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DIGITAL WORLD, LIFEWORLD, AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CORPOREALITY

Abstract

The contemporary world is characterised by the pervasive presence of digital technologies that play a part in almost every aspect of our life. An urgent and much-debated issue consists in evaluating the repercussions of these technologies on our human condition. In this paper, I tackle this issue from the standpoint of Husserlian phenomenology. I argue that phenomenology offers a contribution to our understanding of the implications of digital technologies, in the light of its analysis of the essential structures of human experience, and especially of its corporeal grounding. In the light of this analysis, it is possible to investigate the ways in which these essential structures are affected by digital technologies. In particular, it is possible to highlight the ways in which some digital technologies involve a process of disembodiment or simply a superficial embodiment of experience.

Introduction

The contemporary world is characterised by the pervasive presence of digital technologies that play a part in almost every aspect of our life. An urgent and much-debated issue consists in evaluating the effects of these technologies. What are their repercussions on our human condition? How do they influence the process of construction of one's own identity over time? How do they modify our societies and the way human beings communicate and relate to each other in various domains of their life? Such kinds of questions are tackled by various disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, at both the individual and societal level. In these inquiries, we can find both pessimistic and optimistic evaluations of the impact of digital technologies on human life. For instance, S. Turkle, who is one of the leading researchers of human-technology interaction, has expressed, in the nineties, an optimistic evaluation of the liberating social possibilities of some social networking technologies[1]. However, more recently she has changed her view, expressing concern in relation to new forms of

[1] S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1995.

internet sociality that are leading to a widespread state of loneliness in connectedness[2]. A similar concern is expressed in a much-debated study by J. Twenge and collaborators[3]. They argue that the combination of smartphones and social media in recent years is causing a decrease in psychological well-being and an increase in states of depression and anxiety amongst young people. However, these studies are contrasted by other researches that emphasize the positive and emancipatory aspects of certain technologies. For instance, one could argue that the same technologies allow people to access information that in the past was reserved to the few and that they allow previously marginalized people and groups to express themselves online and to gather together for pursuing common objectives in the real world.

In this paper, I shall argue that phenomenology can offer a contribution to our understanding of the implications of digital technologies. It can do so in the light of its analysis of the essential structures of human experience, and especially of its corporeal grounding. In the light of this analysis, it is possible to investigate the ways in which these essential structures are affected by digital technologies.

The paper is divided into three sections. In Sec. 1., I shall highlight the role of a certain disembodied or simply superficially embodied concept of mind in the rise of the digital age. In Sec. 2, I shall focus on the phenomenological analysis of corporeality and on the thesis of the corporeal grounding of the mind. Drawing on this analysis, in Sec. 3, I shall point out the possibility of evaluating the implications of each specific technology by looking at how it modifies the original form of human experience in its essentially embodied character. In this way, I would like to highlight the fact that some digital technologies involve a process of disembodiment or simply a superficial embodiment, thus pointing out the need to carefully evaluate the repercussions of the digitalisation of human experience. This is done without adopting a prejudicial pessimistic or optimistic stance concerning digital technologies, but with a view to keep them human being friendly.

[2] S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

[3] J. M. Twenge – G. N. Martin – W. K. Campbell, *Decreases in psychological well-being among American adolescents after 2012 and links to screen time during the rise of smartphone technology*, «Emotion», 18 (2018), pp. 765-780.

1. The mind-body problem in the digital age

The mind-body problem is a classic philosophical issue. It is the issue of the relationship between the mental and the corporeal dimensions of a human being. However, the different answers that are given to this problem are not confined to philosophical discussion. In fact, certain ways of understanding the relationship between mind and body can be found at play in human culture at large, in the intertwining between philosophy, science, religion and other cultural expressions, and in ways that inform the self-understanding of human beings.

