Remote Connectedness and Meaningless Knowledge: Of Resonance and Alienation in the Phenomenology of a Digital Global Studies Programme

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Abstract: Through a short literature review and by making use of Heidegger's phenomenological approach and Rosa's theory of resonance in an extensive analysis of semi-structured interviews with students in or close to the Global Studies Programme (GSP), held during the years 2020 and 2021 under pandemic related restrictions, this paper sheds light on opportunities, constrains and particular traits of a digital environment setting in an international and cultural setting and elaborates that a digital study environment was perceived as successful, inspiring and meaningful if interactive relations were fostered; if students heard and felt heard or self-efficient. In this sense, whether or not students met each other physically determined their senses of belonging, their comfort with each other and the success of a digital GSP. Then, students were able to exit their formal roles of being a student in a seminar to which the digital setting tended to reduce them and where inspirational moments could have been rare. It was in such perceived collective moments that knowledge creation and studying was experienced as meaningful, even in a digital setting although alienation was expressed by all interviewees and mutual approachability or equality remained illusive.

Introduction

Bluntly speaking, I am reluctant rather than motivated to engage with this paper on my computer's screen, a screen which contained most of my study experiences within the Global Studies Programme (GSP) of Berlin's Humboldt University (HU) in the years 2020 and 2021. For one, because of a certain overlap between my private space and my study environment, I find it hard to deal with the distractions of my home place and focus entirely on my academic work without the possibility to — as a fellow student put it — "physically detach from my personal life". For two, after more than one year of virtual sessions on Zoom, Blackboard, Google Meet or whatever platform, I am longing for time not spent in front of the computer: *physically shared* time beyond the bubble of my working space and its digital interface inhibiting a 'real' interpersonal relationship. In other words: I want to spend time *with my environment in my environment.* Somehow, for me, this environment hinges on the lived experience in a physical world of which, yes, the digital has become a part, but nonetheless remains an alien part.

However, with restrictions imposed as to cope with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the digital sphere has become a major component of social interactions, in many cases being the only possibility to engage with one another. Similarly, since "the closure of educational institutes is a potential intervention to combat a pandemic", online teaching and learning has "nowadays [become] the most prevalent mode of education" (Kumar and Pande 2021, 252). While research

on the effectiveness of online learning and teaching has gained momentum over recent years and "there is strong evidence to suggest that online learning is at least as effective as the traditional format", it has be said that this "evidence is, by no means, conclusive" (Nguyen 2015, 316). Moreover, it is questionable whether the online format can actually provide the interactive and inspirational academic environment of traditional face-to-face seminars and their countless opportunities for physical encounter; accidental, spontaneous, or planned and structured. Following Hartmut Rosa's (2016, 408) theory of resonance, the key to the good life or, in this case, to a meaningful, efficient and satisfying study experience, lies in successful relationships with the world: "If the connecting sides of this triangle [between material, teachers and learners, across which the educational event stretches] remain rigid and mute, schooling and instruction fail; if they begin to vibrate, however, so that a resonant triangle emerges, education succeeds as a complex process of adaptive transformation of world". Accordingly, this paper's main phenomenological question is whether a digital study environment can indeed provide the conditions for resonant relations to evolve.

As a critical research-oriented social science graduate programme offered by the Institute for Asian and African Studies (IAAW) at HU Berlin, whose primary aim is to "analyze the social world we live in by research and work towards envisioning and realising alternative futures" (GSP 2014) through and by a multicentric and multicultural study environment[2], GSP provides an exceptional opportunity to investigate digitalisation's effects. Being physically separated, partly in different countries or even on different continents, the only possibility for GSPians[3] and their fellow students to engage academically within the lectures and with their content, to socialise as a group as well as with students from partner universities, or generally to relate with their study environment, is via digital means. Hence, in order to explore the opportunities, requirements and obstacles of a digital academic setting, the primary aim of this paper's underlying qualitative research project was to understand how GSP as a programme envisioned to enhance multicultural and multicentric encounters on a global level unfolds digitally, i.e. — with regards to Rosa's theory — how GSPians related to their fellow GSPians, other students and the programme itself respectively its academic content and its multicultural or multicentric composition. My hypothesis is that without physical multicultural interactions and encounters, GSP is little more than theoretically learning global social sciences.

