The Digital Student:
Beyond the Boundaries of the Body

Eva Alerby & Niclas Ekberg

Luleå University of Technology

Sweden

The overall aim of this paper is to explore students' bodily/bodiless presence in the (class)room using the materiality of digital telepresence robots.

What does it actually mean to be present in the (class)room?

How are interpersonal relationships affected when the student's presence is transformed and situated beyond the boundaries of the body?

Theoretical framework

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty
- Martin Heidegger
- (Alfred Schutz)

Beyond the boundaries of the body …
## … or a bodiless presence

Merleau-Ponty's theory of the lived body

- is a mutual interplay between human beings and the world,
- 'the world is wholly inside me and I am wholly outside myself'(Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 408).
- it is through the body that a person is in a living relation to things
- the world influence human beings, and vice versa,
- for the knowledge to be established, or embodied, a habit must be formed.

Telepresence as a "Complicated Presence"?

Is it possible to see the telepresence robot as a heideggerian "bridge", a spatial site and a thing', that unfolds something essential about the contemporary technological world, education, technology, and our possibilities of *being-with, thinking-with* and *learning-with* one another?

*Which Martin Heidegger? Both prior and after "die Kehre"...*
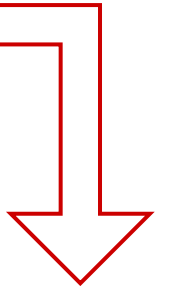
*Following a tricky an winding/recursive pathway from Dasein and meaning **to being and truth** - from Logos to **Ereignis***

A couple of Heideggerian departures

Being-IN-the-world - a question of **involvement rather than placeness**, *of 'Being-there'-with[-of-Others]*

Dasein - as being the **possibility of being ourselves (authenticity)**, *of 'Being-one's-Self'*, or not choosing to understand the world we already have (inauthenticity)
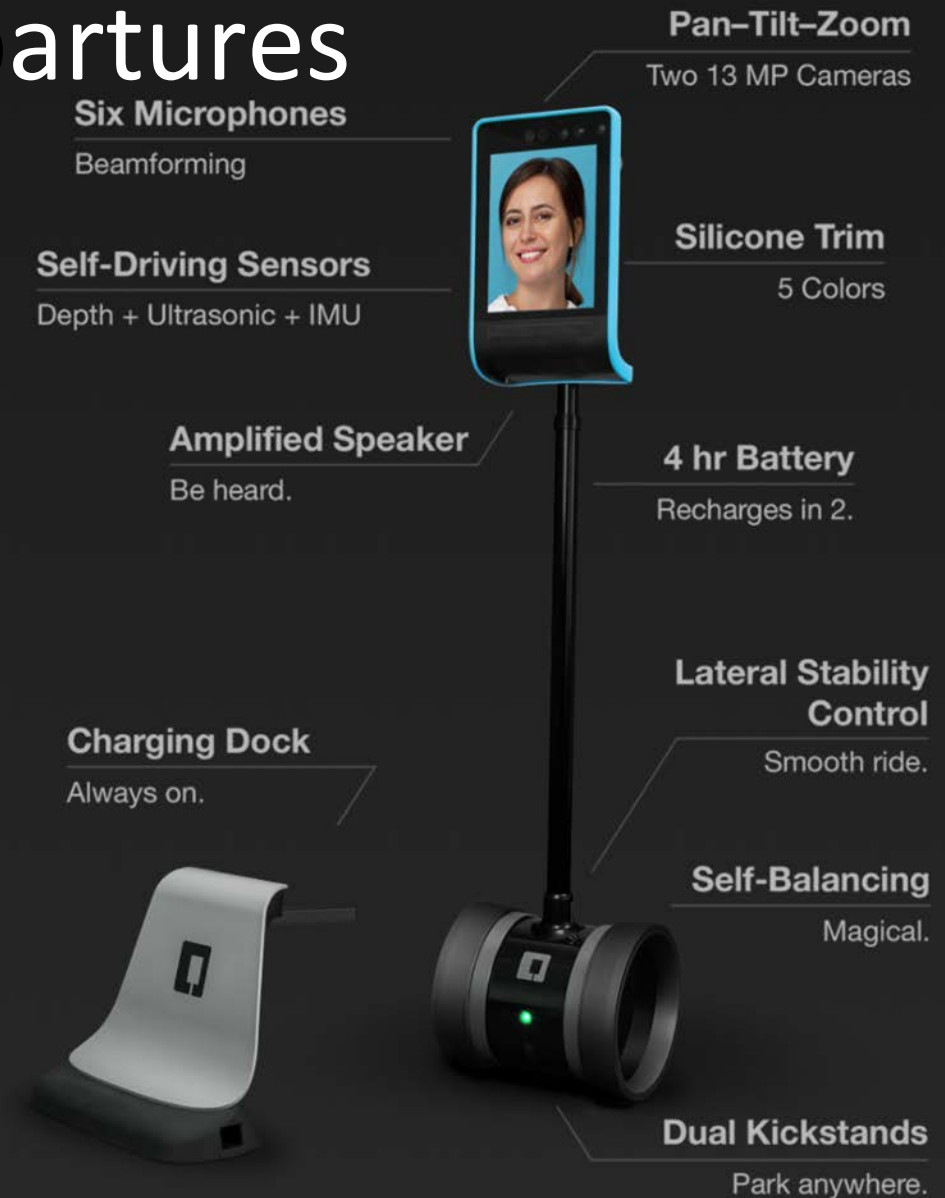
Heidegger and technology