The phenomenological approach to the philosophy of technology leads us to investigate the reciprocal relationships that exist between technology and other dimensions of human culture with which it stands in a co-constitutive relation. In particular, we can look at the connection between the rise of digital technology in the 20th century and certain philosophical and scientific ideas that involve a specific way of understanding the relationship between mind and body. In fact, at the onset of computer science, the pioneering work of thinkers such as e.g. A. Turing, A. Newell, and H. Simon involved a reflection on the nature of mental processes. The functionalist metaphor of the mind as a software that can run on different kinds of hardware, with the associated thesis of multiple realizability, has been at the same time the source and the outcome of the development of digital technology. The Turing machine is an abstract model of computation but its concrete realization in the form of the computer reinforces the concept of mental functions as abstract processes that can be implemented by different material substrates. In this way, the rise of digital technology goes in tandem with an understanding of the mind as something that is relatively independent of the specificity of its material substrate. In this view, the specific corporeal constitution of a "thinking thing" is not essential for the definition of its mental states (as famously stated by H. Putnam, «we could be made of Swiss cheese and it wouldn't matter»[4]). It can be thus said that the digital age has arisen under the banner of a disembodied concept of the mind or, better still, of a superficially embodied view, according to which the concrete constitution of the body is not essential for the definition of the mind.[5]

[4] H. Putnam, *Philosophy and our mental life*. In H. Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers, vol. II*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 291-303, p. 295.

[5] This concept of the mind as disembodied is nowadays challenged by recent developments in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science, with the rise of the "new embodied cognitive science" and the various approaches within the field of 4E cognition, which conceive of the mind as embodied, extended, enactive and embedded. This new paradigm is crucially linked to the phenomenological tradition (see e.g. F. J. Varela – E. Thompson – E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1991).

2. Phenomenological embodiment

In the phenomenological perspective, we find a conception of corporeality as a constitutive condition of experience and, therefore, a radically embodied view of the mind. Such a view can be especially found in phenomenologists such as M. Merlau-Ponty, E. Levinas, and M. Henry, to name a few, but I would like to show that it is already present in the work of the founder of phenomenology. In fact, the mind-body problem is a difficult problem that also arises in the context of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, but Husserl offers a specific solution to it, by analysing the essential role of corporeality in the constitution of experience.

On one hand, it could seem that transcendental phenomenology leads to a disembodied conception of subjectivity as a consequence of its alleged "intellectualism", "Cartesianism" and "idealism". The phenomenological epochè constitutes a "Cartesian" starting point of phenomenology, which "brackets" the existence of the external world in order to investigate the conditions of possibility of experience. In the light of the phenomenological epochè and the phenomenological reduction, the existence of the external world becomes enigmatic (the "riddle" of transcendence[6]) and the possibility that the phenomenologist who develops this inquiry is, in fact, a *solus ipse* cannot be easily dismissed. On the other hand, however, the methodological epochè is just the starting point of an inquiry whose development can be seen, on the contrary, in terms of a philosophical "achievement" of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). An investigation that, in the end, leads to corporeality as a constitutive condition of experience.

This fundamental outcome of the phenomenological inquiry is contained in the analysis of experience in the terms of an intertwining of intentional form (*morphè*) and sensory matter (*hyle*). In fact, the hyle is the sensory component of consciousness that originates from the *sentient body*, i.e. the living and lived body (*Leib*). In order to motivate this claim, it is useful to look at the phenomenological analysis of experience in the light of the contemporary debate on the "hard problem" in philosophy of mind[7]. The hard problem is that of understanding why and how there is "something it is like"[8] to have a certain mental state. This problem is essentially distinct from the "easy" problems, which consist in the investigation of cognitive systems in terms of functions that

[6] E. Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology. A Translation of Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, Husserliana II, Dordrecht, Springer, p. 17.

[7] D. J. Chalmers, D. J., *Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness*, «Journal of Consciousness Studies, *2*(3), pp. 200219.

[8] T. Nagel, *What is it Like to be a Bat*, «Philosophical Review», 83, pp. 435-450.

mediate between environmental input and behavioural output. According to this approach, it is possible to account for the intentionality of

the mind by investigating the causal roles of certain functional states within a cognitive system without, however, touching the hard problem of consciousness. In contrast to the clear separation between hard and easy problems, a different approach, which is crucially inspired by the phenomenological perspective, consists in denying that phenomenal consciousness and intentionality constitute two clearly separated aspects of the mind. This "inseparatism" is at the heart of the "phenomenal intentionality research program" [9]. The central claim of this view is that the intentionality of the mind, i.e. its directedness towards objects, is grounded on phenomenal consciousness and that, therefore, the fundamental form of intentionality is *phenomenal intentionality*[10]. This means that the phenomenal character of a mental state grounds its ability to be directed towards objects.