The following will first sketch some preliminary thoughts on successful relations in a digital version of GSP by drawing on a short literature review and afterwards give a brief note on the research project's theoretical and methodological background. Based on autoethnographic reflections as well as interpretative analyses of semistructured, qualitative interviews with GSPians and other students, I will then illustrate systematically five key characteristics for a digital version of GSP respectively its phenomenological condition regarding resonance and alienation. Namely: how identification as a GSPian and a sense of belonging shapes GSP experiences and — vice versa — is shaped by divergent possible modes of interaction in a digital GSP. How the GSPian's disposition, the mere freedom of opting for a digital GSP or postponing it entirely, inhibits the occurrence of moments of resonance. How a digital GSP reduces GSPians to their formal role as students. How it individualises the engagement with GSP's academic content and creates a sense of bubble thinking. And ultimately, how a digital setting of GSP renders some markers of inequality invisible, but nonetheless restrains abilities and willingness to engage. In the conclusion, I will link these findings as to draw a digital GSP's phenomenological picture and — coming back to the broader theme — to elaborate requirements, conditions, opportunities and obstacles for digital study environments.

Preliminary Thoughts: Towards a Phenomenology of a Digital GSP

All around the globe, educational systems were rather unprepared for the extent of the current COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding public health related actions; quite effectively, educational systems "have been derailed from their normal operations", with the closure of schools, colleges, and universities "for an indefinite period" as a "potential intervention to combat a pandemic" (Kumar and Pande 2021, 251f.). In consequence, institutions, lecturers and students had to adopt a digital study setting, soon facing difficulties such as inadequate infrastructure, poor availability and speed of the internet, extra financial expenses, lack of proper training, common guidelines, and motivation (Ibid., 265). Contrary to biased, optimistic tones of pre-pandemic papers such as Kyong-Jee Kim and Curtis J. Bonk's (2006, 29) survey on the prospects of online teaching in higher education inferring a coming "unique and exciting era in online teaching and learning" resulting out of an increasing demand, better technological possibilities, and — in short — an ever "more realistic and authentic" study environment. Koushal Kumar and Bhagwati Prasad Pande (2021, 266f.) observe that the "productive utilization of online teaching-learning methods and the eventual benefits to students rely partly on the extraneous environment, such as availability of appropriate infrastructure, and also to a significant extent, on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers about the role of technology in the modern education system". Maria Limniou and others (2021, 12f.) add that the students' predispositions, individual characteristics and behavioural patterns prefigure their ability to adapt to a transformed digital study setting since "the COVID-19 pandemic 'forces' everyone to change habits and build on prior experience elaborating approaches and self-regulation strategies which may affect teaching and learning".

Whether a student grew up with digital technology or not does not only point to age as a conditional difference regarding how the research participants relate with their study environment but also to their cultural background, bearing in mind that e.g. there are huge discrepancies in internet access between countries of the Global North and countries of the Global South.[4] (ITU 2019). Moreover, as Deborah Lupton (2015, 135) highlights, the internet "is not a universal phenomenon across regions and cultures: it has different histories and configurations in different countries" with "assumptions and beliefs concerning digital use" as "shifting between cultural contexts" as "the material infrastructures that support access to the internet". In a study on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, for instance, Obiageri Bridget Azubuike and others (2021, 7) point to a "digital divide and social and cultural reproduction of educational inequalities" through socioeconomic status, educational background, digital skills and an unequal access to digital tools. Mind that, as Lupton (2015, 188) sums up, digital technologies are "an integral part of everyday life", social life is "configured through and with digital technologies", they play "a major role in configuring concepts of selfhood, social relationships, embodiment, human–nonhuman relations and space and place", "what counts as 'the social' is increasingly enacted via digital technologies", and digital technologies are "integral parts of contemporary social networks and social institutions".[5] Hence, while some students are more able to participate in that ever more important social sphere and to deal with digital technologies, some are less able to do so.[6]

