

Technology in Therapeutic Interaction

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(professional paper)

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Abstract

The article examines the role of technology and digital media in therapeutic interaction through the lens of M. Heidegger's philosophy, especially the concept of enframing (*Gestell*). Online therapy is shown to have important practical advantages: it increases access to psychological care, extends the geographical reach of therapeutic contact, and makes the interaction more flexible and cost-effective. At the same time, the digital format is not a neutral medium of communication, since it belongs to a broader technological mode of revealing reality that subordinates human relations to the logic of calculation, control, and reproducibility. In this context, the therapeutic relationship risks being reduced to a service, while psychic suffering becomes an object of operational management. The author argues that in the age of planetary technology, preserving a space of non-productive relation becomes especially important, as it allows room for pause, silence, symbolic work, and a genuine human encounter. As a response to the technologization of therapy, the article proposes not only professional technique, but also moral maturity, ontological openness, and the therapist's heartfelt involvement. These qualities make it possible to preserve in therapy a dimension of meaning that cannot be reduced to technical efficiency or digital control.

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In this article we should like to turn not to the questions usually debated — disputes about the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interaction when technical means of communication are used, and about their positive and negative features — but to the involvement of technology itself in the therapeutic process, and to its influence (Heidegger, 1993, pp. 221-237; Bibikhin, 2002, pp. 145-150).

Debates about technology are usually conducted at the applied level: does it improve something in therapy or make it worse? Among the positive features of using technology, the following are commonly cited: the availability of specialists, flexibility of scheduling, savings of time and travel costs, the possibility of receiving help without local restrictions, and the possibility of consulting an expert with a narrower specialization (Barak et al., 2008, pp. 109-160; Backhaus et al., 2012, p. 432). Video sessions also make it possible to use online tools for exposure, functional assignments, and symptom monitoring between meetings. Sergio Benvenuto, the well-known Italian psychoanalyst,

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philosopher, and writer, in his interview “Why psychoanalysis is not practised remotely,” points to the current “experimental” character of such interaction (Benvenuto, n.d.).

Among the drawbacks one may cite limited access to the full range of non-verbal language because of the camera frame and connection quality, which can complicate the interpretation of emotional states; questions of privacy, data storage, and compliance with professional standards on online platforms; and interruptions of connection and problems with software and equipment (Rochlen et al., 2004, pp. 269–283; Simpson, 2009, p. 518). Among the specific features of in-depth psychodynamic work is the fact that physical presence and a specially equipped space are considered important elements of the therapeutic process; the shift to online work may alter the dynamics and intensity of that work. These claims, however, may vary considerably within the therapeutic community (Gabbard, 2014, p. 89; Turkle, 2011, p. 134).

Leaving these questions to specialists in their field, let us note that online psychotherapy and psychoanalysis may also be considered a concrete manifestation of the power of technology-as-enframing (Gestell): the remote format draws the therapist and the interlocutor into a mode of “ordering production,” in which the psyche, speech, relationships, and time become resources to be organized, accounted for, and used efficiently (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

This process may be seen in M. Heidegger’s description as follows: the essence of modern technology may be described as enframing, a particular mode of revealing the concealed in which every being shows itself merely as “standing-reserve” (that is, a resource at one’s disposal). Enframing is not simply an aggregate of devices, but a gathering challenge that “concentrates the human being upon ordering production,” compelling him to relate to everything as to what must be extracted, processed, accumulated, and distributed (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993). The human being himself is seized by this mode of revealing: he no longer disposes of technology freely, but is included in its destinal order (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

In this light, online therapy may likewise be seen as part of ordering production. Digital platforms, the internet, and video communication are examples of technology that structures communication into forms of “information” and “messages” subordinated to the logic of production and management. In online therapy, the psychic content of the session is transformed into a flow of data: words, images, and metrics that must be delivered in good time — supplied, processed, documented, paid for, and fitted into a schedule, into the interface of the platform. In the technological age, language risks being reduced to a “sequence of messages” (information), losing its own content; this bears directly on the speech of the therapeutic session when it is formatted by the interface, the timing, and the protocols of an online service (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

From the standpoint of enframing, the advantages (accessibility, convenience, scalability) mean that life and suffering become better integrated into the technological order: psychic suffering, too, is now a resource that can be “promptly serviced” in a global network (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993). The therapeutic dyad acquires new possibilities, but precisely as nodes in a network of “ordering production” of help, where relationships are normed by platform protocols, regulations, tariffs, and specialist-matching algorithms (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

Technology also favours accounting and control: session recordings, electronic records, statistics, and algorithmic support may increase the reproducibility and

transparency of therapy (Luxton et al., 2016, p. 32; Naslund et al., 2017, pp. 486–500). For enframing, this corresponds to the tendency towards the “quantification” and “objectification” of relationships, in which the human is revealed first of all as that which lends itself to measurement and management (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993, p. 237).

Alongside such evident advantages, however, there are evident drawbacks. The human being, for his part, becomes an object of monitoring, targeting, and data processing; his suffering is incorporated into the chain “identify the request — select a specialist — conduct a session — collect an evaluation — optimize the product.” Enframing itself compels one “to supply the actual as standing-reserve”; the therapist, his time, his attention, and even his own personality appear as a managed resource in the networked production of services (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993). The therapeutic relationship is reduced to a service, the psyche to a “case” within the system, and conversation to an exchange of information; the possibility of a genuine revealing of the being of the human is thereby obscured by the logic of service (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

Heidegger himself emphasized that the power of enframing is dangerous because it “drives out other modes of revealing” and conceals the very possibility of a different, non-productive relation to beings. He also wrote, however, that the task is not to destroy technology but to prepare a “free relationship” to it — that is, to see in it not only an instrument but also a destiny of revealing, while at the same time not allowing it to monopolize the truth about the human being (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993).