Technology (essentially):

- discloses the world, the other and ourselves as **resources**
- induces **disconnectedness** (oblivion of being)
- give rise to a particular **homelessness**.

"Technology is a **mode of revealing**. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where aletheia, truth, happens" (QCT, 319).

Technology as the greatest **danger** - and "the **saving power**"

Dwelling - the crucial fourfold of "earth and sky, divinities and mortals"

Spatial location, but mainly concerns **existential dwelling** …
"as the basic character of human being" (BDT, 350).

(HYLE)

(EIDOS)

Dwelling as in *building, cherishing, protecting, preserving, caring, cultivating, granting (the things in themselves)*

(KINOUN)

(TELOS)

FINDING AN AUTHENTIC SPATIO-TEMPORAL & SOCIO-MATERIAL EQUILIBRIUM..?

Four-fold unifying interplay of meaning-dimensions (Jussi Backman, 2015):

- uniqueness, **resistance and materiality** (earth)
- appearance and visibility, given **determination and conceptualization** (sky/world)
- *historical* understanding and **receptivity, culture** and community (mortals/humans),
- *futural* aims and purposes, **orientation** (divinities/gods)

Experiencing telepresence

"The bridge is a thing; it gathers the fourfold but in such a way that it allows a site for the fourfold. By this site are determined the places and paths by which a space is provided for.

Only things that are locales in this manner allow for spaces. What the word for space, Raum, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum, Rum,* means a place that is freed for settlement and lodging. **A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary,** Greek *peras*. **A boundary is not that at which something stops but**, as the Greeks recognized, **the boundary is that from which something begins its *essential unfolding*"** BW/BDT 356.

What understandings of being (oneself/other) take place and evolves through the use of the telepresence technology?

What characterizes the places wherein/throughout the student resides/moves?

Which paths are taken - or avoided?

What boundaries do the student experience - and what do they mean?

…

…

Some thoughts and questions …

- **Is the idea of "educational dwelling" a reasonable re-conceptualization/ regionalization of "dwelling"?**

- **How to relate to contemporary, smart (edu-)technology?** *Thing, tool, space, locale, a post-modern "Other"?*

- *How far can a "body of space" (and space, itself) be renegotiated before the significance/relevancy is lost?*

Finally …

"Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p 284).

Thank you for listening!

eva.alerby@ltu.se

niclas.ekberg@ltu.se