It should be noted however, that the emphasis of Lupton's observations is on digital means playing an *integral* part in social life; they complete the unit and do not replace a non-virtual world. With the digital sphere essentially complementing social life, potentially either resulting in "the emergence of a new 'participatory culture' of greater cooperation or solidarity, or alternatively [. . .] a pandemonium of competing media noise, self-promotion and meaningless disembodied in-

teraction, in an increasingly atomized society" (Gere 2008, 222), community, subjectivity and social relations change and have to be understood differently. But such digital relationships are not of an as resonant and successful manner as non-digital ones. They are — to come back to Lupton's words — *integral*; complementary rather than substituting. Accordingly, a digital version of GSP can only partly cover the multicultural experience, those interpersonal relations across borders originally envisioned, even though both GSPians and students from the partner universities participated in online seminars. Moreover, with the lack of multicultural interactions and encounters, GSP becomes the mere professional experience of studying social sciences applied to the global context.

Nonetheless, in a study I conducted during my first term in 2020, I came to acknowledge that — in spite of exhausting hours in front of the screen at "horrible" times for some, some lecturers being remote or out of reach and a lack of self-confidence to participate in the lectures — difficulties within a digital study environment to bond "socially and academically" did not hinder my batch from forming a certain group identity. Informal meetings and social media fostered getting to know each other outside the academic, formal and alienating setting of Zoom seminars. Yet, as soon as COVID-19 related restrictions were alleviated in Berlin, students in Berlin — now able to meet outside the digital sphere — began to build their own "little sense of community", as were the words of one fellow GSPian.[7] Before, even for those already living in Berlin, lockdown measures created conditions under which everyone could only access their study environment by and through digital means. Interaction based on a common ground facilitated first moments of resonance in "shared disappointment" or through shared "silly moments", furthered by a joint — yet shrinking — feeling of hope and positivity. Now, more than a year later, it is clear that both the extent of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding duration of a digital study environment was underestimated.[8] Three terms of GSP have now passed for my batch without any non-virtual seminar or any experience abroad at partner universities. Most fellow GSPians have opted to postpone their second and third term a little, clinging to the hope that — as to use the words of one fellow student — "things might go well and we might be going to Asia in winter [2020]". Of course, that did not happen. GSP became digital.

A Methodological and Theoretical Note on the Research Project

Expanding the findings of 2020's first research project in which I explored the phenomenology of a digital term for my GSP batch through autoethnographic reflections and interpretative phenomenological analyses of semistructured qualitative interviews, I have conducted several similar interviews in this summer 2021 with fellow GSPians, with GSPians from other batches or even from the other Global Studies graduate programme at Freiburg University, as well as with some fellow students from partner universities, most of them naturally online. Last year's as well as this year's many interesting, thorough and honestly lovely interviews helped me to understand how GSPians related to their fellow GSPians, other students and the programme itself under restrictive pandemic conditions and gave the content of this paper's results, i.e. the insights into the opportunities and limits of a digital study environment. This was possible against the background that — as previously mentioned — GSP is about bringing together students of various backgrounds, differing, for instance, in terms of nationality, age and disciplinary qualification (*social space*), and studying at universities around the world on three continents, in the Global North as well as in the Global South, being actually present (*physical place*). Especially since some fellow GSPians

are still in their home countries while some are in Berlin, both social space and physical place play a defining role in how GSPians perceive their relationship to the GSP-concerning world and their study environment, or — phenomenologically speaking (Husserl 2002 [1913]; Heidegger 2018 [1927]) — how they are set in their worlds, suggesting relevant discrepancies in GSPians' perceptions of their study environment. Hence, in line with the sociological theoretical framework of resonance and alienation which — according to Rosa —refers to the quality of *relating with* and *being in* the world, the research focusses on GSPians' or in Heidegger's sense "'human beings' existence in their world as an individual and within their social context" (Horrigan-Kelly et.al. 2016, 7).

