Our Filtered Lives: The Tension Between Citizenship and Instrumentality

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The central problem to be examined here is that the loss of the private self is a threat to the theory of citizenship, which rests upon the idea that a citizen is a person with both a private life and a public life, a distinction inherent in many traditional theories of citizenship. Without the restoration of a potent private sphere in the individual life, citizenship becomes thin and shallow, an unnecessary and antiquated theory, useful only as a convenient tool for organizing the masses.

The private life of the individual in today’s society is now intricately linked with technology. Thus it is impossible to explore the loss of the private self without also looking at the role of technology in the life of the citizen, specifically the sense in which a citizen’s relation to their own existence is technologically-mediated. To such an end, I will have recourse to Martin Heidegger as a thinker who explicates how technology transforms our relation with existence, or to use his term “being.”

Technology gives us an opportunity to relate to the environment, others, and ourselves differently. Rather than experience being as present to us, we have the opportunity for a mediated experience with being because of the power of technology. In itself, technology is a tool; it is a means to an end, not an end in itself, a mediator between person and reality. By allowing technology to mediate our experiences, we are succumbing to what Heidegger will call “ge-stell,”1 or enframing, with the result that we see everything as instrumental (a sunset is no longer a sunset, but something to be captured by technology in the form of a photograph for the sake of posting). Today, relating to the world instrumentally is more pervasive and more difficult to resist because of social media, a new phenomenon particular to postmodernity.

In order to see how technology influences citizenship, I am dependent on Hannah Arendt’s characterization of the social, private, public and political realms. One consequence of social media is that the sharing of one’s private life (be it sentiments, activities, or opinions) is acceptable and expected in the public sphere; indeed, it seems that more and more, the public sphere is constituted by private stories. Further, because technology operates through enframing, both the private and public spheres have become spaces of utility. This may be opposed to how Arendt will characterize these spheres or to how Heidegger juxtaposes enframing with the more primordial poiesis as a mode of relation. It would seem, then, that the private sphere is receding into the public. To regain a thriving theory of citizenship, one in which participation as a citizen is an honor both for the state and for the private self, means a move away from the functionalism that encapsulates us today.

And finally, the enframing that results in the loss of the public and private boundary is harmful not only to the theory of citizenship, but to our own beings as well. If we can return to a state of relating to the revealing of nature as non-mediated, and privilege the poetic over the technological, then our own beings will return to a more natural state that nurtures and values the private life. If such a change is made, then the new, substantial private life will be prepared to contribute to an equally substantial public sphere.

1 Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, 19.
Instru-mentality, Technological Mediation and Enframing

Heidegger, in “The Question Concerning Technology”, provides the philosophical underpinnings that illuminate the core of the postmodern problem with regards to technology. Taking some of his contributions, the links between the technology of social media, the public and private spheres, and citizenship become clearer.

According to Heidegger, as humans, our natural and primary way of relating to being is through *poiesis*, which is a “bringing into appearance” or a “bringing-forth” of the essence of a thing, where essence is understood in terms of presencing. For example, an oak tree brings forth its essence, gives its presence to us by revealing itself to us as what it is. Yet, another way to relate to beings is through technology, and when beings are revealed to us through technological mediation, they are revealed in terms of instru-mentality. When beings are revealed in terms of instru-mentality, they are revealed as instruments to be used for some end. When beings are revealed in terms of presencing their essence, they are revealed as ends in themselves, that is, not for some other—instrumental—purpose.

The concept that Heidegger introduces in order to relate modern technology with being is that of “ge-stell,” perhaps best translated as “enframing.” Just as *poiesis* is a revealing of essence, so too is technology a way of revealing. Heidegger suggests that technology reveals beings as “standing reserve,” meaning that “everywhere, everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering.” Consider the oak tree. What are the thoughts that cross the mind in the presence of the tree? If the thought is something along the lines of “I could use that tree to build a table” or “I should take picture of that and publicly share it on social media so that my friends will know, for sure, that I appreciate nature” then the tree is being experienced as standing reserve. Rather than appreciating the tree for itself, it is subjected to order based on how useful it is, and what it can be used for.