However, at the heart of the phenomenal intentionality theory, we can find again the mind-body problem, which arises when considering the issue of scepticism concerning the existence of the external world. In fact, the theorists of phenomenal intentionality assume a radically internalist perspective, claiming that the phenomenal content of mental states is "narrow". They do so by referring to internalist scenarios such as the possibility of a "brain in a vat", a "disembodied Cartesian mind"[11] or a "space soul"[12]. These scenarios, however, give rise to the issue of scepticism: given that the directedness of mental states towards alleged "external" objects is grounded on "internal" phenomenal contents, what guarantees us that, in fact, one is not a "brain in a vat" or a disembodied "solus ipse"? In my view, a way out of this issue can be found in the phenomenological development of the internalist standpoint. In fact, the thesis of the "phenomenal grounding of intentionality"[13] is close to the phenomenological concept of the essential intertwining between intentional form and sensory matter in the constitution of every experience. However, contrary to the possible sceptical outcome of the phenomenal intentionality theory, the phenomenological view leads us to understand

[9] U. Kriegel, *The Phenomenal Intentionality Research Program*, In U. Kriegel (Ed.), «Phenomenal Intentionality», Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

[10] See e.g. T. Horgan – J. Tienson, *The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality*, In D. J. Chalmers (Ed.), «Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings», Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 520–533; B. Loar, *Phenomenal Intentionality as the Basis of Mental Content*, in M. Hahn & B. Ramberg (Eds.), «Reflections and replies: Essays on the philosophy of Tyler Burge», Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, pp. 229-258.

[11] T. Horgan – J. Tienson, *The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality*, p. 254.

[12] U. Kriegel, *Intentional inexistence and phenomenal intentionality*, «Philosophical Perspectives», 21 (1), 2007, pp. 307–340, p. 321.

[13] See U. Kriegel, *The Phenomenal Intentionality Research Program*, p. 5 ff.

the phenomenal grounding of intentionality in terms of its corporeal grounding, confirming the essential rootedness of intentional mental states on the being of the *sentient body*.

In particular, this becomes clear within the "genetic" development of transcendental phenomenology, which investigates the deep temporal structure of experience. The definition of this inquiry is outlined already in *Ideas I*, where Husserl claims that «the transcendentally 'absolute' which we have brought about by the reductions is, in truth, not what is ultimate; it is something which constitutes itself in a certain profound and completely peculiar sense of its own and which has its primal source in what is ultimately and truly absolute»[14]. This means that the "absolute" field of transcendental consciousness has a deep temporal constitution which, in the end, takes place in the life of a concrete embodied subject. In fact, according to the phenomenological analysis of timeconsciousness, the field of consciousness has a constant threefold structure of impression-retentionprotention, which is the structure of its pre-reflective self-manifestation[15]. At the heart of the field of consciousness, there is the primal impression (*Urimpression*), which takes place in the self-affection of the living body.

The analysis of the body as a constitutive condition of experience is developed throughout Husserl's work. In *Ideas II*, Husserl investigates the essential role of the body in the constitution of the objects of experience, distinguishing between those sensations that are relative to the sensible properties of constituted objects (*sensations of features*, such as the sensation of redness in perceiving a red object) and the *kinaesthetic sensations*, through which one feels the positions and the movement of various parts of the body (eyes, head, etc.). The kinaesthetic sensations motivate the course of perception, e.g. in moving around an object in order to perceive its various sides. Both the "kinaesthetic sensations" and the "sensations of features" are aspects of the sensory dimension of conscious experience, which is constitutively grounded on the being of corporeality. As a consequence, the distinction between a merely "functional" and a "sensory" dimension of the body turns out to be an abstraction. The functional dimension of the body (the body that moves around the objects in the environment) is made possible by the *sentient* character of the living body. Only an abstract consideration could understand the information that comes from the various parts of the body

[14] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, The Hague, Martinus Nihoff, 1983, p. 163.