From these conclusions it may be determined that the digital form is not a neutral channel but a particular “mode of revealing” that structures the experience of each participant in the therapeutic interaction (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993). The deliberate preservation of spaces of non-productive relation (silence, pause, symbolic work not reducible to the exchange of information) allows another dimension to emerge within technology — one close to the “poetic revealing” of which Heidegger spoke as a possible counterweight to enframing (Heidegger, 1993, p. 237; Bibikhin, 2002, p. 189).

We have written elsewhere that the therapeutic process, understood ontologically, may be called an “unfolding” rather than “instruction,” “upbringing,” “persuasion,” “compassion,” and so forth (Uglev, n.d.). Such a therapist does not transmit his knowledge and experience; he assists in the formation of an “equivalent” acquired in the course of his own analysis, by cultivating the *gisements profonds d’un sol mental*, the “deposits of the mental soil” of the analysand, being merely a guide in the world of the analysand’s own analytic journey. The fullness of the therapist echoes the theme of holiness; all of this could be said otherwise. “The blessing added nothing to the content of the conference; the consecration of an apartment is something other than moving furniture into it — it adds nothing to the apartment.” This is already a priestly function: just as the priest does not work miracles by his own power, so neither the therapist nor the psychologist does so by his own — he merely does something that will later allow what is to happen to occur of itself, without any help from him; he is the “shepherd of Being.” And the therapist, exactly like the priest, is a witness — a witness of confession and of changes that have taken place, an oracle, a teller, and a poet of the being of thought (Bibikhin, 2012, 2024; Uglev, n.d.).

But what is to be done with technology itself, which divides, controls, and schedules the actions of every participant in therapy? The problem is in fact far broader and does not concern only the time of the session. Smartphones and personal computers with

internet access; social services, messengers, e-mail, planners; at home and at work, at friends' places, in the bathroom, before sleep and upon waking. People aged between 16 and 64 (data from the "Digital 2020" conference) are online for about seven hours a day (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020). This is an enormous figure: roughly 100 days a year. If sleep is excluded, we spend almost half of our conscious time in the digital world. And it is precisely this world that shapes the themes and experiences arising in therapeutic interaction, being not something incidental but the real itself. It is the human being who becomes incidental.

Originally, the Platonic understanding of creation as a bringing forth from non-being into being, and the Greek τέχνη as "art, craft, creation," were understood as "technology": the historically original creative mode of human existence that enabled the human being to survive and to master the world. At the same time, following Heidegger, in the age of planetary technology the essence of technology as enframing has shifted the emphasis from the poetic, creative disclosure of truth to a total technological disclosure, in which everything is grasped as an element of a productive scheme (Bibikhin, 2012; Heidegger, 1993). Herein lies the radical difference between the creative "automaton" (the self-movement of spirit, of art) and the technological automaton: the latter, historically embodied in the bureaucratic and totalitarian machines of the twentieth century and today in digital platforms, social networks, and messengers, forms a generation that "feeds" on technology and sees the Other as a functional mechanism (Bibikhin, 2002, 2012, 2024).

If the therapeutic relationship should finally submit to the logic of the technological automaton, then the destruction of humaneness (and of humanity — both rendered in English by the same word, "humanity") may surpass the catastrophes of the past, whereas the therapist's task consists in preserving the poetic, non-productive dimension of the encounter, where a genuine event of the new is possible. "If the essence of technology, enframing as the danger sent by Being, is Being itself, then technology can never be brought under control by a merely willed human effort, whether positive or negative. Technology, whose essence is Being itself, will never allow the human being to overcome it. That would mean that the human being had become the master of Being," Heidegger wrote in his work "The Turning" (Heidegger, n.d.). The event has already become impossible. Should time come to a halt, creation will halt, and life will halt with it.

What, then, is the way out of all this? A way out of the technological may be defined not by the abolition of technology but by a transition to other modes of relation, resting upon the moral purity of the heart and upon ontological — and in some cases theological — experience (Bibikhin, 2002, pp. 210–215). The human being is thereby not merely freed from intrusive thoughts, but becomes receptive to a supra-subjective influence at the level of the transcendentals, the universals: love, goodness, truth, beauty, honesty, justice (Bibikhin, 2002; Uglev, n.d.). This level corresponds to the maxim of the ontological dimension of psychotherapy: technology, enframing, and digital automatisms continue to operate, but they no longer set absolute criteria of value; a person suddenly "succeeds" in experiencing fullness, ineffable joy, and light as events that he does not "produce," but to which he is admitted when the "door of the heart" opens — not by his own effort (Bibikhin, 2002).

In recent times, therapeutic emphases have begun to shift from neutrality towards client-centredness — not, however, as some set of methods and practices that can be

learned, but as qualities inherent in the therapist himself (Bibikhin, 2002; Uglev, n.d.). Sustaining heartfelt presence and receptivity to “practical wisdom,” which create an ontological steadfastness, and the subsequent unfolding towards Being, make it possible to bridge the gap between one’s personal experience and the client’s experience — including for beginning therapists who seek to fill that space with experience not yet available to them (Bibikhin, 2002; Uglev, n.d.). M. K. Mamardashvili linked the parallel theme of *amechania* to a completed state of human maturity (Mamardashvili, 1997, p. 147), to the accumulation of a certain life experience. This brings therapeutic interaction to a new level, where technology remains merely a means, while the decisive condition becomes the therapist’s mature heartfelt involvement, through which the space of a genuine human encounter and the birth of new experience are sustained.

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