For Heidegger, enframing “challenges [man] forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve.” Enframing itself is a summons, and the summons expresses itself every time we relate to reality with technology in mind. That which “challenges forth” is the summons, but it is not an external factor. Rather, the summons is purely internal, somewhat similar in experience to what we refer to as the “call of conscience,” an instinct, a desire, or a need to behave and act in a certain way. Just as an instinct is first present in the thought, and then brought either to action or non-action, so too does enframing involve two steps: the summons is heard to relate to an experience through the medium of technology; the response is either to act on the summons, or to turn away from the summons.

In fact, to act on the summons does not require the physical apparatus of technology. For example, my experience of my life becomes enframed when I think, “I am going to update

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4 Ibid., 17.
5 Ibid., 20.
my Facebook status.” When I hear the internal summons to share my current situation or disposition via social media it shows that I already have a relation to my existence as if it were standing reserve. Becoming habituated to the summons is like exchanging my own mentality for the instru-mentality of technological mediation. I relate to my existence as if it were something to be “posted,” and as a means to whatever ends may come from such “posting.” In other words, as my existence is revealed to me, being filtered through technological mediation, social media orders my understanding to see itself in terms of instru-mentality (cf. Scalambrino, 2015). In this way, acting on the summons completes the presencing of existence in terms of enframing and, done repeatedly, becomes habitual.

One way social media, such as Facebook, establishes control, that is orders our existence into standing reserve, is through the “inter-face” mechanisms users must learn to successfully navigate the technology (cf. Scalambrino, 2014). A subtle example of this, through enframing, is in terms of the media’s attractive terminology. Status updates are an opportunity for “sharing” with friends and family. Under the guise of human relations, Facebook becomes the mediator. Enframing is always present whenever the technological tools of social media are present. If I am enjoying the company of friends, and yet I have my iPhone always at hand ready to take pictures, respond to the people not really there (cf. Engelland, 2015), etc. then I have opened myself up to answer the summons immediately, and to express the summons—to allow technological mediation order me—by actually taking the picture, and actually texting someone back. The idea of a social situation that is not mediated by technology is a rare find now. Even if I am physically present with a friend, my phone is still mediating my experience. In fact, the pervasiveness of social media and smartphones coincides with enframing as usual and customary in regard to social interactions.

The habit of living life ordered through technological mediation, and therefore as standing reserve, is what we are up against. With the habituality and the instru-mentality sustained through technological mediation, especially social media, the issue of standing reserve appears even more pressing. Enframing does not mean that a person looks at life as though through a picture frame fit with technological lenses. Rather, enframing is a summons that calls to us, internally, to relate to the world and to each other in terms of standing reserve, or, as instruments, that is, objects to be used in some fashion (cf. Scalambrino, 2015). When the relation of presencing (or “essencing”) occurs through enframing rather than poiesis, then we relate to the being of another person in terms of their utility. Social media allows us to create a representation of ourselves for others to encounter.

Through a cyber dimension, we become distanced from others, but the great guise is that we think we are becoming closer to them. In our private lives, we live with a fear of always imposing on others because we are so used to the non-imposition that is associated with media communication (cf. de Mul, 2015). We sacrifice presence for absence in that we are merely present in terms of instru-mentality, when our relations are technologically-mediated.

Enframed identities compete for us to be them, like Ernst Jünger’s insights regarding the identity of “worker” or the Hollywood-fashioned identity of “celebrity,” and as if possessed
by the efficiency of instru-mentality, we work to be our own paparazzi. Of course, there are
a multitude of examples that can be drawn from social media that illustrate just how easy it is
to live a filtered life, where relation to being becomes mediated. Postmodern technology
looks like the publication of the private; it is “the manipulation of man by his own planning.”
For example, the “personalize your LinkedIn profile page” with an image that
describes you, your interests, etc. Physically present personalities are readily substituted for
the chance to control what aspects of your personality you want projected for others to see.

