

공존의 의례: 세계적 전염병 대유행 시기에서 공존하기

Rituals of Coexistence: Being Together in the Times of a Global Pandemic

Foerster Yvonne
Shanxi University

부하고도 생생하고, 많은 경우 무형의 사회적 유산으로 간주되며 오늘날 사회를 체현하는 한 부분이다. 해당 논의는 신기술 결합과 관련된 문화적 의례의 변화와 공존, 그리고 올림의 구체적 실행들에 대한 요구를 기술하는데 초점을 맞추고 있다. 이를 이끌어나가는 주요한 질문은 ‘치료와 통제, 그리고 연구의 한 분야로서 신체적 교감의 감소, 신체의 가상적 통신과 객체화의 증가로부터 어떠한 긴장과 가능성이 발생하는가?’이다. 이 논의는 전통적 인본주의와 인간중심주의를 비판적으로 다루는 철학적인 포스트휴머니즘을 바탕으로 이 초미의 과제를 발의하는 데에 그 목적이 있다.

국문요약

세계적 유행병은 의료체계뿐 아니라 경제에도 하나의 도전이다. 이는 우리가 공존하고 있는 일상생활과 그 방식을 크게 바꾸고 있다. 사람들은 이제 다른 이에게 다가가고, 공감을 표시하며, 서로를 위로하는 것이 무엇을 의미하는지에 대해 새로운 정의를 찾아야 한다. 또한 우리는 오늘날 사회적 거리두기에 기반 한 친밀감의 새로운 형태를 만들기 위해 어떻게 디지털 기술을 사용해야 하는지를 배운다. 유행병의 바이러스는 우리들의 사회생활에 은밀히 침투하는 외계 세력이자 동시에 신체제이다. 바이러스는 인간들이 서로 가깝게 있는 곳, 즉 우리가 먹거나 마시기 위해 만나는 장소에서 우세하게 번식한다. 단절될 수 있는 많은 문화를 결합시키는 것은 다름 아닌 먹고, 마시고, 그리고 춤추는 우리의 의례 행위이다. 특히, 음식 문화는 풍

Abstract

The global pandemic not only challenges health systems and the economy. It deeply transforms 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 being the word of the hour, we learn how to use digital technologies for creating novel forms of closeness. The virus becomes the new other, the alien force that invisibly permeates social life. It finds its hosts predominantly in the places where humans get close to each other: When we eat, or meet for

drinks. It is the ritual of eating, drinking, and dancing that binds together an otherwise largely disembodied culture. Culinary culture is a rich, vivid and last but not least very much embodied part of today's societies, that in many cases is deemed to be an intangible cultural heritage. In this talk I aim at describing the changes in cultural rituals with regard to the incorporation of new technologies and the need for embodied practices of coexistence and resonance. The central question is: What tensions and potentials arise from a decrease in bodily communion and a rise of virtual communication and objectification of the body as field of research, treatment and control? I build on ideas from philosophical Posthumanism as field of research that critically engages with traditional humanism and anthropocentrism and aims at initiating a discussion about this pressing issue.

The global pandemic not only challenges health systems and the economy. It deeply transforms 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 being the word of the hour, we learn how to use digital technologies for creating novel forms of closeness. The virus becomes the new other, the alien force that invisibly permeates social life. It finds its hosts predominantly in the places where humans get close to each other: When we eat, or meet for drinks. It is the ritual of eating, drinking, and dancing that binds together an otherwise largely disembodied culture. Culinary culture for example is a rich, vivid and last but not least very much embodied part of today's societies, that is in many cases deemed to be an intangible cultural heritage. This paper aims at describing the changes in human bodily communion with regard to the incorporation of new technologies and the need for embodied practices of resonance. My theoretical perspective combines a phenomenological description of changing practices with a philosophical posthumanist outlook on what it means to be human in the global pandemic. Both, traditional embodied rituals

as well as digital encounters are designed to transcend the boundaries of the individual (and eventually the human) and to incorporate otherness in a material or mental way.

I take the culture of embodied, hedonist encounter as an important factor in human culture also in the light of battling a global pandemic. The counterpart of decreased bodily closeness are new technologies employed to track the spreading of the virus and share information on medical research as well as social behavior. Humans in critical medical condition face a treatment devoid of human contact. Care is often taken over by robots, medical supplies being delivered by drones and visits to the doctor are done via computers. 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 embodied and social being. This is the imagery we know from stories like *The Matrix*, that has puzzled philosophical thinking for decades. Today we enter an era with extensive use of digital communication technologies combined with much less freedom of movement and real bodily encounter. Also, new technologies are only in part means of communication. A much larger sector is data-mining, data-sharing and surveillance. In those sectors the body does not figure as a lived body, but as object of research, treatment and control. This transition has the potential to alter our rituals of coexistence in much deeper way than we realize. Philosophy of technology reflects on the relation of embodied human beings and technology from different perspectives. Let me first give an idea about the main forms of philosophy of technology.

