, present and future.

The 5G tower and the coconut tree

(poem by Jacoba Matapo)

Our allegories speak of your genealogy
The birth of the coconut with eyes to see
Its milk and flesh, feeding life
Each fibre entangled in earth and context,

Scholarship speaks of your genealogy
The birth of digital technologies
Algorithms eyes see our tendencies
Feeding life and subjectivity
Fibres reaching globally

The 5G tower and the coconut tree

'A Deviator from the norm': Rise of an alternative academic self within digital spaces and places

Olivera Kamenarac

A field of academia holds a longstanding tradition of producing and publishing academic knowledge through distinguished publishing houses and academic journals, frequently not accessible outside academic peer communities, represented as the 'ivory-tower' (Barok et al., 2015; Watermeyer, 2016). However, through the affordances provided by digital technologies, digital scholarship came into existence, offering a wide range of knowledge production and distribution activities and approaches.

By opening spaces for public dialogue and collective intellectual work, digital platforms encourage 'a new', so-called digital scholarship culture in academia (Murphy & Costa, 2019). Digital scholarship practices promote public engagement, open content and professional autonomy in knowledge construction and publishing, characterising academic knowledge as a public good. As such, digital scholarship culture questions the traditional academic 'habitus' and encourages 'deviant trajectories' (Bourdieu, 1998), energising academia with alternative scholarship approaches. Furthermore, it holds the potential to transform the traditional practices and identities rooted in the assumption that academic knowledge, 'enveloped in a

culture of prestige, is to be 'sieved' through one-dimensional communication channels (Costa, 2018).

Exposure to the different scholarship practices and realities has transformed a conception of what it means to be an academic (i.e. professional identities) and opened space for a sense of an alternative professional self; a digital scholar; 'a digital academicus'. As Costa (2018) shares, digital scholars are viewed as 'deviators from the norm', exercising alternative ways of being in and doing an academic project and challenging power relationships and structures established in the traditional culture of prestige and power.

Although there is lots of space for traditional and digital scholarship to complement one another, academics are still under pressure to negotiate between the traditional academic norms, underpinning the politics of higher education institutions (Rider et al., 2020), and rules of the digital scholarship game which are yet to be written (Murphy & Costa, 2019). Even when academics are encouraged by their institutions to engage in online public debate, the pressure to publish intellectual work in distinguished, high impact academic journals, inaccessible to the world outside academia, remain. Yet, digital academic scholarship is often less recognised in 'the court of conservative formal academic judgment', while simultaneously being rewarded by digital scholar communities sharing a similar value system of scholarly practice (Costa, 2018).

The tensions between the traditional academic and digital scholarship 'habitus' and identities have been intensified with a growing crisis in the neoliberal academic job market, where the security of academics, especially 'early careers', becomes increasingly precarious (Thwaites & Pressland, 2017). Without an anchor of stability, fewer academics seem to take a path deviating from the longstanding logic of doing, thinking and being in academia. Yet, the current epoch provokes multiple questions, including what the future holds for academics who deliberately and persistently 'deviate from the norm' daring to exercise alternative professional selves and ways of doing an academic project within digital spaces and places? How could the present tensions and precarity be used as a point of resistance for making academic knowledges accessible to spaces and places outside the walls of 'ivory tower'?

Talanoa tu'ufonua and grounded speculation

David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae

Tongan education philosopher and scholar, Linitā Manu'atu claims *lōloto* (deep) philosophising requires Tongan researchers to ground their in-depth speculations in a particular knowledge system (personal communication, Sat 8 Aug, 2021). Whether in-depth speculation is from/within the Tongan or Western knowledge systems, the mode of language chosen becomes a key way of expressing speculative understanding. Talanoa, beyond phenomenological and experiential interpretations and meanings and co-construction, is built not only on co-construction of meanings through conversation (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017), but in-depth meaning-making that is *lōloto*. My intention is to foreground Tongan concepts in relation to Western concepts, articulating areas of diversity based on knowledge construction and practice. For Tongan researchers and academics born/raised in *tu'atonga* (literally means outside of Tonga), theorising and philosophising from/within *tu'atonga* (figuratively linked to *fonua* or land in the diaspora of Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), Australia, and US), the concept of *tu'ufonua* (locating and grounding one's place and space of sense-

making and meaning-making) becomes central to one's sense of speculative meaning-making (Ka'ili, 2017). The practice of tu'ufonua and grounded meaning-making, is a negotiation of Tongan speculation based on the ways in which one embodies knowledges and practices. As articulated through the concept of lōloto, in-depth speculation does not only resonate in abstract thought and thinking but in the soul and spirit (loto) as well. Speculation from a Tongan lens therefore, necessarily relies on mind-body-spirit sense-making and meaning-making.

