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Rituals of Coexistence: Bodies and Technology during Pandemics

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Abstract. Pandemics not only challenge health systems and the economy, they also deeply transform our everyday lives and the ways in which we coexist. People have to find new definitions of what it means to be close to one another, to show empathy and to comfort each other. With social distancing, we must learn how to use digital technologies to create novel forms of closeness. Viruses becomes the new other, alien forces that invisibly permeate social life. They find hosts predominantly in the places where humans get close to each other. Rituals such as eating, drinking, and dancing are the links that hold an otherwise largely disembodied culture together. I will combine a perspective on human cognitive evolution as an embodied process, the hedonist drive towards bodily encounter in Sigmund Freud's sense and the development of technology and the current tendency toward a culture of disembodiment. The article asks what the role of bodily ritual is in public space. Here I will argue that this is a vital role because it is the only way to create feelings of resonance and connectedness amongst larger groups of people. The pandemic prohibits these rituals, so we need to ask further: Does the pandemic lead to new forms of being together? This is closely linked to the accelerated development of technology. The more precise question is: Does technology afford new forms of embodiment? My aim is to introduce ideas of philosophical posthumanism to think in a productive way about incorporating technology in order to satisfy human needs for contact and resonance.

Keywords: embodiment; technology; resonance; ritual; hedonism

> "[...]
> we can't stir a finger in this world without the risk of bringing death to somebody. Yes, I've been ashamed ever since; I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace."
>
> Camus (1991 [1947]: 252)

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Introduction

The pandemic not only challenges health systems and the economy. It deeply transforms our everyday lives and the ways in which we coexist. Albert Camus described bodily inhibition in during the plague when just lifting a finger might bring death to somebody. People had to find new definitions of what it means to be close to one another, to show empathy and to comfort each other. With social distancing, we must learn how to use digital technologies to create novel forms of closeness. In these circumstances the virus becomes the new other, the alien force that invisibly permeates social life. It finds its hosts predominantly in places where humans get close to each other. Rituals like eating, drinking, and dancing on the other hand are the links that hold an otherwise largely disembodied culture together. Culinary culture for example is a rich, vivid and very much embodied part of today's societies that is in many cases even deemed to be an intangible cultural heritage. Today the rich culture of hedonist bodily encounters in public has largely been put on hold. People have to deal with loneliness, depression, aggression and economic insecurity.

The enduring pandemic raises the question of new viable forms of embodied conviviality in a pressing way. How can we tackle this issue systematically? Right from the start it should be clear that this is a question that requires a transdisciplinary approach. This article can be only a reflection on the main problems of this topic. Firstly, we need to ask about the function of embodied social rituals.[1] Answers to this question can be found in psychology, sociology, anthropology and cognitive science. Then we can ask what role the public plays in a setting in which these embodied encounters take place. In the next step, we need to describe what happens if these possibilities of bodily encounter break away. And last but not least a reflection on technologies that substitute face to face encounter is needed. The final question will be what future social structures might look like, that at least in part substitute embodied encounter through technologies such as Zoom, Skype or other virtual platforms.

[1] The term *ritual* might be misleading since rituals imply rules, repetition and a more or less fixed social structure. One could most certainly find these features in our contemporary habits of eating out, drinking in public or dancing in clubs. Rituals are usually more defined in function and are not to be conflated with practices and habits of everyday life. I will try to give a phenomenological account of cultural practices of being together in public. The question of whether these can be defined as rituals or not I will leave to sociologist or anthropologists for the moment. In any case, we can define them as habits or routines with special sets of rules and a more or less regular occurrence.