Yet, Facebook is perhaps the most primary example of people giving to the public updates
on their private lives, updates which can then be liked, shared, and commented on. The
original meaning of words such as “sharing” and “liking” receive a second definition based
on the instru-mentality of social media. In other cases, people submit themselves to
technology, and thus lose themselves. The technology is too powerful. One of the popular
hash tags in social media is the #besomebody. The idea behind the trend is that you are told
you are being somebody to yourself, but really it’s directed outward, trying to tell others that
you are somebody. Thus, you allow your own being to be hijacked into pure judgment, the
judgment of others, and their enframed judgment at that.

The role of enframing has been present for as long as technology has been present. Today,
social media is one particular instance of technology, but it is one that makes enframing
more and more difficult to escape because we are constantly and physically around the tools
that make social media possible: the computer at home and at work, the phone in the pocket
or hand, the tablet always within reach. One of the reasons social media deserves
consideration is because for the first time in history technology is in the hands of the
everyman. We no longer just have the technology of big machines. Now it is big machines in
addition to the technology of the masses, the technology of social media.

Gianni Vattimo, in “Postmodernity, Technology, Ontology,” comments on how “Heidegger
… remained stuck in a vision of technology dominated by the image of the motor and of
mechanical energy.” Nevertheless, though Heidegger wrote about technology in his own
historical situation and relates enframing with modern technology (machines powered by
motors directed at the control of nature) his ideas are still highly relevant in today’s culture
(and perhaps more so than ever before considering that technology permeates all sectors of
society).

Thus, there is also a historical motivation behind this paper. To fully appreciate the state we
are in today, it is helpful to look at how technology, in our postmodern condition, is one of
the reasons why the issues here deserve (perhaps urgent) consideration. The historical
evaluation will not be a lengthy one: it is not necessary to trace technology beyond the
historical transition from modernity to postmodernity to gain an understanding of why and
how technology today has become a (seemingly) essential part of everyday life, and a factor
of everyday-ness that is not without consequences.

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7 Vattimo, “Postmodernity, Technology, Ontology,” 223.
While Heidegger’s account of how technology alters our relationship with being can be traced back to the origin of technology, in more recent history the shift from modernity to postmodernity provides an explanation for how and why the concept of enframing deserves particular attention today, in our postmodern world. Richard Merelman’s article “Technological Cultures and the Liberal Democracy in the United States” highlights the shift from modern technology to postmodern technology in order to suggest a reason for the change in how citizens view American government and liberal democracy. His distinction between the directions of technology (which serves as the groundwork for his entire essay) is important here, because it reinforces the urgency of the social media and enframing issue.

Merelman points to the modern era, when technology was directed outwards towards the control of nature. However, the entire culture of technology during that era was translucent; the average citizen was able to understand how technology operated. However, with the transition to postmodern technology, the emphasis of invention became directed on the human person, rather than nature. New technologies geared towards human development and health allowed the former focus on nature to be redirected.

In the modern era, as Merelman writes “the self acted, technology responded, and nature yielded to the civilized control of society.” Thus Bacon was justified and Descartes was fulfilled. In his _New Organon_, Bacon’s third axiom reads, “Human knowledge and human power come to the same thing, because ignorance of cause frustrates effect. For Nature is conquered only by obedience; and that which in thought is a cause, is like a rule in practice.” Bacon was the first to introduce the idea of controlling nature, and thus he introduced this era of modernity. In extension of this transition, Descartes succinctly writes in his _Discourse on Method_ that we must “render ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature. This is desirable not only for the invention of an infinity of devices that would enable one to enjoy trouble-free the fruits of the earth and all the goods found there, but also principally for the maintenance of health…” As Descartes points out, such mastery of nature is made possible by physics. The important point about modern technology is that it was directed outwards.

Furthermore, because the technology was directed outwards, the effects, as Merelman writes, were immediately observable and calculable. We do not see the same possibility for calculating in postmodern technology, because enframing is an internal summons. What is internal to the person is much more complicated than the control of nature. The results of enframing are much more subtle, less clear, less comprehensible, and ultimately less scientific.