The ngaluope: virtual community and connective spaces

When engaged in talanoa, the environment and contextual spaces become “co-creator of the talanoa process and provides the conditions (noa) for relational ontologies in knowledge sharing and knowledge generation” (Matapo & Enari, 2021, p. 84). The ngaluope is used by Tongan people to relate to the cyberspace or online space. It is space that expresses certain mixed feelings associated with possibilities, discomfort, retribution, vulnerability, and relationality for communities. The unsettling of the ngaluope by positioning my place and position to whenua (land), people, and ideas was a way to ground my tu'ufonua grounding and orient myself in relation to people and communities in Kirikiriroa, Hamilton, NZ. The ngaluope extends feelings of possibilities or uncomfortableness visibly or invisibly in some situations (being in online meetings with people's camera off, for instance). When I am able to ground my sense of connections, materially and philosophically, the practice of connecting becomes meaningful. Connecting with the EDG community – consisting of culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse early career scholars based at universities in NZ, Australia, and China – developing our sense of community goes beyond face-to-face interaction. Our diverse ideas and perspectives, if the ngaluope becomes a space of discomfort, can perpetuate feelings of disconnection at any point during engagement. The vā relational space is one in which Tongan communities appreciate and seek to nurture and embrace (Fa'avae et al., 2021; Ka'ili, 2017). Yet much of the development of vā is constructed within the social world. Does vā have meaning outside of social and societal conditions and context? This requires reimagining.

Reimagining possibilities beyond human conditions

Reimagining possibilities beyond humanism is positioned by the academe as a 'post' condition. The posthuman turn suggests a shift from a predominantly human-centred view of the world to one that gives agency to the nonhuman sphere (Braidotti, 2013). Such post-humanist positioning assumes and undervalues the deeply grounded Indigenous Pacific and ancestral knowledges pre-European contact. It is obvious the theorising of human and abstract thought has become prioritised conditions of intellectualising within the Western-oriented academe. The knowing and what it means “to know” is a privileged state, predominantly within dominant knowledge systems. According to Mika (2015), there is a multitude of possible indigenous responses to Western philosophy. For minority knowledges within Pacific and Pasifika communities and academic contexts, can vā be conceptualised and realised as having its own potentialities beyond humanism? This concern is one that requires ongoing talatalanoa and a community that enables and appreciates diverse perspectives and speculations.

Intertextual revelations

Sonja Arndt

Developing community is widely espoused as an aim and process of education, and in recent times the focus on how this occurs in digital spaces has become increasingly elevated. In early childhood education the notion of community is a crucial element in curricula and fundamental to the goal of belonging – to an early childhood setting, group, and society. It entwines relational encounters with children, their families, and of children and teachers with their local place. As a relational element of educational engagements community might be seen as an intertextual encounter, where intertextuality implies a complexity that involves the histories, bodies, ontologies and epistemologies of those things and beings who are in relation with one another. It recognises stratifications across time and place, implying a particular ethics of the engagement. And it does this as it brings to the fore the multiplicity of voices, utterances and perspectives represented, embodied and enacted in the elements involved in the things and beings relating to others, and within the relational encounters themselves.

Julia Kristeva's (1969/1986) idea of intertextuality draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogue, offering a useful theorisation of the layered and textured nature of communicative encounters in this light. It opens up to not only the dominant, smooth, rich and beautiful, but also to the vulnerable, difficult and marginalised elements of the encounter, that may be more easily concealed in digital encounters. By explicating the existence of relationalities that struggle on the sidelines, that may not ever rise to the fore, achieve recognition, or become accepted as norms, viewing digital encounters as attempts to build community through Kristeva's intertextual lens pushes us to elevate and value pasts, presents and futures between relational elements, and also within them. The need for digital community building that has been elevated in all educational sectors times of the COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging for early childhood teachers. Much has been written about teachers' increased workloads, need to adapt, lack of connection, or for early childhood teachers the additional worries about demands to be present, 'open' to care for, educate, build community with/for 'essential' workers' children. As a reminder to dig underneath the veneer, to ask not only what is present, in the news and written about, as well as what is not, examining the complexities of digital community building in the early childhood sector exposes more than the expected difficulties in adjusting to an era of 'COVID-normal'. It reveals a massive undervaluing of the sector and its teachers as a whole.