This article aims to describe the changes in human bodily communion with regard to the incorporation of new technologies and the need for embodied practices of resonance, a concept borrowed from the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019). Both traditional embodied rituals as well as digital encounters are designed to transcend the boundaries of the individual and to incorporate otherness in a material or mental way. My theoretical perspective combines a phenomenological description of changing practices with a philosophical posthumanist outlook on what it means to be human during the current global pandemic. In order to understand the importance of embodied rituals of coexistence I will draw on Sigmund Freud's text on *Civilization and its Discontents* (1961 [1930]), written only a decade after the Spanish flu had killed millions of people around the globe. Freud's theory elaborates on instinct and drives at what is at stake in human behaviour, which is deeply embodied and reflected in social rules that are designed to keep it at bay. The ambivalence between social peace and denied or diminished possibilities of gratification leads to the precarious stability of civilised life. Under the current critical circumstances this stability gets even more precarious because the traditional outlets, the rituals of embodied coexistence, break away. I will underpin this reading of Freud through another topic that emphasises embodied being together from an even more fundamental perspective: The evolution of human cognition as being dependent on being together bodily and engaging in shared cognitive acts such as storytelling or other group tasks. In my argumentation, I will combine a perspective on human cognitive evolution as an embodied process, the hedonist drive towards bodily encounter in Freud's sense, and the development of technology and the current tendency toward a culture of disembodiment. The article asks what the role of bodily ritual is in public space. Here I will argue that this is a vital role, because it is the only way to create feelings of resonance and connectedness amongst larger groups of people. The pandemic prohibits these rituals, so we need to ask further: Does the pandemic lead to new forms of being together? This is closely linked to the accelerated development of technology. The more precise question is: Does technology afford new forms of embodiment? My aim is to introduce ideas of philosophical posthumanism to think in a productive way about incorporating technology in order to satisfy human needs for contact and resonance.

Conceptual Framework: The Philosophy of Technology and the Absence of Intercorporeality

I take the culture of the embodied, hedonist encounter as an important factor in human culture in the light of battling a global pandemic. The counterpart

to decreased bodily closeness is the new technologies employed to track the spread of the virus and share information on medical research as well as on social behaviour. People in critical medical condition face treatment devoid of human contact. Care is often taken over by robots, medical supplies being delivered by drone and visits to the doctor are via computer. The living body as well as the suffering or dying body is denied contact. This dystopian image has haunted the cultural imagination since the rise of technology: The isolated body hooked up to machines that merely dreams its existence as an embodied and social being. This imagery, which we know from stories like *The Matrix*, has puzzled philosophical thinking for decades. Today we enter an era with extensive use of digital communication technology combined with much less freedom of movement and real bodily encounter. In addition, new technologies are only in part means of communication. They also to a large extent give rise to data-mining, data-sharing and surveillance. In those sectors the body does not figure as a lived body, but as an object of research, treatment and control.

This transition has the potential to alter our rituals of coexistence in a much deeper way than we realise. The philosophy of technology reflects on the relationship between embodied human beings and technology from different perspectives. It is a rather young subfield of philosophical research. From a phenomenological perspective, there are three influential types of approach, which I will present briefly. Unfortunately, none of them really takes the dynamics of embodied encounter and the role of embodiment in social coexistence into account. The first is an abstract stance toward modern technology that has its roots in Martin Heidegger's essay "A Question Concerning Technology" (1977 [1954]). Heidegger's ontological view of technology as a logic of seeing the world has influenced countless scholars and remains strong today. He does not specify types of technology. Rather he holds that the technology of the 20th century (and he might say that this has not even changed with the rise of digital technologies) is not so much an accumulation of artefacts and instruments shaping the life-world. Rather he speaks of the essence of technology, of technology being a logic that makes people conceive of the world solely in terms of *enframing*, as a reservoir of potentials and goods ready to serve the purposes of man. This theory even includes people becoming or understanding themselves as instruments and their working power as standing reserve. Technology thus figures as an abstract force that unveils the earth and life itself as instruments or storage of goods. At the same time technology hides the independent character of things as entities in their own right beyond the possibility of being of use for a purpose. This way of thinking has been critiqued as an abstract way of talking about technology and as being oblivious to the vast diversity of technologies. On the other hand, it is still a very fitting

way to describe technology. If one thinks of the whole industry of smartphone applications that are directed toward the individual becoming a fitter, more intelligent better person, such applications turn human bodies and minds into a form of clay to be moulded into an ideal tool to achieve ones' goals or to fit into societal categories. Heidegger's thinking about technology is relevant, because it draws attention to the way technology mediates perception, which is also important in the question of embodied coexistence and its development through new technologies.