Modern technology lasted through World War II, and indeed it continues today. Much of

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8 Merelman, “Technological Cultures and Liberal Democracy in the United States.”
10 Bacon, _The New Organon_, 33.
11 Descartes, _Discourse on Method_, 35.
our technology is meant to master nature. However, it has receded. The transition to postmodernism began in post-World War II American culture, and was in full force by the 1960s. Why did modernism end? Perhaps our control of nature, as Merelman suggests, goes too far. Why else would the rise of environmentalism occur simultaneously with the shift to postmodernism? We controlled too much of nature, and we drew back. This is one interpretation. But perhaps it is more likely that environmentalism is also the control of nature; it’s just cleverly disguised. By focusing less attention on the control of nature, it became possible for technology to be redirected towards the human person. The technology is still external to us, but its effects are now seen in the workings of the person, not just in nature. Soon, we may realize that this too must be reined it. The other cause for transition to postmodern technology is more natural and obvious: technology and science strives on. Man is not content with domination of nature; it must also dominate the two extremes sandwiching our earth: the solar system on one hand and the human person on the other.

Thus, with the transition to postmodern technology, the emphasis of invention became directed on the human person, rather than nature. New technologies geared towards human development and health allowed the former focus on nature to be redirected. Now, in the postmodern condition, one of the main purposes of technology is to understand the self. In some ways this was successful, for example the research regarding the human genome and mental illness. These are two examples that aid in understanding the self (though in no way is this meant to suggest that human persons can be reduced to their mental faculties and their inherited genetic traits.) But what does technological enframing look like today? We will see that rather than aiding in understanding the self we are compromising and sacrificing the self. This is done under the great guise of technology. Postmodern technology promises self-fulfillment, life improvement, self-betterment…but it is, for the most part, a deceit and the repercussions extend into many areas of life, including that of citizenship.

I am focused on the so called communication technology of social media as representative of postmodern technology, I do not think it can separated from the technology directed towards understanding man’s biology, in other words, medical technology. All of these separations still fall within the technology of information; it is merely expressed differently based on specific areas. For example, medical technology allows the illusion of facial reconstruction; communication technology allows for the illusion of the media persona, a not-there identity, entirely fabricated (not only by the fabricator, but also by others who can say what they want about others within this technology). It is interesting that, with regards to medical technology, Descartes was in a way foreshadowing the evolution of postmodernism when he speaks of the “maintenance of health” as one of the benefits of mastering nature.

So far, we have seen that technology, as a source of revealing, reveals to us being as standing reserve. Also examined was the historical perspective: that the transition from modernity to postmodernity, culminating in the social media that permeates our world today, brings the concept of enframing to the forefront due to the extreme accessibility and habitual use of social media. Now, with the previous progress in mind, we will begin to turn our attention to the effects of enframing in the realm of citizenship, which will necessarily mean the effects on our own beings as well. To the extent that enframing is a part of our every day life, I will
argue that enframing is contributing greatly to the loss of the sense of the private self, without which the theory of citizenship cannot remain meaningful to the citizen.

From Enframing to the Efficiency of Postmodern Technology

For Arendt, society, and thus the social realm, is where “private interests assume public significance”\(^{12}\) which takes the form “of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else…and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public.”\(^{13}\) What is necessary for survival? Eating, shelter, and the education of the young become some of the constituents of the social realm. It seems that social media should not be called social media. There is nothing about social media that makes it necessary for survival.

The private on the other hand is a “sphere of intimacy”\(^{14}\) where the happenings of the private life need not extend into the social realm. It is closed off from the eyes of others, except those personally involved in the sphere. Furthermore, it ought to revolve around real presencing. However, Arendt points out that in the modern era “modern privacy in its most relevant function, to shelter the intimate, was discovered as the opposite not of the political sphere but of the social, to which it is therefore more closely and authentically related.”\(^{15}\)

For Arendt, it is clear that the private sphere is closely linked with the social (and not the public) sphere. Does this then mean that the social and the private have nothing to do with citizenship since they are thus severed from the political realm? By no means. We shall see that Arendt is drawing a chain, and connects the social sphere with the public sphere. For Arendt, the public and private do not co-exist snugly side-by-side. Rather, the social realm falls between them and knits them together, while at the same time allowing the two spheres to remain distinct. Some private issues (such as education) appear in the social realm, and then the social realm contributes to the public sphere.