Philosophy of technology is a rather young subfield of philosophical research. From a phenomenological perspective, there are three influential types of approaches. The first one is an abstract stance toward modern technology which has its roots in Martin Heidegger's essay *A Question concerning Technology* (originally published in 1954). Heidegger's view ontological of technology as a logic of seeing the world has influenced countless scholars and remains strong today. He does not specify types of technologies. 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 artifacts 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 standing there ready to serve the purposes of man. This theory even includes people becoming or understanding themselves as instruments. 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 for the abstract way of talking about technology and being oblivious of 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 directed toward a fitter, more intelligent and the best possible self that one can be: 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.

The second prominent form of philosophizing about technology is rooted in the critique of Heidegger's abstract ontology of technology: Postphenomenology. This line of thought has become well known through the works of the American philosopher Don Ihde, who draws on phenomenology and pragmatism as the roots of his thinking. The post in postphenomenology stands for a change in direction. The endeavor to uncover unchanging properties of cognitive acts is not at the center of postphenomenological work anymore as it has been in classical phenomenological approaches. Rather it is Edmund Husserl's famous dictum "Back to the things themselves!" that inspires postphenomenological analyses and descriptions. Other than Heidegger these scholars are interested in the diversity and concreteness of technologies and how they mediate human relations with the world.

A third important strand in philosophy of technology is the huge sector of research 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 prioritize the body as condition sine qua non of

cognition (e.g. embodiment theorists like Shaun Gallagher, Alva Noe) until proponents of the media a priori, who hold that cognition is and always has been mediated through technology (e.g. Mark B.N. Hansen, Katherine N. Hayles).

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 impact on subjects whereas intercorporeality in a stronger sense is not a central topic. If one focuses on cognition also the subject is more central than any form of conviviality.

The enduring pandemic raises the question of viable forms of embodied conviviality in a pressing way. The question is how can we tackle this issue in a systematic way? Right from the start it should be clear that this is a question that requires an interdisciplinary if not a transversal approach. Firstly, we need to ask about the function of embodied social rituals.¹⁾

Answers to this question can be found in psychology, sociology, anthropology or cognitive science. Then we can ask what role plays the public as a setting in which those embodied encounters take place. In a 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 how future social structures might look like, that at least in part substitute embodied encounter through technologies such as Zoom, Skype or other virtual platforms.

In the last months of lockdowns and restricted public life it has become very clear that people feel more and more unrest and aggressions are on the rise. The political and ideological unrest, namely 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 for getting together in public. The distinction between private and public, as 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 until the last monarchies it was a privilege of the

highest ranks in society. Anyone who was poor or in a serving position had no right to a private life whatsoever. Only with the development of democratic societies the idea that everyone had a right to privacy developed. With social media this rather young development is challenged as we all know. Even without the contrast of private vs. public there always has 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 lockdown getting back together in training even makes people cry out of relief to finally be back in each other bodily presence.

The importance of doing things together can be traced back to the earliest stages of human cognitive evolution: namely skills like shared attention and the formation of cognitive groups. The evolutionary psychologist Merlin Donald describes in detail the importance of forming groups that had the goal of carrying out a common task for the evolution of human cognition (Merlin Donald (2001), *A Mind so Rare*, W.W. Norton & Company: New York, London). 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, humans were able to form a theory of mind, to understand the other as having qualitative states of mind just like oneself. This is part of the legacy we share with our primate ancestors. A few steps further in the cognitive evolution we encounter 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. It is about imagination, of 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 ones' own body in motion (comp. Donald (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). That means human cognition is neither primarily language based nor confined to the subject. The humanist and enlightenment's tale of the strong rational subject is thus flawed. Evolutionary psychology shows how intercorporeality and intersubjectivity lie at the roots 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, humans have developed their cognitive abilities. These 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 in phylogenetic as well as in ontogenetic becoming (comp. also Shaun Gallagher (2005), *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press). Donald holds: "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 deeply depends on human contact, which is at least initially in phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives a bodily contact. From actual touch through kinetic mimesis and shared gazes/intentions we develop the capacity to understand the other as a being with intentions and a mind just like ourselves. Mental content is by far 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 like the bodily connection has become obsolete in a culture that emphasizes the word, the seeing on a distance (think of the predominance of images in the media) and the self-sufficient subject. The oblivion of the importance of bodily being together is one of the effects of modern technologized and optimized society, a heritage that also dates back to ideas of enlightenment and classical humanism.