Computer guided thought; AI's community bubble's and the passive 'noosphere'

Ruth Irwin

Building community through cyberspace has opened up myriad possibilities that were unavailable before the invention of global information technologies. But these communities, and the type of knowledge and attention they command are not unproblematic. Stiegler (2018) discusses the 'proletarianisation' of knowledge associated with an increasingly passive attention to cybernetics. Three things contribute to the capture and standardisation of knowledge through the internet. Stiegler argues that the speed of the internet is many

thousands of times faster than the synapses in the prefrontal cortex, or thinking part of the brain. Ideas from any part of the globe are in some ways more accessible than local phenomenological experience. The physical time taken sitting in front of a computer screen adds to the alienation from local environment and communities, at the same time as it contributes to the standardisation of information from the particularities of local conditions and ideas. The capture of attention by cyber communities create 'bubbles' where ideas get mutually reinforced, and exposure to alternatives are ruled out by the algorithms that control the computer search function. A good example is when Facebook allowed advertising by Cambridge Analytica that included permission to capture the personal information and 'likes' of anyone who agreed to it. This information was accessed by the Brexit campaign who then tailored their activities to vulnerable people and hugely influenced the political sweep and xenophobia of the right wing anti Europe campaign (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).

Stiegler has argued that the passivity and intellectual lag of passive attention to the computer screen is increasingly producing a different kind of 'noosphere'. Sitting for hours and hours constricts the bloodflow, reduces fitness and agility, tires out eyesight, and ironically, increases social isolation and commodifies our attention. As the internet offers increasing connectivity and access to information, people are reducing their exposure to real life social interactions and developing their own unique perspectives.

The 'bubble' of ideas is amplified by algorithms that take previous interactions with search engines, and exacerbate tendencies rather than offering a wide variety of search options. Increasingly we are only exposed to like minded opinions and information. Docile attention to their devices is activated less and less by active decisions, and links, chat groups, videos, adverts and even friend suggestions are guided more and more by the availability of material generated by AI algorithms. The implication for education is very important. Students increasingly enter the education system suffused in a narrow bubble, with little exposure or critical discernment about their own ideas or that of others. They have less exposure to diverse epistemologies and knowledge production despite a more international repository of information.

The acceleration of cybernetics is not just about the speed of optic cables, but is also due to what Heidegger calls the "ordering of order" (1977:17). The decision making or classifications guiding that ordering of order is obscured because machine learning has no mode of reporting. The programmers themselves have limited insight into why some elements are amplified and others dampened in the production of search orientation. Traditionally parameters of research or policy could be examined for bias on the basis of class, gender, sex, class or other motives, but in this case the racism, classism, and sexism still take place but in a black box that is impossible to crack. But tendencies can be perceived. Postcodes influence the search responses to a query on climate change, for example. A denialist postcode will tend to throw up thinktanks funded by the Koch brothers or the Murdoch press, whereas other information will come to light within a university server or in a more liberal postcode. Stereotypes are amplified through machine learning that is informed by much more than the simple search history of a particular device. The unparalleled information available globally are limited by unseen parameters that reduce exposure to divergent views, and with it, the thinking that ever more passive bodies are exposed to in the Information Age.