Underlying questions of how the interviewees individually *are in* and *relate to* their world(s), how they attempt to make sense of it, how they interpret and analyse it, align the methodological stance with the theoretical background, the theory of resonance developed by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2020 [2016]). According to Rosa, resonance not only presents a resolution to modernity's logic of "acceleration" (Rosa 2013) and a solution to the problem of modern society's "dynamic stabilization" (Rosa 2017), but as a concept also introduces a sociological perspective focusing on how individuals relate with the world around themselves, to society, friends, work, university, beliefs, nature, etc. Rosa argues that modernity's "escalatory logic of dynamic stabilization is tied to the promise of increasing our individual and collective scope and reach. This triggers [. . .] the 'Triple-A Approach' to the good life: the modern way of acting and being-in-the world is geared towards making more and more of its qualities and quantities available, accessible and attainable" (2018, 42). The digital sphere takes this logic to the next step, especially with the internet revealing access to almost unlimited amounts of potential social interactions, knowledge, culture, images, experiences, things and so on. But their mere accessibility, this "limitless horizon of availability" (Ibid., 46) does not automatically imply the satisfactory experience of good life one was looking for. In fact, increasing the scope according to the logic of the Triple-A Approach appears to significantly reduce the experiential and relational quality. Good life in its essence, Rosa states,

> is not a matter of scope (in money, wealth, options or capabilities), but a particular way of relating to the world – to places and people, to ideas and bodies, to time and to nature, to self and others. Increasing the scope is only a means and a strategy to enable or facilitate the latter – it becomes detrimental if it is structurally turned into an end in itself and thus culturally leads to alienation from the world (and to the destruction of nature on top of it) (2017, 448).

In this paper, I shall take it for granted that each one of us is indeed looking for a good life in the sense Rosa is referring to. However, such a universal focus on relationships is likely to oversee the social inequalities diminishing individual abilities to lead a life which they might value (Sen 2006, 36; Rehbein 2011, 3). Such structural capabilities differ around the globe as well as locally, creating hierarchies of power and excluding those with less capabilities from engaging on the same level as those with more capabilities. Such inequality of making the world available, accessible and attainable, becomes especially apparent comparing GSPians to students from other universities, since GSPians are homogenous in the way that they can all afford and have access to GSP, even under the current circumstances. In this paper, I shall mainly focus on the quality of the individuals'[9] relationships to the world in order to explore shared notions of successful or failed relationships which — according to Rosa — define a good life.

Alienation as failed relationship with the world
Alienation can be defined as a "relation of relationlessness." (Jaeggi 2014, 1) For Rosa, it is the opposed other of resonance in the sense that alienation "is a particular mode of relating to the world of things, of people and of one's self in which there is no responsivity, i.e. no meaningful inner connection. [...] Alienation thus is a relationship which is marked by the absence of a true, vibrant exchange and connection" (Rosa 2017, 449). In this failed relationship to the world, the world is perceived indifferent and inaccessible or even repulsive. It is devoid of meaning, cold and dump to the individual.

Resonance as successful relationship with the world
A relationship which is in contrary responsive, so to say vibrant, is described by resonance. In a resonant mode of relationship to the world, subject and world touch and transform each other. Hence, the individual experiences affection (intrinsic interest) and emotion (responsive self-efficacy) within an intrinsic moment of transformative quality and elusiveness while being with the world rather than just in the world. The elusiveness of moments of resonance, their non-controllability or constitutive unavailability, is of crucial importance, for it is only granted in such moments that both the world and the subject are confident enough to speak (or not speak) with their own voices. Rosa (2017, 450f.) clarifies: "whether or not we 'hear the call' is beyond our will and control [...] due to the fact that resonance [...] involves encounter with some real 'other' that remains beyond our control, that speaks in its own voice or key different from ours and therefore remains 'alien' to us." Accordingly, "resonance is not just consonance or harmony; quite to the opposite; it requires difference and sometimes opposition and contradiction in order to enable real encounter." Therefore, moments of resonance require the ability, the will to participate and to engage, a certain open mindedness, i.e. an attitude of love,[10] respect and interest, since successful relationships are — according to Rosa — of a responsive kind; they are successful only if we and the other are equally allowed to speak, both being subjects and not objects. Subsequently, the way one approaches one's world decisively influences one's possibilities of *being with and in* that world, i.e. of having a *responsive relationship* with it. Drawing on the theory of resonance, it is precisely when we experience this notion of touch and being touched, in these moments when we 'spark' that we experience this connectedness of truly being with the other, meaning with our social, psychological and even physical environment. Interlinked axes of resonance include horizontal or social, vertical or existential and diagonal or material axes of "*Weltbeziehung*", i.e. relating with and being in the world (Rosa 2016, 331-340).