Arendt has a specific definition of the private sphere. Shiraz Dossa summarizes Arendt’s conception of the private as such: “that privacy is the natural condition of men is a truism for Arendt: the needs and wants of the human body and the natural functions to which the body is subject are inherently private.”\(^{16}\) Further, Arendt contrasts the category of the private with that of the public. The public realm is fascinating because it can be either social or political.\(^{17}\) Traditionally, the public was aligned with the political. However, the larger the community, the more social the public will be. We are therefore losing our sense of the political and the private to the social and the public.

\(^{12}\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 35.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^{17}\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 43.
Arendt constitutes the public realm in two ways. The first is “that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity.” However, Arendt’s public is not infiltrated with social media as it is today; thus our public realm has become a filtered reality. In another sense, for Arendt the public “signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it.” How awesome is it that we have private ownership in this world! And it is equally awesome that there is a public sphere that balances the private. However, it is not necessary for social media to publicize that the world is common to all; the commonness should be enough in itself and has no need to be enframed.

The other point that Arendt is making is that the public realm is receding. During her time, the state of the public realm was no longer permanent. The permanency of the public sphere is highly important in Arendt’s philosophy because it means that what we create today is not only for our generation; the public today ought to take the future into consideration as well since “It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time.” The idea is to live in a world, and to create a world, that is strong enough to withstand time.

To overcome time suggests a worthiness of the pursuits engaged in creating something in the public sphere because then the works succeed the condemnation of mortal decay. They participate and gain access to an eternal realm (though an eternal realm still confined in the physical world). Perhaps Arendt is right: how much of our public world will withstand time? But in another sense, the opposite is happening: all is falling into the public. The private is being subsumed under the public, and the public now has its identity as social, and not political. If all that is left is the public sphere, then without the opposition of another sphere there can be no loss of the public: it’s permanency is parallel to a dictator, ruling with no contestants. Rather than the public being like a dictator, it should rather retain a healthy tension with the private sphere, each of the two acting as a balance for the other.

Presented above are Arendt’s definitions of the social, private, public and political realms, and how each relates to the others. The most significant one for present purposes is the distinction between the public and the private. It is clear that Arendt elevates the public realm, and I elevate the private realm. She speaks of rising from the private to the public. But I would not say the move from public to private is an ascent. I would rather say that they are on a horizontally-related, rather than vertically.

From Postmodern Technology to Boundary Blurring Between the Public and the Private

The enframing that occurs with social media is mediating our relation to real presences and thus necessarily it is directly affecting our private and public lives. When our private lives

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18 Ibid., 50.
19 Ibid.
bleed into the public sphere via social media, the public sphere itself becomes a mirror image of mediated personalities. For Arendt, the public sphere means “something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves.” Granted, social media is seen and heard via technological devices, however the relation to what appears via technology is once removed from reality: it is a copy, and it is also an illusion.

As social media makes a stronger and more permanent presence in the world, the private realm becomes less and less significant because what used to be strictly present in the private realm can now easily be projected into the public realm. While social media exacerbates enframing, the issue at hand is nothing new. Arendt notes how in modernity “functionalization makes it impossible to perceive any serious gulf between the two realms.” Thus it is function, enframing, and usefulness that blur the boundary between the public and private.

In addition to Arendt, Vattimo argues “what concerns us in the postmodern age is a transformation of (the notion of) Being as such—and technology, properly conceived, is the key to that transformation.” Indeed, our notion of being is transformed, or at least filtered, by technology because of enframing. Vattimo characterizes enframing as “the totality of the modern rationalization of the world on the basis of science and technology.” Thus, it is impossible to conceive of being as extending beyond enframing. As we have already seen, the rationalization that Vattimo speaks of is the utilitarian nature of enframing, an aspect that coincides with the pragmatism originating in the 20th century.

The very utility that is necessarily attached to pragmatism continues to presence itself today through enframing, made easy by social media. Vattimo clearly states: “I don’t believe that Pragmatist and Neopragmatist arguments are strong enough to support a choice for democracy, nonviolence, and tolerance.” Therefore, he supports an ontological rather than a pragmatic point of view, which, as a philosophical position, prefers “a democratic, tolerant, liberal society to an authoritarian and totalitarian one.” To have a life not dominated by the enframing of technology is more conducive to democratic ideals. While the private and public spheres are necessary in any political system, democracy is our current situation, which adds a definite relevance to the experience of enframing as opposed to other ways of relating to reality.