Engaging and developing community in digital spaces

Frans Kruger

How might one actualise community in digital spaces when the digital “explodes social structures” (Stiegler, 2016, p.157-158)? Taking this question as a point of departure, I consider the communities that we might collaboratively call into being in the digital. The digital is a space that collapses spacetime and dissipates narrative-memory while simultaneously making the differences between individuals, communities, and the places we inhabit more apparent. Given this, what (imagined, technological, cultural, temporal, spatial, etc.) boundaries do we cross in coming into community in digital spaces (cf. Janz, 2019)? If such boundaries are understood as coupling points (cf. Ramose, 2014), the digital functions both as a technology of boundary-creation and boundary-erasing. For Stiegler (2016), the process of digitalization creates the conditions pertinent to the emergence of a *different* public. The emergence of such a public is important to consider, since for Stiegler (2016), the digital, as a *pharmakon*, is both a poison and a remedy. While on the one hand, it is germane to the emergence of a toxicity that leads to a process of proletarianisation that results in “the loss of mnesic competence” (Stiegler, 2016, p.159), on the other hand, it remains “a vehicle for a process of deproletarianisation... where subjects recover their place as subjects” (p.159). How might individuals and communities create the milieu to be(come) subjects that can exercise critical and affirmative power by coming together in the digital space? One way to achieve this might be to conceptualise coming into community in digital spaces as be-ing becoming. This concept by Magobe Ramose (2014), I argue, allows for working against the proletarianisation and de-singularising effects of the digital.

Be-ing becoming foregrounds that *motion* is the ontological departure point of being (thus be-ing), and that such motion emerges through and in relationality (Ramose, 2014). For Ramose (2014), “the ineradicable network of complex relationships between and among beings” (p.30) means that be-ing constitutes boundaries. Furthermore, be-ing “already exists in potency and is actualized” (Ramose, 2014, p.30) when we establish diverse relations in an unfolding pluriverse. Coming into community thus entails not a question of meaning or essence (what the essence of a digital community might be or who may be considered part of it?), but rather one of process and relationality, and the expressions of be-ingness that these processes and relations are productive of. Coming into community in digital spaces means engaging in a continuous process of boundary-creation, -crossing, -erasing, and transformation; in short, it entails engaging in boundary-praxes. Yet, the always incomplete and incessant process of coming into community does not position be-ing becoming in terms of lack (*manqué*), but rather reframe it as an affirmation of the possibilities for what such communities, and the individuals associated with them, might be(come) as borders are continually created, transgressed and transformed (cf. Agada, 2021, p. 4). Thus, actualising be-ing becoming in digital spaces allows for the process of coming into community to be productive of “singularities that constitute negentropic bifurcation” (Stiegler, 2016, p. 163) through boundary-praxes. It is such praxes that potentially serve as a remedy to the negative pharmacology of the digital.

Grappling with Nothingness through the digital space

Carl Mika

At first glance, from a critical Maori perspective, digital spaces do not match our holistic expectations. Both 'digital' and 'space' are fragmentary terms in different but connecting ways: the former assumes that a thing or things in the world should be reduced to the form of data, and 'space' assumes that there is a locus of some sort that is set apart from the All. Combined, digital spaces suggest that things that have lost their immediate materiality are to be organized within an equally rarefied forum. Humanity is then meant to accept the hollow archetype of both the thing and its organizer.

Given that digital spaces are a reality, though, in what way can we conceive of them so that they agree with discrete Maori aspects of thought? It seems that digital spaces create huge lacunae between things in the world: digital spaces are fragmenters of things *par excellence*. But they reveal an opportunity, at the same time, for contemplation about the gaps that an entity cannot fill. In the same way that thought about a situation or an object offers up possibilities beyond the phenomenon, then, digital spaces may equally engage with a Maori notion of nothingness ('kore' in Maori). There is always a reality beyond both the entire digital space as a complete phenomenon as well as beyond any one thing we are searching on the internet. Focusing on either of these, we are producing an active image of them. However, in Maori thought, such an image is always backdropped by an ontological prior (Mika, 2017). Arguably, focusing on that, rather than whatever we are searching for in the digital space, is more important.

Populating the world with nothingness as the digital space does, then, seems to accord with a Maori worldview in an unintentional way. Thinking about the entire phenomenon of 'digital space', we might conclude that it has its limitations and then speculate on the phenomena/overarching phenomenon it cannot account for. This could be nothingness itself, or the force of an emotion that comes with contemplating the complexity of the digital space (in much the same way that we often hear people wonder at the limits of the universe). If I engage with something specific in the digital sphere - a search for a single (and hence fragmented) idea or object - I may become aware of my lack of available language to carry out a suitable search, and this limitation then becomes the 'space' I choose to think about for that time. Or I would perform the search satisfactorily, apply the knowledge from it, but then realise that I am not able to *fully* represent it or whatever grounds it.