Since intercorporeality and being together as groups has played such an important role in cognitive development, it is still inscribed in our way of being entangled with-

in the cultural world. This is an educated guess which needs further research: There is a chance that also today being together in public, talking, eating, discussing, dancing might trigger positive cognitive feedback mechanisms, because those were the situations in which we have cognitively evolved. That would explain why people crossculturally pursue these habits and have a hard time coming to grips with the pandemic necessity of social distancing.

Let me once more take a step back in intellectual history and think for a moment about Sigmund Freud. With the Nazis in Germany on the rise he wrote in 1930 a book called *Civilization and its Discontents*. This book talks about eros and thanatos as the two human drives behind enculturation. Both are clearly corporeal and involve complex human contact. 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 like you love yourself. Modern societies are structured by innumerable laws restricting sexual behavior and cultural education channels those primal drives in order to use their energy through sublimation (raising families, being good citizens). Still, those energies are more or less present in every single human. Freud has been writing this theory of culture as a means and product of sublimation in a social climate of a beginning war, with all the unrest and aggression boiling up. The discontent of civilization seen from a Freudian perspective points back to embodied behavior - a quite raw and cruel one 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 civilization and the destructive drives toward sex and death. Every society does it in its own way.

Today we face a global increase of 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 that caters to sublimated human drives. The danger that

looms over our days is that the balance between primal instincts and the endeavor to keep up a civilized way of coexistence might drop. If there are no public spaces in which humans can be bodies, or use intellectual capacities in an engaged bodily presence, discontent will rise. 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 gestures and bodily presence: There are uncountable possibilities (or have been 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 the close inner circle of family and friends is open up toward the recognition in a public setting. The intimate act of eating performed in public, be it on a date, amongst friends or family creates a resonance through sitting together, feeling qualitative bodily (even rather intimate) states of pleasure, sharing an atmosphere of sounds, aromas and visual impressions. Similar is the situation of dancing. Here the body, its movements, proprioceptive affections, touch through the other and last but not least rhythmic resonance amongst strangers are creating an atmosphere of intimacy in public.

These situations are important factors to keep a balance between bodily needs and pleasures and the rational demands of a civilization. The hedonist part of human behavior 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 for a society not to get radicalized. Radicalization 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.

As I have argued, bodily being together has played a vital part in human cognitive evolution. It is also part of the primal psychological set up. While Freud's theory is highly debated, it is obvious that humans are by no means pure rational beings and that there are darker forces at play in our psychological setup than we would like to admit. That be-

ing said, let me focus on the embodiment of cognition once again. The focus on bodily being together is not meant to be a call back to nature as Jean-Jacques Rousseau would have it. Rather it means we have always been posthuman, even in 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 artifacts (such as drawing, ritual objects and so on). The human mind hence is 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 even only within the own body but also extended to other bodies like in the case of partner dance. All these cognitive abilities need bodily presence of other bodies, and also technologies and the material world in general, to be formed. 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 (Hartmut Rosa (2013), *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, New York: Columbia University Press). 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 industrialization, urbanization, digitalization, which altogether exhaust the modern human mind in his view. In his later work, he proposes a remedy to this suffering: *Resonance* (Hartmut Rosa (2019), *Resonance. A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, Cambridge: Polity). The concept of resonance is first and foremost a material one of bodies/objects resonating through being 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. A simple example might give an idea here: In everyday life, we often act without seeing effects. We simply do, over and over again: Making breakfast, cleaning dishes, writing emails, go to conferences, do networking, publish our thoughts. Even elaborated forms of work often do not seem to make a difference.

We have the feeling that our action have no effect or do not produce some 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 happen also intellectually and 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 concerning resonance. But this is a form of resonance happening in the virtual void.

This brings me to my last point: In the absence of bodily encounters we seek technologies like zoom, skype and other virtual communication platforms out 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. But it is worth thinking about what are the chances of at least partly finding in technology what we miss these days. Incorporating technologies belongs to being human and as I have shown it has been a practice already at the beginning of human cognitive evolution. The question that will need further research is: In which way can current communication technologies produce experiences of resonance that are cognitively and emotionally productive and satisfying. In other words: How can the growing discontent with civilization mediated through technology that does not numb humans but enrich and enable a social life beyond the matrix of the anthropocene?

The humanities have the tools to critically analyze 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 of developing new concepts that let us think beyond the immediate human needs and toward new rituals of coexistence.

NOTE

- 1) I used the term ritual several times now. This 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. Still rituals are usually more defined in function and 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 those 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.