[15] D. Zahavi, *Inner (Time-)Consciousness*. In D. Lohmar & I. Yamaguchi (Eds.), «On Time - New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time», Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 319-339, p. 334-335.

in the terms of mere information with no sensory component (i.e. no "what-it's-likeness"), such as the information that would be used by an artificial agent in order to perceive and act (or that would be used by a "phenomenal zombie", in Chalmers' famous thought experiment). Concretely, kinaesthetic information has a sensory nature, i.e.

it is a form of phenomenal consciousness. It is because there is "something it is like" to feel one's body that one can perceive the environment.

Therefore, in the phenomenological analysis of corporeality, we find the acknowledgement of a central role of the sentient dimension of the body, i.e. the body as the locus of phenomenal consciousness, which feels itself and the surrounding environment. As argued by R. Bernet, in Husserl's analysis of the body we find a «phenomenology of the flesh»[16], which is focused on the *Leib* as «intimate flesh feeling itself in a sensible self-affection»[17]. This "pre-reflectively lived body"[18] is the locus of the self-manifestation of subjectivity and the locus of the manifestation of the world. When analysing those sensations of contact (*Empfindnisse*) that are at the basis of our openness to the world, Husserl highlights the fact that the *Leib* is at the same time sentient and sensible[19]. In the case of the two hands that grasp each other, each hand is at the same time touching and touched[20]. The selfaffection of the flesh is the primordial experience in which subjectivity opens up to alterity, in a «noncoincidence of the flesh with itself» that is «the condition of openness to the world»[21] (Bernet, 2013:
53).[22]

[16] R. Bernet, *The Body as a 'Legitimate Naturalization of Consciousness*', in «Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement», 72, pp. 43–65, p. 64.

[17] R. Bernet, *The Body as a 'Legitimate Naturalization of Consciousness*', p. 47.

[18] See E. Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, pp. 248-251.

[19] See R. Bernet, *The Body as a 'Legitimate Naturalization of Consciousness*', p. 53.

[20] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitituion*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, pp. 152 ff..

[21] R. Bernet, *The Body as a 'Legitimate Naturalization of Consciousness*', p. 53.

[22] These analyses deeply influenced Merleau-Ponty, who draws on them when developing his phenomenology of corporeality and his *ontology of the flesh* (M. Merleau-Ponty (1968), *The Visible and the Invisible*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

The phenomenological analysis of corporeality, therefore, leads to the thesis of the radical embodiment of subjectivity. In terms of the phenomenological mereology, this is the claim that there is a relation of grounding (*Fundierung*) of the mind on the living and lived body.[23]

3 Experience and corporeality in the digital age

At this point, we can draw on the phenomenological analysis of the bodily roots of experience when investigating how the primordial experience of the living and lived body is affected by those digital technologies that are widely used in the contemporary world. In fact, most of the human beings in

contemporary societies are constantly using various digital technologies, which are becoming increasingly integrated into one's body and environment and are used in almost every aspect of one's life (from personal computers to e.g. smartphones and digital tracking devices). In general, we can say that these technologies involve a process of digitalization of various dimensions of human experience (sociality, communication, work, leisure time, physical activity, etc.), which means that these domains of existence are more and more mediated by digital technologies. The pressing question is therefore to understand the implications of this process of digitalisation of human experience. In particular, we can focus our inquiry onto the modifications of bodily experience in the digital world. In fact, in the light of the phenomenological analysis of corporeality, it is possible to highlight the ways in which certain technologies lead to a process of "disembodiment" of human experience or, in any case, a merely superficial embodiment, which involves corporeality in an impoverished form. This issue is nowadays tackled by various disciplines that are concerned with the repercussions of digital technologies on human experience at both the individual and the societal level. These disciplines can be informed by the phenomenological investigation of subjectivity in developing their theoretical and empirical analyses of the impact of digital technologies.