To put it bluntly: it is whatever lies beyond the digital focus that seems to match up with a Maori worldview. With that in mind, I have noticed that zoom offers opportunities for the sort of philosophy I am aiming for here. Zoom sessions are often most creatively productive when people cannot quite hear what someone else has said, or else when (and sometimes relatedly) they answer a question in a *non sequitur* way. Occasionally amusing, the deliberate/accidental misunderstanding only occurs in most instances because there is no immediate, physical presence of the speakers, which means non-verbal cues, for instance, cannot be read.

All this may merely be a technical limitation but, regardless of how hard it tries to heal its technology, the digital space will forever throw an unintentional shadow that provides fuel for our thinking on the 'beyond' and its relationship to the All.

Digital spaces in Africa: A strong and identifying voice for youth

Mahaman Yaou Abdoul Bassidou

There is a consensus today that digital spaces encourage, and can facilitate, one's self-expression, in situations where face-to-face expression is impossible and yet where cross-global communication is necessary. Nevertheless, engaging in digital spaces can raise concerns around identity, vulnerability, security, and safety; these issues are poignant ones for Africa, a continent which has a great deal to gain from digital spaces but whose inhabitants must also consider the deeper philosophical aspects that those spaces give rise to.

African people have strong ties beyond the borders created by colonisation. These ties are sealed by values like language, culture and politics. The first of those elements listed – language - is interesting for its disregard of borders., The most spoken language in Africa, Swahili, for instance, is shared by more than ten (10) East African countries (Tanzania, Kenya, RDC, Rwanda, Burundi, etc.), and Hausa, a West African language, spans such countries as Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Cameroun, attesting to the high mobility of Africa's inhabitants and their identities. African languages, along with all others, grow from their cultural context: here, we come to the second value, which equally reflects the porousness of borders. African knowledge, and therefore languages, are reliant on orality and are retained by elders and, moreover, no decision or even utterance of the elders is challengeable.

In the digital realm, however, youth are given more control, since digital spaces are largely kept by youth, giving them several voices. Whilst this growing autonomy of expression has its advantages, a counter-argument that the digital space is concomitantly eroding African ethics and values is possible. They allow youth to do what they cannot normally do face-to-face, including sharing intimate images and videos, even using crude expression with a certain ease. Digital spaces allow cross cultural sharing and so African youth adopt behaviours far away from African identity.

A relative lack of control - or perhaps too much control, as I have just outlined - over images and personal information is counterbalanced by the voice given by digital spaces in the case of Africa. Since colonisation, Africa has been blocked from speaking for itself, even at the highest level where the elite replaced the colonial master in most cases. Africa's important decisions (electing leaders, managing the abundant natural resources, etc) still originate from outside (European imperialism). African history, culture, and identity are being told, but very badly, by others and not by Africans. This problem relates to all dominant sectors, starting from education. Curricula of basic education in most of African countries is dominated by western history and culture, instead of local indigenous values and culture. It is common for children to still learn, for example, that Scottish explorer, *Mungo Park*, discovered the Niger river, while their parents have been living there and drawing their lives from the river for centuries. They are told how the African resistance leaders during anticolonial battles were all killed or exiled by white dominators. In development sectors this tendency to overlook local realities becomes apparent, where programmes like the World Bank, UNICEF, FAO intervene with packages that threaten to fail because they ignore the local traditional practices (see Ezeanya-Esiobu 2017, for more explanations). In the media, the most successful author, artist or politician is the one that is capable of associating with, and referring to, France, and that can be advertised by RFI or France 24. All these examples show how Africa

is marginalised and dispossessed in telling its own stories. Today, digital spaces give voice to Africans, especially youth, who get the opportunity to speak for themselves. Social Pan-Africanism is born, and with that much of the protest against the violation of democracy and human rights in Africa takes place on digital spaces (*Printemps arabe* in 2008, anticolonial protests waves, in Mali and West Africa).