The second way of philosophising about technology is rooted in post-phenomenology, Heidegger's critique of the abstract ontology of technology. This line of thought has become well known through the works of the American philosopher Don Ihde (e.g. 2001), who draws on phenomenology and pragmatism as the roots of his thinking. The *post* in postphenomenology signifies a change in direction. The endeavour to uncover unchanging properties of cognitive acts is not at the centre of postphenomenological work anymore as it has been in classical phenomenological approaches. Rather it is Edmund Husserl's famous claim to go back to the things themselves that inspires postphenomenological analyses and description. The diversity and concreteness of technologies and how they mediate human relations with the world come into focus here. Although technology in this perspective is strongly incorporated in embodied cognition, the dynamics of bodily encounter in techno-social spaces is rarely reflected. One attempt to broaden this horizon can be found in Mark Coeckelbergh's (2020) attempt to understand technology through performance metaphors, which are supposed to capture the social and intercorporeal dimension in a more precise way.

A third important strand in the philosophy of technology is the huge research sector into the nature of cognition, its bodily and technological underpinnings and the possibility of artificial intelligence. This field of research focuses on the conditions of possibility of cognition and is informed through analytic philosophy of mind, phenomenology and embodiment theory as well as through neuro and cognitive science. This field is very diverse and ranges from theories that prioritise the body as *condition sine qua non* of cognition (for example embodiment theorists such as Shaun Gallagher, Alva Noë or Andy Clark) to proponents of the *media a priori*, who hold that embodied cognition is and always has been mediated through technology and that technology might even transcend the human one day and create a posthuman life form (Hansen 2001; Hayles 2012). This theoretical strand focuses on cognition and how it is embedded in socio-technological environments and extended through technologies. Intercorporeal entanglements are rarely reflected here.

To cut the long story of diverse approaches to technology short: Despite the diversity of theories there is little research to be found on the effects of technology on embodied cultural rituals and habits. Heidegger's ontological approach does not consider embodied encounter at all. Postphenomenology is more occupied with the materiality of technology and its effect on individual subjects, whereas intercorporeality in a stronger sense is not a central topic. If one focuses on cognition the subject itself is more central than any form of conviviality. The role of bodily experience and being together needs further consideration.

Intercorporeality as Fundament of Embodied Cognition

The importance of doing things together can be traced back to the earliest stages of human cognitive evolution, specifically in skills such as shared attention and the formation of cognitive groups. The evolutionary psychologist Merlin Donald (2001) describes in detail the importance of forming groups that had the goal of carrying out a common task for the evolution of human cognition. Only with the ability to understand the other as a being with intentions through for example directing the other's gaze toward an object of shared intention, were humans able to form a theory of mind, to understand the other as having qualitative states of mind just as we are. This is part of the legacy we share with our primate ancestors. A few steps further in cognitive evolution bring us to the stage of storytelling. This happened in groups, were most of the members of a community or tribe gathered together. The cognitive function of stories is to constitute the ability to think beyond what is just plainly there. This function relates to imagination, to grasping possibilities of thinking beyond the present moment and uncovering the hidden potentials of reality. Even the possibility to lie or deceive needs the capacity to imagine things to be different. This can be seen as the start of culture, its myths and institutions. Stories represent the first virtual realities. These early products of imaginations are by no means purely products of language. Donald argues that the first step on the way to developing a language and the ability to tell stories was in fact kinematic imagination, which is the ability to envision one's own body in motion (2001: 271). This ability facilitates communication and shared attention:

> The first priority was not to speak, use words, or develop grammars. It was to bond as a group, to learn to share attention and set up the social patterns that would sustain such sharing and bonding in the species. (*Ibid.* 253)

It is central to Donald's theory of human cognitive evolution that the most important step is to form cognitive groups and thus become "hybrid minds" (*ibid.* 252). This means human cognition is neither primarily language based nor confined to the subject. The humanist and Enlightenment tale of the strong rational subject is thus flawed (see Förster 2020b). Evolutionary psychology shows how intercorporeality and intersubjectivity lie at the root of human cognition. Only by connecting with the other through kinetic mimesis, shared intentionality and stories that turn subjective memory into group cognition with a shared cultural horizon have humans developed their cognitive abilities. These abilities developed essentially in the presence of others, through being embedded in groups and extended through the bodies and minds of others. Being together thus is the key to developing cognitive abilities (cf. Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1993; Gallagher 2005). Donald holds that:

> Collectivity has thus become the essence of human reality. Although we may have the feeling that we do our cognitive work in isolation, we do our most important intellectual work as connected members of cultural networks. This gives our minds a corporate dimension that has largely been ignored. (Donald 2001: 298)

So far, we have seen that human cognition depends strongly on human contact, which is at least initially in phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives a bodily contact. From touch through kinetic mimesis and shared gazes/intentions we develop the capacity to understand the other as a being with intention and a mind just like ourselves. Mental content is certainly not limited to the subject or its brain. It extends through social communities, symbolic and narrative layers of culture, language and media/technology. Today it seems that the bodily connection has become obsolete in a culture the emphasises the word, seeing at a distance (think of the predominance of images in the media) and the strong rational subject. The oblivion of the importance of bodily being together is one of the effects of the modern technologised and optimised society, a heritage that dates back to the ideas of the Enlightenment and humanism.