Concerning the modification of bodily experience by means of digital technologies, it should be noticed that even tools such as haptic devices and visors for virtual and augmented reality, which try to involve more and more the body in its entirety, cannot really equate and replace the richness of fully embodied experience in the lifeworld. For instance, these technologies tend to involve just some privileged senses (sight, hearing, touch) and in a way that is, nevertheless, partial. This point is

[23] When investigating the relationship between the different sciences that pertain to different "ontological regions", Husserl claims that «'material thing' and 'psyche' are different regions of being, and yet the latter is founded on the former; and out of that fact arises the fact that psychology is founded on somatology». (Husserl, 1983: 32)

highlighted by R. Farrow and I. Iacovides[24], who stress the fact that there are certain proprioceptive aspects of our embodied sensory experience that «could never conceivably be reproduced within digital environments as we know them: gravity, heat, etc.»[25]. Furthermore, Farrow and Iacovides highlight the difference between our primordial form of embodiment and the kind of embodiment that is made possible by digital avatars, referring in particular to online games[26]. By taking into account the phenomenological analysis of corporeality, especially in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, they argue that the idea of a «total immersion» in digital worlds «is simply fantasy»[27]. Even the newest control and mimetic interfaces, which track one's bodily movements and simulate them into the digital environment, are not able to generate a feeling of total immersion in the digital environment. This is

also because certain features of our "being-in-the-world" cannot be adequately recreated within the digital environments. In order to develop the latter point, we can highlight the specific features of the objects that populate the digital environment.

In fact, digital technologies involve the interaction with various kinds of "digital beings"[27], which are units of digital information (i.e. series of binary digits) that populate the digital world (e.g. digital texts created with a word processor, digital images, music files, avatars in an online game or multiuser dungeon, etc.). As argued by J. Kim[28], these objects have specific ontological features that distinguish them from all the other things with which we interact in ordinary life. On one hand, digital beings have certain thing-like features, such as durability, substantiality and extension, which make them a new kind of thing. Kim makes the example of virtual billiard balls in a virtual pool game. These objects can keep their identity over time and one can interact with them under various circumstances. They can also exist for themselves, and not just as signs that represent something else, therefore having a «quasi-bodily presence»[29]. Furthermore, digital beings can be used as tools in order to achieve certain objectives. On the other hand, digital beings lack some essential features of ordinary material things. In particular, they do not belong in objective time and space, since they can be at different locations at the same time and can be perfectly duplicated[30]. In fact, digital beings

[24] R. Farrow – I. Iacovides, *Gaming and the limits of digital embodiment*, «Philosophy & Technology», 27 (2), 2014, pp. 221–233.
[25] *Ibidem*, p. 230.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 227.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 221.
[27] J. Kim, *Phenomenology of Digital-Being*, «Human Studies», 24, 2001, 87–111.
[28] *Ibidem*.
[29] *Ibidem*, p. 94.
[30] *Ibidem*, p. 99.

simultaneously admit two contradictory possibilities: eternal endurance and instant vanishing. They can «either endure forever without any change or disappear instantly without leaving a trace»[31].

From the phenomenological perspective, it is significant to reflect upon the way in which these peculiar features of digital beings influence our relationship with them, which is different from the way in which we relate to ordinary material things. In fact, ordinary things cannot last forever but they also cannot instantly vanish.[32] These peculiar features of digital beings concern their *materiality*, which is merely virtual and therefore radically different from the materiality of ordinary physical things and of the living body. In fact, like every material thing, the living body cannot endure forever and cannot vanish instantly. Whereas digital beings do not have spatiotemporal constraints, material things and, amongst them, the living body, are essentially characterized by their spatiotemporal limits. Therefore, when dealing with digital beings we are constantly confronted with their paradoxical nature and, by

contrast, with the limits of the material world, whose horizon of meaning is constitutively delineated by spatiotemporal boundaries.

Concerning this point, we can observe that the history of technology is the continuous attempt to overcome the limits of human corporeality and the digital age is the culmination of this process. In particular, an extremely disembodied way of thinking about subjectivity is enclosed in the idea that one day we could be able to "upload" the mind into another physical substrate, be it a computer or a totally artificial body.[33] However, in the light of the phenomenological analysis of corporeality, we can say that this idea is based on an abstract concept of the mind that ignores its corporeal grounding. If the phenomenological thesis of the corporeal grounding of experience is correct, then the idea of transferring one's mind in another physical support would be a material counter-sense (analogous to the concept of a color without extension or a timbre without duration). However, even if we can theoretically exclude such a possibility, the idea that is behind it, i.e. the idea of the inessentiality of the body for the constitution of experience, can exert a powerful effect on the collective imagination of human beings in the digital age.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 100.

