



SOUTHEASTERN ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOP

HOSTED BY THE VIRGINIA TECH STS PROGRAM AND UNC CHARLOTTE CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

SEPT. 23, 2017

Schedule

Note: Sessions are expected to run for 50-60 minutes (25 minutes/speaker), followed by a 15 minute short break between sessions. Feel free to shift around or take a break if you need to during the day.

9:30am Welcome and Introductions

10am-11am - Session 1

- Bono Shih, Virginia Tech, “Are Engineering Skills Gendered? A Conversation with Philosophy of Technology”
- MaryCatherine McDonald, Old Dominion University, “More Machine Than Man: Military Training, Mental Health, and Turning Men into Machines”

11:15-12:15 - Session 2

- Josh Earle, Virginia Tech, “Morphological Freedom: Identity, Individuation, and the Genre Solution”
- Robert Rosenberger, Georgia Tech, “The Threat to Driver Distraction Policy Posed by the Trump Administration”

12:15 Break for Lunch

1:15-2:15pm - Session 3

- Matt Duncan, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, “Dewey Plays Pokemon: Democracy and Digital Rhetoric”
- Andrew Garnar, Clemson University, “Local Realism”

2:30pm-3:30pm - Session 4

- Jack Leff, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, “Asthma as an Aural Technology of Race”
- Ashley Shew, Virginia Tech, “The Minded Body in Disability and Technology”

3:45-4:45 pm - Session 5

- Daniel Susser, San Jose State University, “The Social Effects of Online Manipulation”
- Dylan Wittkower, Old Dominion University, “Using Care Ethics Approaches to Information Economies to Replace Privacy with Consent”

5pm: High Fives, Handshakes, Hand Jives

Abstracts **(no concurrent sessions)**

"Are Engineering Skills Gendered? A Conversation with Philosophy of Technology"

Bono Shih, Virginia Tech

In a recent volume of the *Philosophy of Engineering and Technology* series, philosophers of technology have not yet agreed upon whether certain technologies are or can be value (or ideologically) neutral. This paper gives the question an underexplored twist: are engineering skills value-neutral? Or to narrow the scope of the question for a particular case: are engineering skills gendered? An initial analysis can show that engineering skills are only paradoxically gendered in the way similar to technology being gendered, depending on which defining dimension of skills and technology that is under scrutiny and how we understand “gendered.” In a major departure, I argue that while interrogations over values in engineering skills and in technology do share some parallels, the makeover from the old value neutrality question of technology now takes on a new face: it matters to stakeholders in engineering education, such as concerned students and educators. The questioning of value-neutrality in engineering skills will entail a shift of discourse from the regulation of technology and the sensibility in product developments, to educational policies and student motivations. Practical concerns from the education space will, in return, frame the language of such questioning and perhaps help formulate a sensitive response.

"More Machine Than Man: Military Training, Mental Health, and Turning Men Into Machines"

MaryCatherine McDonald, Old Dominion University

When soldiers return home from combat, there is an enormous amount of pressure to return not just to *where* they came from, but to *who* they were before they left. As we know, this is not as easy as we might hope. But why? Why is reintegration back into civilian society so very difficult for some? And so seamless for others? In this paper, I will explore something that hasn't yet been examined as a reason for reintegration difficulty. Namely, basic training. My argument will be that the ideology and the technology that is used to prepare soldiers for battle makes it impossible for some of them to come back home - meaning both in the sense of back to their civilian lives and houses, and also back to their pre-combat sense of embodiment.

Morphological Freedom: Identity, Individuation, and the Genre Solution

Joshua Earle, Virginia Tech

Morphological Freedom is defined in the Transhumanist Bill of Rights as “the right to do with one’s physical attributes or intelligence whatever one wants so long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else.” Ostensibly, this right would allow for a transhumanist future with many different sets of abilities, both enhanced and not. However, I believe that this is not actually about creating a world where all ability sets are normalized and accepted, but rather a warrant for unfettered access to technologies designed to enrich and empower those already at the top of the cultural and financial hierarchy. In this paper I will argue that this view, and the neoliberal assumptions which undergird it, will instead culturally reinforce a singular morphological way of being with outliers becoming stigmatized and oppressed. Case studies, such as cosmetic surgery and others will be used to illustrate how even with our current ways of altering our appearance and abilities, we tend toward a singular understanding of “normal.” I will argue that unless we reconstruct the notion of identity and self, we should not expect this tendency to change merely because we have access to more sophisticated technology. This argument is based in critical reflection on identity, and the cultural forces which produce and reinforce normative values and expectations.

The Threat to Driver Distraction Policy Posed by the Trump Administration

Robert Rosenberger, Georgia Institute of Technology

The last eight years have seen at least some important movement on the part of the US federal government in terms of addressing the problem of smartphone-induced driving impairment. These efforts have included the proliferation statewide texting bans as well as a series of design guidelines. Using tools from the philosophy of technology, I have long argued that this has not been enough. But as with so much in this country, the context of the debate was redrawn last fall with the election of a new president and the appointment of his new administration. The question now is whether progress on this issue will come to a halt and perhaps even backslide. I consider the current state of smartphone driving impairment reduction efforts, the mad rush of industry lobbyists pressuring the new administration to ease regulations, and whether Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao can be counted on to keep our roadways safe. [Spoilers: She can't.]