To illustrate how his theory translates into praxis, Rosa (2020, 403-420) cites the example of school which is quite similar to GSPians' university life, involving fellow students, lecturers and lecture content. The vibrant connection, a successful relationship between those three angles animates studying as a complex process of "*Weltanverwandlung*" (Ibid., 408; italics i.o.), meaning a transformative, self-effective and responsive process of relationship. Under such conditions each one of the corners of that triangle *speaks* to each other in the sense that

... the professors convey enthusiasm and engage with the students,

... the students feel accepted, are open and captivated by the subject,

... and the content seems to both significant, challenging and meaningful.

As soon as one of the axes of the triangle, one of the relationships — either between student and professor or between professor and content or between content and student — freezes, as soon as a relationship becomes rigid and silent, the whole triangle as a space of resonance is threatened to fall silent. In that case, alienation grows and the sense of meaning fades for both the professors and the students. This paper focusses on the latter's *Weltbeziehung*, i.e. their *being in and with* their GSP related worlds.

Evaluation of the Research Project: Key Findings

Inspired by Rosa's theory, the purpose of this paper's underlying research project was to elaborate if, how and when GSPians were able to digitally build successful and satisfying relationships with their fellow international students, GSP's academic content and the programme as a whole, i.e. when they experienced moments of resonance. In the first study I conducted in summer 2020 interviewing fellow GSPians from batch 2020, I found a positive correlation between interaction and sharing[11] and moments of perceived resonance. At the same time, alienation grew through being detached and remote, with Zoom, Google Classroom, etc. being "the entrance to the classroom", the professors being able to "turn off the class" and possibilities for interesting conversations and discussions in informal settings limited:

GSP batch 2020's relation to...	Alienation	Resonance
...lecture content	• long hours in front of the screen • vastly differing time zones • discrepancies in understanding; insecurity	• personal interest • multicultural experiences
...lecturers	• remoteness; out of reach • intimidation	• interaction; reachable • personality
...fellow GSPians	• towards those who are not on the same *level*, i.e. who do not have the same chances to meet in person • intimidation	• shared pity • shared funny and silly moments • informal meetings • familiarity and confidence • group identity

Table 1: Summary of the findings in the first interviews with GSPians from batch 2020 in CW 29 2020.

This is, of course, no surprising coincidence, as the very concept of resonance requires a certain responsivity, meaning that moments of resonance constitute a relationship of mutual response, in which both poles speak with their own voices (Rosa 2016, 295). It should be noted that interaction can be fostered whereas e.g. personal interest has to grow on its own, in line with Limniou and others' (2021) observations about students' individual traits being prefigurative for a successful experience within a digital study environment. However, with resonance being the other of alienation and not its opposite, it is interesting to picture the two columns of the table as the two ends of a balanced scale. The more interaction is fostered, the more likely the lecturers will not

be perceived as out of reach, intimidating and alienating. The more intimidated I am, the less I am likely to share funny or silly moments and to experience moments of resonance with my fellow GSPians — just to give two examples on how to read this table. Recalling the elusive quality of resonance, I want to make clear that e.g. interaction does not *create* moments of resonance. But nevertheless, according to my research, interaction is a condition which *facilitates* moments of resonance and enables that "real encounter" of "not just consonance or harmony" but also "difference, [. . .] opposition and contradiction" (Rosa 2017, 451). In this sense, our dispositions are conditional for resonance which brings me to the five main findings of this paper.