Since intercorporeality and being together in groups has played such an important role in cognitive development, it is still inscribed in our way of being, entangled within the material, social and cultural world. This is an educated guess which needs further research: There is also a chance that today being together in public, talking, eating, discussing, dancing, etc., might trigger positive cognitive feedback mechanisms, because these were the cognitive situations in which we evolved. This would explain why people pursue these habits cross-culturally and have a hard time coming to grips with the necessity for social distancing during the pandemic.

Sigmund Freud and the Darker Forces of Conviviality

In the recent months of lockdowns and restricted public life it has become very clear that people feel that agitation and aggression are on the rise. Political and ideological unrest, specifically the staggering success of conspiracy theories and right-wing ideology, is strongly connected to the exceptional circumstances made necessary by the pandemic. Let me dive a bit deeper into the quite obvious human craving to come together in public.

The distinction between private and public, with the private sphere being a space in which the individual is free from the eyes of others, is a fairly recent social development. From ancient Greece to the last monarchies it was the privilege of the highest ranks in society. Anyone who was poor or in a serving position had no private life whatsoever. Only with the development of democratic societies did the idea that everyone had the right to privacy develop. With social media, this rather recent development is challenged. Even without the contrast of private versus public there has always been a special quality to gatherings in public or in bigger groups. Dancers for example speak of the bodily energy that develops amongst them while dancing. After the first lockdown, getting back together to train even makes people cry in relief at finally being back in each other's bodily presence.

Even if it is more of an observation than a valid philosophical argument, I want to ponder the thought of intimacy and corporeal relations in public as vital for contemporary cultures. This is not to say that everybody necessarily needs these encounters. But in general, industrialised societies tend toward a negligence of embodied ritual, which in science fiction narratives plays out as dystopian images of humans as outdated life forms in comparison to disembodied artificial intelligences (Förster 2016). This tendency is symptomatic of Western thinking with its primacy of rational thought and scientific objectivity. Both has come under criticism with thinkers such as Edmund Husserl (1970 [1936]) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2014 [1966]), and is today the subject of theories of embodied cognition (for example Timothy Ingold 2014) or in posthumanist theories. The rise of digital technologies and social media represents another step toward a lifestyle that neglects the body. Even if these technologies belong to the material life-world just as a hammer or a potter's wheel and thus are also means of bodily presence and engagement, they do not afford bodily action (as in Gibson 1986 [1979]) in a balanced or interesting way. Users are predominantly forced to hold a static position in front of a screen that forces life to match grids just as the nude woman's image is forced into a geometric perspective in Albrecht Dürer's drawing *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman* (around 1600). Contemporary technologies fail to engage the user in healthy or dynamic forms

of embodiment, much less afford embodied encounters. With the pandemic, static screen behaviour has become the dominant way of getting in touch with others. This has been a rapid and radical change in the way social contacts are made. Given the central role of embodied social behaviour in the development of human cognition this already points to problematic consequences, for example in the education of children. If we look at psychological and affective aspects there will be changes and problems in future.

Let me once more take a step back in intellectual history and think for a moment about Sigmund Freud. In 1930, with the Nazis in Germany on the rise, he wrote a long essay called *Civilization and its Discontents* (1961 [1930]). Here he talks about *eros* and *thanatos* as the two human drives behind enculturation. Both are clearly corporeal and directed toward other bodies. Culture is at the same time a means to cultivate these archaic drives and a way to put them to use through sublimation. *Thanatos*, the drive toward aggression and death, becomes guilty conscience and thus encultures the recognition of authorities. *Eros* on the other hand is turned from the craving for sexual gratification into the imperative to love the other as you love yourself. Modern societies are structured by numerous laws restricting sexual behaviour and cultural education channels these primal drives in order to use their energy through sublimation (raising families, being good citizens). These energies are more or less present in every single human. Freud wrote this theory of culture as a means and product of sublimation in a social climate between the two wars, with unrest and aggression boiling up and a huge pandemic just passed. The discontent of civilisation seen from a Freudian perspective points to bodily drives – quite raw and cruel ones for that matter. These strong bodily drives according to Freud are primal means of gratification, a raw form of happiness so to say. With the force of social rules and laws humans are prevented from seeking this kind of happiness in exchange for the possibility of a peaceful and secure life. There is an intricate structure that balances civilisation and the destructive drives toward sex and death. Every society forms these structures in its own way.