Before moving on to discussing how the lack of a boundary between the public and private influences the individual life of the citizen, there is a final point to be made about the republic, one that speaks to the very lifeblood of citizenship as a theory. Wilson Carey McWilliams, drawing on Tocqueville, states “freedom is not the mastery of persons and things; it is being what we are, subject to truth’s authority. No teaching is more necessary if the technological republic is to rediscover its soul.” What we are sure to lose in our current

21 Ibid., 33.
22 Vattimo, “Postmodernity, Technology, Ontology,” 214.
23 Ibid., 222.
24 Ibid., 226.
trajectory is the soul of our nation. In an illusionary manner, social media is about mastery and the sense of feeling like we are in control. It is the delusion that we can control a relationship in a text message. It is becoming evident that time is a huge factor with social media: how quickly in time can an image go viral? How quick is the response to messages?

As we can control this factor of time while participating in social media, we allow ourselves to fall prey to the illusion of power. In social media, there is no subjection of the self, there is only self-proclamation. When the citizens of our republic have no soul, the soul of the republic suffers. The soul of the republic is only as great as the people who make up the republic. Nietzsche, drawing on Aristotle, asks if greatness of soul is possible. If it is, social media is not helping in the nurturing of greatness since a soul that relates to being as not exceeding standing reserve loses all sense of mystery. When the souls of a nation are suffering, infected with a continually enframed view of being, then the very soul of a nation suffers as well, as it’s lifeblood is slowly shut off.

Some encourage the publication of the private as a signal of the advancement of mankind in the social realm. If the social realm were the highest, then such would be the case. But there are reasons why I hold the private to be of great significance: people begin their role as citizens in the private realm. The remedy of this problem is necessary if we are to remain as citizens, if citizenship is itself going to survive. All can be traced back to what is going on in the private realm. It determines our identities, which we then carry into the public realm.

A healthy citizen is a citizen who is able to distinguish the private from the public, and retain a balance between the two. To lose this, is to lose the capacity to be a citizen, and thus we face the collapse of the theory of citizenship. This theory only has existence in so far as we as individuals uphold it through our own existences as public and private beings. Thus as we continue to sacrifice our private selves, we are slowly chipping away at the theory of citizenship. Arendt approaches the same problem, but subordinates the private to the public. For her, a well-lived public sphere trickles down to the private sphere and improves it. Her ordering is necessary if the public sphere is where man truly fulfills his nature (the guiding principle of Civic Republicanism). The conclusion is the same for both of us: an identity as a citizen that involves both the public and the private spheres. We merely diverge on the privileging of spheres.

Furthermore, the boundary between the public and private self is a condition for citizenship in that a strong identity of the private self serves as preparation for a well-constituted public sphere. The enframing by technology today that is weakening the boundary between the private and the public thus has implications for the theory of citizenship. If a citizen lacks a foundation in their private life, then that citizen may as well be a foreigner to the system of citizenship that they are attempting to participate in. Just as a foreigner will lack the disposition to give credibility and care to the style of citizenship that is either not their own or that they have no intention of participating in, so too is the citizen who attempts to participate in the public sphere while lacking a hidden and private life. Since the public

26 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 139.
sphere is made of citizens, the only way to have a thriving citizenship is for a sense of strong personal identity with the state where the citizenry reside. The personal identity is established in the private sphere, where the soul learns to relate to reality, and then brings itself to help constitute the reality of the public. A citizen with no private life is like an apple with no core: it is all façade, with nothing substantial to contribute to permanency and foundation.

Finally, the private realm ought to remain unpublicized for the sake of retaining a unified self, and for the sake of self-reverence and mystery. Once publicized, reverence and mystery become obsolete. Paul A. Cantor and Cardinal Ratzinger offer ideas on what it means for the human person to exist without reverence and without mystery, two aspects of the human race that technology helps make disappear. When we then lose our sense of private identity we are losing a part of ourselves. Though we are incomplete beings, we accentuate and magnify our incompleteness through technology. It is entirely voluntary, and entirely unnecessary.