[32] Of course, a material thing can be totally destroyed, but this usually requires a physical process that involves time and energy, whereas a digital being can be immediately destroyed with not much effort (e.g by just pressing a button).

[33] If such a procedure were possible, the "mind" that would be uploaded would become a digital being itself, with the previously highlighted ontological features and in particular with the possibility of eternal endurance and of instant vanishing.

However, there is another and more pervasive way of understanding the relationship between corporeality and technology. This is the approach that conceives of technology as a way of enriching our experience of embodied subjects in the ordinary world. In fact, concerning many digital technologies that are widely used nowadays, the digital world is not another realm that is separated from the ordinary world. On the contrary, the digital domain is intertwined with the concrete world of our ordinary experience. Concerning these technologies, it is important to investigate the repercussions that they have on human experience considering, in particular, its corporeal and intersubjective dimensions. Various studies, for example, have focused on the implications of social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) that have a pervasive presence in the life of human beings in the digital age. This issue has been tackled by phenomenological thinkers. A. Borgmann[34] and H. Dreyfus[35] developed a detailed criticism of technologies such as chat rooms, emails, newsgroups, and online gaming platforms, which are the precursors of social networking media. Borgmann highlights the difference between those features of human relationships in the lifeworld that are based on the interaction between fully embodied human beings and the construction of one's

identity online, which is disembodied and abstracted from immersion in the lifeworld. In a similar vein, Dreyfus argues that these digital media suspend one's fully embodied presence in the real world, constituting an impoverished substitute of ordinary life. However, Borgmann and Dreyfus had in mind some technologies that allow one to construct an anonymous or fictitious identity online and they did not foresee the way in which social networking platforms are nowadays used by people in order to give an online presence to their real-world identities[36]. Notwithstanding the fact that new social media technologies are more related to the ordinary world, as opposed to merely digital worlds, it is nevertheless important to reflect upon the repercussions that they have on human experience. For example, Lopato[37] argues that the cultivation of intersubjective relationships through social media significantly differs from its embodied counterpart in the real world. Drawing on Sartre's phenomenological analysis of in-person communication, Lopato argues that online communication inhibits our ability to effectively communicate with others and, for this reason, it cannot be

[34] A. Borgmann, A., *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992; A. Borgmann, *Holding On to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millenium*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999.

[35] H. Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, New York, Routledge, 2001.

[36] S. Vallor, *Social Networking and Ethics*, In «Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy», 2016, pp. 1–47, p. 9.

[37] M. S. Lopato, *Social Media, Love, and Sartre' s Look of the Other: Why Online Communication Is Not Fulfilling*, «Philosophy & Technology», 2016, pp. 195–210.

“fulfilling”. This is because, as claimed by Sartre, in-person communication always involves the perception of the
“look of the other”, i.e. the perception of how one person is judged by the other. This is a fully embodied experience. On the contrary, Lopato observes that online communication through social media introduces radical modifications to in-person communication. In on-line encounters, the meeting between people is just based on a partial representation of the other, in contrast to her fully embodied presence. Therefore, the “look of the other” is directed to a partial representation of the other, which excludes many essential features of embodied communication that cannot be conveyed online. This introduces an irreducible gap in online communication, turning it into an insufficient substitute of inperson communication between embodied subjects in the lifeworld.

3 Conclusion

The digital age has arisen under the banner of a disembodied concept of subjectivity, which is based on the idea that the body is not essential for the constitution of the human mind. This disembodied concept of the mind comes into play in those digital technologies that imply a disembodiment or simply a superficial embodiment of our ordinary experience in the lifeworld. However, the phenomenological analysis of corporeality leads us to highlight the corporeal grounding of the mind and therefore the essentially embodied character of human experience in all of its dimensions. This analysis can serve as the basis for the careful evaluation of the repercussions of each digital technology. This analysis

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should not assume a preconceived pessimistic attitude concerning the impact of digital technologies on human experience. However, it can warn us against the risks of dehumanization that are incorporated in certain technologies, when they clash with the essential features of human experience and especially with its corporeal grounding. Pointing out the ways in which some digital technologies negatively affect human experience can thus lead to developing them in ways that keep them human being friendly.