Today we face a global increase in rules, laws and surveillance. The pandemic makes it necessary to suspend those embodied practices and rituals that might well be the last residuum of bodily encounter. The danger that looms over our days is that the balance between primal instincts and the endeavour to keep up a civilised way of coexistence might fail. If there are no public spaces in which humans can be bodily beings, or use intellectual capacities in an engaged bodily presence, discontent will increase. Just think of philosophical discussions over a good red wine with people gesturing, leaning in close and following one another not only through words but also gestures and bodily presence; there are uncountable possibilities (or were before the pandemic) in which people

get together like this. Dining out is one prime example. The habit of eating together has always been a central ritual in all forms of human groups and plays an important role in the upbringing of human offspring. Dining out is a special cultural form, where a close inner circle of family and friends opens up in a public setting. The intimate act of eating performed in public, be it on a date, amongst friends or family, etc., creates a resonance through sitting together, feeling qualitative bodily (even rather intimate) states of pleasure, sharing an atmosphere of sounds, aromas and visual impressions. The situation of dancing is similar. Here the body, its movements, proprioceptive affections, touch through the other and last but not least rhythmic resonance amongst strangers create an atmosphere of intimacy in public. The fact that these rituals take place in public is important as this is a way of escaping small private spaces and being present as bodily beings in the open. Even if privacy is key to feelings of security and safety, self-awareness and confidence rely on recognition in public situations. Today social media takes over the function of life in the streets and market places: People show their private lives to a wide public in order to be recognised and receive approval. Georg Simmel points out in his philosophical reflection on fashion (1905) how humans seek individuation as well as assimilation with social groups through their appearance, which is characteristic of modern, urban life. Even if fashion does not necessarily require close bodily contact it is already a means of being present in public in a bodily way and affords certain forms of movement and shape communication. In dancing, dining, going to theatres or attending parties this bodily contact gets much closer and is ritualised through implicit rules and norms. Such situations are important factors in keeping a balance between bodily needs and pleasures and the rational demands of a civilisation. The hedonistic part of human behaviour does not get much attention in philosophy and science in general. With the current situation, this might change. The challenge of the pandemic is to take the necessary measurements while making an effort to understand what is vital in order that a society not become radicalised. Radicalisation is what we witness now in many countries. The growing aggression is in part happening due to the lack of commonly accepted outlets. This poses a direct danger to democratic societies. In the remaining section I will reflect on the current situation, the technologies and their potentials and risks.

Remedies: From Freud's Oceanic Feeling Toward Posthuman Societies

It should have become clear that technological development in general and its acceleration through the pandemic have reduced these vital possibilities of

bodily ritual quite radically. It is especially theories in critical or philosophical posthumanism (for example Barad 2007; Loh 2018) that stress the importance of the recognition of humans as embodied, extended and deeply connected minds, although this connection is not confined to other humans but extends to everything else from bacteria up to artificial intelligences. *Being with* in a fully embodied sense not only makes us human but also gives us a sense of the deep entanglement with bodily and material otherness, which is constitutive of the human and has historically been more or less neglected (for example Förster 2020a). Interestingly Freud mentions this idea in his text and relates it to the concept of the *oceanic feeling*, which is rooted in religious thought but which might also help us understand the need for bodily relations in a more empathic way:

> originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it. If we may assume that there are many people in whose mental life this primary ego-feeling has persisted to a greater or less degree, it would exist in them side by side with the narrower and more sharply demarcated ego-feeling of maturity, like a kind of counterpart to it. In that case, the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe – the same ideas with which my friend elucidated the 'oceanic' feeling. (Freud 1961: 68)

Reading these lines one might even come to think of theories such as Barad or Donna Haraway's famous slogan "Make kin not babies!" (2016). Freud's description of the *oceanic feeling* does not need to be reserved for religious experiences. It might also be a good metaphor to describe experiences in which humans connect and resonate with each other. This happens especially in dance, in engaged ways of talking, in aesthetic or mind-altering drug experiences.