Paul A. Cantor writes: “when man chooses to revere nothing higher than himself, he will indeed find it difficult to control the power of his own technology.” Social media is followed with an attentive reverence, but since social media is a platform for the self, reverencing social media is essentially reverencing one’s media self, and nothing higher. When the media acts as such a vice grip, it is difficult to remember to revere anything else. Reverence does not have to pertain to religion or belief systems. It can mean to honor the internal difference of the human person, out of humility recognizing that no representation ever captures the greatness of man. Why would we choose to honor media personas that strive so hard for coherence over the contemplation of actuality?

The reverence that Cantor is talking about is similar to Cardinal Ratzinger, in An Introduction to Christianity, asking,

But if man, in his origin and at his very roots, is only an object to himself, if he is ‘produced’ and comes off the production line with selected features and accessories, what on earth is man then supposed to think of man? How should he act toward him? What will be man’s attitude toward man when he can no longer find anything of the divine mystery in the other, but only his own know-how?

Our publication of the private dehumanizes us, reduces us, and secludes us. I argue that it is not part of the fabric of reality. We see in the face of the other, not their inherent mystery, but a shell of their opinions. Our participation further reduces our own mystery that we hold to ourselves. If we are to truly have a public sphere that lasts more than a generation, then a “production line” creation is far too weak and fallible, since it is so easily changed and manipulated to match the going trends and styles of the day. The weakness of such a system is then expounded when it applies not just to the manufacturing of things, but to the

28 Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 18.
manufacturing of people as well. Not only is the result a loss of beauty in the creation of the public sphere, but also man is demoted to robotic-like expectations, devoid of all “divine mystery.”

Ratzinger’s characterization and implications of the manufactured person is the same as Heidegger’s exploration of standing reserve, since standing reserve fully embraces utility, and leaves no room for mystery. As previously illustrated, enframing harms the private life and destroys hiddenness. Thus, the experience of reality (including the human person) as standing reserve that occurs through enframing is detrimental to the mystery of the person. Though the mystery of the person is explored in the public sphere, it finds its root and primary expression in the private sphere. But, what is the point of divinity, or eternity, when there is no birth of such things in the private sphere, and no sustenance for them in the public sphere?

A Public, Shallow Life

Arendt provides a succinct summation of the problem: “A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow.” Our life is constituted by physical presences, both in the public and the private spheres. However, added to the real flesh of the physical world is the prominence of media presences (which are immaterial) that allow the individual to have a constant presence in the public sphere. When the media presences become the main way in which we relate our lives to the world around us, then we are looking at a great private loss. Along with the loss of the private self comes the loss of a profound and real theory of citizenship. Thus, if the overarching idea to be preserved is citizenship, then we must search for a way to preserve the hidden life, the private life. It is possible that such a reversal will change our embodiment in the fibers of apathy that currently constitutes the general perception of citizenship.

If enframing occurs because we respond to the summons that results in standing reserve, then a change in perception, an internal change, will radically derail enframing. An internal change towards external reality means escaping from enframing and (perhaps) returning to what Heidegger will call more “primordial,” a relation to the world that was possible prior to the power of technology that allowed for enframing in the first place. Ideally, it means seeking the inherent value present in the world, rather than living by standing reserve alone. It means returning to reverence, to soul, and to mystery, as opposed to total revealing in utility and a life that does not extend beyond what is manufactured and functional. Though utility cannot (and need not) be totally eradicated, utility also need not be privileged above other paths of relation.

Once enframing is held in check, the private realm will not sink so quickly into the public, and the two realms will once again become distinct. The internal opposition to enframing will put a hold on the constant filtration of reality, and thus allow for a wellspring of endurance, a new revealing of truth not based in usefulness, and a return to the hiddenness

29 Arendt, The Human Condition, 71.
of the private sphere. The re-established privacy then re-draws the boundary between the public and the private, such that a newly well-established private sphere provides for a stronger sense of self, a better preparation for entering the public sphere. The strength of self not hindered in the public sphere infuses the soul of citizenship, and thus saves citizenship.

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References