The Social Effects of Online Manipulation

Daniel Susser, San Jose State University

Privacy and surveillance scholars routinely argue that powerful information actors—advertisers, employers, and so on—manipulate us. Using information they collect about our preferences, interests, incomes, and so on, they induce us to buy their products, vote for their candidates, and work when and for however long it suits them. As part of a larger, collaborative project, I am working to explain what it means, exactly, to manipulate someone, how we can systematically identify cases of manipulation, and what the effects of manipulation are on individual autonomy. In this paper, I begin to extend our analysis from the individual to the social level, asking: what are the effects of manipulation (or more specifically, manipulative information practices) on our institutions and other collective endeavors? What social problems arise in a world where the information technologies we rely on are quietly carrying out hidden agendas?

Dewey Plays Pokemon: Democracy and Digital Rhetoric

Matt Duncan, University of North Carolina

This paper will explore the rhetorical content of gestures expressed in the Twitch Plays Pokemon interface using a pragmatic lens. Specifically, I will attempt to read the mythology that accompanies the phenomenon as a result of a collaborative and socially-constructed rhetoric that is employed to

accomplish a collaborative goal within a cooperative meaning-making system. As John Dewey's formulations of inquiry and democracy resonate deeply with both the case study and the resulting mythos, I will access these formulations in order to construct a pragmatic lens with which to analyze the case study. I hypothesize that applying these frameworks to the folksonomic references that emerge from TPP like "Bird Jesus" and "The False Prophet" will lead to questions worth asking about the democratic character of the phenomenon and, with some tuning, a model for pragmatic digital composition using cultural reference and user input as a medium.

Local Realism

Andrew Garnar, Clemson University

If one pays attention to the news recently, with all of the talk of "post-truth," "fake news," and "alternative facts," it definitely seems like something curious is going on with the concept of "reality." This paper attempts to develop a philosophical for interpreting the proliferation of multiple realities. The goal of this concept is to extend out the strands of (popularized) postmodern thought about relativism and solipsism that is less grandiose and metaphysically dubious. In doing this, I demonstrate clearly how important aspects of the postmodern continue into the present. I also show this concept helps account for some the trends that postpostmodern theorists argue undermine the concept of the postmodern. The starting point is Albert Borgmann's analysis of postmodernism in *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*. There Borgmann distinguished two possible reactions to the postmodern condition: hypermodernism and postmodern realism. In *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* he argues that these possibilities are mutually exclusive. Given his caution, this chapter attempts to fuse them together as a way to make sense of the frequent claim that society, specifically American society, has become fragmented into alternate realities. I refer to this as "local realism." Local realism takes from hypermodernism a reliance on a variety of ICTs to create simulations of the world. On the other hand, it achieves something like, or at least a simulation, of focal realism in that it creates practices that allow for the formation of sophisticated communities and meaningful activities. After quickly sketching this using Borgmann's terminology, I go about a lengthy reinterpretation of local realism using tools appropriated, oft times ironically, from classical pragmatists. I borrow from Peirce his analysis of how the community settles questions about reality, which is embedded within Mead's writings on the social self, significant symbols and sociality to bridge the divide between hyperrealism and focal realism. I then use James' "pluralism" to help

explain how ICTs, in conjunction with other technologies, allow for a proliferation of alternative realities. By the end of the paper, I will have demonstrated that the concept of “local realism: entails a number of overlapping and competing worlds, understood as ICT-enabled meaning-generating communities.

Asthma as an Aural Technology of Race

Jack Leff, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

This paper seeks to intervene in contemporary discussions surrounding asthma and offers an analysis of its aural character, which has traditionally been absent within the overarching conversation. The intervention I propose is to identify wheezing, the major aural characteristic of asthma, as an aural technology of race that both delineates and is justified through racial difference. I work within both Michel Foucault and Falguni Sheth’s conceptual frameworks to understand both technology and technologies of race respectively. In order to substantiate my thesis, I employ contemporary environmental racism studies to show a racial distribution in both the prevalence and severity of asthma. Additionally, I undertake a close listening of “normal” breathing alongside asthmatic wheezing to highlight the aural difference between the two and illustrate how wheezing can generate vulnerability through Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s misfitting. Lastly, these two material components are synthesized through the lenses of Jennifer Lynn Stoeber’s sonic color line and Fanon’s combat breathing to establish wheezing as an aural technology of race.

The Minded Body in Disability and Technology

Ashley Shew, Virginia Tech

This is an aspirational presentation where I seek audience feedback. This paper, when it becomes a paper instead of just a sketchy plan of a paper, will first critically examine futuristic rhetoric about cyborg bodies, exoskeletons, and amazing prostheses in the context of traditional philosophical accounts about the nature of mind and body. Finding that these accounts of future tech and the nature of body and mind mutually reinforce each other, this paper then argues that a critical lens from disability phenomenology is crucial to reconsidering and reforming both a philosophy of bodyminds and of our technological futures.

Using Care-Ethics Approaches to Information Economies to Replace Privacy with Consent

Dylan Wittkower, Old Dominion University

Exchange of personal information online is usually conceptualized according to an economic model that treats personal information as data owned by the persons these data are ‘about.’ This leads to a distinct set of concerns having to do with data ownership, data mining, profits, and exploitation, which do not closely correspond to the concerns about privacy that people actually have. A post-phenomenological perspective, oriented by feminist ethics of care, urges us to figure out how privacy concerns arrive in fundamentally human contexts and to speak to that, rather than trying to convince people to care about privacy as it is juridically conceived and articulated. By considering exchanges of personal information in a human-to-human online informational economy — being friends on social networking sites — we can identify an alternate set of concerns: consent, respect, lurking, and creepiness. I argue that these concerns will provide a better guide to both users and companies about prudence and ethics in information economies than the existing discourse around ‘privacy.’