My aim here is to draw attention to the importance of such embodied rituals. The question that needs to be answered in a timely manner is the following: How can technological developments integrate such experiences or substitute them with novel forms? The focus on bodily being together is not meant as a call back to nature as Jean-Jacques Rousseau would have it. Rather it means we have always been posthuman, even at the beginning of our cognitive evolution. The faculties of sharing attention and kinetic mimesis are at their core incorporating otherness in a cognitive and emotional sense. At the stage of language and oral culture mental contents are already shared, sedimented and distributed over minds and artefacts (such as drawings, ritual objects and so on). The human mind hence is not and has never been purely human or natural for that matter. It

is extended not only into its environment but always also into other bodies and minds. Even memory is in many forms embodied and not only within the own body but also extended to other bodies as in the case of partner dance, where the movements depend on predominantly on interaction. These cognitive abilities need the bodily presence of other bodies, technologies, and the material world to be actualised. The need for bodily and material presence and interaction is thus by no means simply a hedonistic thing, rather it is what connects humans on all level of their existence.

The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa has diagnosed modern life as suffering from constant acceleration (2013). Acceleration is omnipresent in the debate about the development of technology and the possibility of transcending human life. Rosa focuses on the sociological consequences of industrialisation, urbanisation and digitisation, which together exhaust the modern human mind, in his view. In his later work (2019), he proposes a remedy to this suffering: *resonance*. This image captures the human needs for embodied experience in a less dramatic manner than Freud's *oceanic feeling*, though I am inclined to fuse both in my further enquiries into this topic. The concept of resonance is first and foremost a material one of bodies/objects resonating because they are affected by each other. Resonance specifies the quality of being with each other as something that extends through different entities and beings in a beneficial way. Rosa describes how our entanglement with the world lacks resonance, and thus we become estranged and get exhausted. An example, in everyday life we often act without seeing effects. We simply do, over and over again. We make breakfast, clean dishes, write emails, go to conferences, network, publish our thoughts. Even elaborated forms of work often do not seem to make a difference. We have the feeling that our actions have no effect or do not produce any kind of resonance in others. Resonance is being in tune, in sync with someone or something other than ourselves. This is the fascination of dance: Two or more people move as if they were one body. This kind of resonance can also happen intellectually, even on the level of gustatory sensations while enjoying a meal. Such embodied practices are the glue that holds culture together. Surely resonance can also be dangerous. Looking at the infamous social media bubbles which reinforce hate speech and conspiracy theories, there is definitely a problematic aspect relating to resonance and the feeling of being one with others. However, this does not diminish the relevance of resonance for personhood and wellbeing.

This brings me to my last point: In the absence of bodily encounters we seek technologies such as zoom, skype and other virtual communication platforms in order to stay in touch, to communicate and even to party together. This development will surely not be a sufficient substitute for gatherings in public,

where the individual merges in resonance with the crowd. However, it is worth thinking about what the chances are of at least partly finding in technology what we miss today. Incorporating technologies belongs to being human, and as I have shown this was already a practice at the beginning of human cognitive evolution. The question that will need further research is: In what way can current communication technologies produce experiences of resonance that are cognitively and emotionally productive and satisfying? Or will we need to rethink human-machine interfaces and redesign them? For example, is it possible to move away from the screen culture inherited by the central perspective of renaissance paintings and the phantasy of panoptical control? Is it possible to design interfaces as environments that do not predetermine behaviour but afford creative ways of agency? In other words: How can the growing discontent with civilisation mediated through technology enrich and enable a social life beyond the matrix of the Anthropocene? The humanities have the tools to critically analyse the complexity of changing societies and life-worlds. Despite the huge cultural differences, it is safe to assume that rituals of coming together exist cross-culturally and are being inhibited cross-culturally today. In this way, we mediate the known and the unknown, the intimate and the alien, the beloved and the stranger. The field of the other is growing. Technologies become part of the body and people's ways of encountering each other. Even the virus as an invisible threat is ultimately part of our bodies and our way of being in the world. This points to the need to develop new concepts that let us think beyond immediate human needs toward new rituals of coexistence.

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