Open Review: Decentering Western Digital Spaces

Marek Tesar

In recent years, collective writing has developed as a genre with its own philosophies and methodologies (Peters et al., 2021). There is something powerful and seductive about how the ideas of community can be developed in digital spaces, and it raises questions of ontology and axiology, which sit at the heart of such creation as the most recent collective writing projects from the Editorial Development Group (EDG). The EDG has been for years the backbone of the publishing ecology of PESA journals; a place and space where editors and interns debate and analyse, and also become part of ethical knowledge production. The EDG is currently led by Sonja Arndt, Carl Mika and Ruth Irwin.

Digital spaces is a great topic; particular during the past two years with pandemic lockdowns and pandemic education, the whole world has had [new] encounters with the digital space. There is no better way for how to think about digital spaces – and their past, present and futures – than via collective writing. Recently, in the collective debate, we have written about the tenets of the Philosophy of Education – what it means, what it is, what it could be. While a number of scholars approached the philosophy of education from different perspectives, digital spaces were not really alluded to or debated (Tesar, Hytten, et al. 2021). Reading this fabulous collection, I do understand that it was a significant omission.

The possibilities and impossibilities of the digital space is a powerful exploration in this collective writing. What is really appreciated are the three notions that are woven throughout; philosophical thought / care; the decentering of Western thought; and what a re-thinking of digital means, particularly the digital possibilities of the Covid-19 pandemic. The idea of critique that authors offer makes sense. And that critique is not functional; it is philosophical, or even poetic. The idea of digital places and spaces is not only about lived experiences, but it is about imaginings and future possibilities. The authors do offer Heideggerian or Foucauldian critique; asking questions about ontologies of the places, introducing fascinating concepts of the digital *vā*, debating alternative digital selves that are produced within the academia; offering re-readings of the intertextuality through Kristeva's new normal, fascinating philosophical views on AI, and foremost focusing on the development of a community. The collective writing is filled with ontological departures, and the de-centering the technologies of the West. As Mika argues "... it is whatever lies beyond the digital focus that seems to match up with a Maori worldview."

Open Review: The community of digital dispositif?

Pablo Del Monte

The reflections on digital spaces in this article are thought-provoking and expand our possibilities to be with/in these spaces. Reading these commentaries triggered the memory of an interview to Jaron Lanier, known for pioneering virtual reality, for having coined the term and for his critical thought on these matters. As well as being one of Silicon Valley's digital technologies gurus, Jaron Lanier is a music enthusiast who has a great collection of instruments. He recently said in an interview published in *The Guardian*:

I have been working just now with an Ethiopian instrument called a begena, an old harp. Probably similar to the one David played in biblical times. The way you have to hold it is interesting. That kind of thing enthralms me. It is like time travel... it brings your body's movement into some kind of a connection with people who lived many centuries ago. (Adams, 2017)

I found this anecdote meaningful in relation to the discussions in this article because he talks about how technologies elicit particular human experiences and performances that are carried and transmitted by technologies themselves. Also, how these generate a sense of connection with others across space and time. Let me relate this idea to Foucault's concept and method of *dispositif* (Foucault, 1980) and attempt a contribution to this conversation.

Foucault's *dispositif* or apparatus is useful to think about the ways in which living beings are constituted in their relation to singular socio-material formations - networks of human and non-human, discursive and non-discursive elements that perform strategic actions in response to historical problems or urgencies. Subjects are constituted but also constitutive of them, they act on other elements and are also acted on as they participate in these compounds. The subjectivities that emerge with/in *dispositifs* are certainly not determined by them, since their effects and operations are multiple and contingent. Nevertheless, subjects become intelligible, capable, vulnerable when they are entangled in apparatuses. At the same time, these forms of intelligibilities, capabilities and vulnerabilities do not belong to the subjects - they emerge with/in *dispositifs*. In this sense, an apparatus could be thought of as a binding "gift that keeps on giving, a reciprocity in the giving of a gift that doesn't - indeed, cannot - belong to oneself" (Campbell, 2006, p. 2). Drawing on Roberto Esposito's work (*idem*), we could think of *dispositifs* as conditions of possibility for singular communities.

Considering digital spaces as *dispositif* may elicit further questions on the ways in which digital "gifts" (actually, many social platforms can be accessed freely) make us capable and vulnerable, what forms of *donations* - said and unsaid - we are required to return when participating in digital spaces and how these contribute to making others capable and vulnerable too. And, how all of this may be thought of as having some particular sense of community to it.

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