Identification: the Different Stages of Belonging

Especially for those who were able to physically meet, identification with GSP is about a "certain energy", a "spirit". Indeed, "even though we were sitting in front of our screens" and "didn't know [. . .] maybe the height of people or their way of moving or their facial expressions, their mimic, their gestures, [. . .] we did know each other in a way, [. . .] even though we're far away from or were far away from each other most of the time. [. . .] there was a group process somehow, even though we were sitting in front of our screens". However, for some GSPians of batch 2020, there was another level of relating to their study environment as soon as there was the possibility to meet fellow GSPians in person, as one interviewee described: "I definitely feel like that [. . .] ever since we started to get to know each other in person a little bit, I feel a sense of belonging that I didn't have before, and I feel like that there is something developing within the group that I can say I'm part of this and this is what maybe identifies me as a GSPian". On the other hand, for those GSPians who remained on the digital level because of e.g. travel restrictions, alienation grew towards GSP as soon as many fellow GSPians started to meet in person; the "sense of community" shrunk mostly to those in a similar situation of not being able to join other GSPians in Berlin or to meet each other. Shared "funny things" or "silly moments" and "getting to see people outside of just a Zoom screen" via "social media" as experienced moments of connection, were overshadowed by the fact that those GSPians could only look "at a little picture of every-one's lives that [they] would have been a part of, had [they] been in Berlin", as one interviewee living on a non-European continent and not having met other GSPians in person coined it. This division of the group limits the extend to which one may feel as a part of the group, endangers the identification as a GSPian and ultimately reduces the perceived meaning of GSP, especially with lacking multicultural experiences.

With the meaning unfolding in the sense of a group on a "joint path" and futility increasing with a relative lack of physical or non-digital access to that group, it became apparent that the most crucial axis of the triangle outlined in the theoretical framework is in fact the relation to the fellow GSPians. A vibrant connection to the fellow GSPians gives the possibility to engage in discussion over the lecture content and over the lecturers, enabling GSPians to develop vibrant connections to those corners of the triangle as well. The other way around it is more difficult, since lecturers and content are not as easy to reach on one's own. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, it should be noted that the accessibility of the group differs as soon as some of the group are able to meet in person. Compared to the digital, the physical seems to be the preferred mode of interaction, inevitably and "in a subconscious way" excluding those who are not able to join. Literature on that topic suggests that this is due to the lack of nonverbal communication which is important for the exchange of information especially among a familiar group. Accordingly, the amount of information is reduced and some information even suppressed in digital communication (Hollingshead 2001, 562-565). These disadvantages hinder us GSPians

to relate equally to those of the group who remain in the digital mode of interaction. Moreover, with "[g]roups adapt[ing] to their communication medium quickly" (Ibid., 562), the hinderances become increasingly apparent and split the group, leaving those physically detached alienated from the experiences of the GSPians in Berlin.

While internally GSPians identify and relate with each other the more they are able to interact, i.e. the more they are able to physically meet, and gain energy, purpose and meaning from that respective 'sense of a group' exploring other cultural contexts and academic narratives, those who are not GSPians, those *other* fellow students from the partner universities who had seminars together with GSPians, form and are perceived as a different group. Although from the formal and functional perspective of online lectures, there was no "need to connect with international students" since "all were similar in the sense that [they] were students, sharing "the sense of like being a student" as one fellow student from a partner university stated, some GSPians could not help but notice e.g. that "*they* are not participating" in the same way as GSPians were.[12] Of course, when there is the group of *visiting* GSPians, there is also that group of (more or less voluntarily) *hosting* students from the partner universities. Actually, some of those students told me that they were excited about having students from "basically all over the world" at their universities and that there was "a bit more of an incentive to interact with international students because" they were familiar with their universities and fellow 'non-international' students. One student spoke of a "very exciting [...] prospect of learning from someone else and also just trying to get an understanding of how [the international students] approach academia and how they see academia within their own local context". However, I was also told that some felt "scared of" engaging with and asking the international students (meaning: the GSPians) e.g. about their experiences in the digital setting since it lacks this momentum of "[physical] face-to-face connection [that] makes you feel like you can be acquainted with somebody and be like 'nice to meet you'". Thus, interaction evolved mostly around lecture related topics or because of group assignments. But even in such a limited space, moments of resonance unfolded, moments when the relationship was not "purely administrative or academic" but developed a certain humanness through additional and elusive sets of interaction: an unforeseen joke, a joint laughter, a random text message on WhatsApp during a lecture. As a fellow student coined it: it is in those moments "when you can begin to see a person as a person, you know, as a human being, you can have a life with them, you can share human experience. It's because some things are universal, you know, some experiences are universal in the interaction that I had with [a GSPian]. I could see it. I could see winging it as a universal phenomenon".

'Spoilt for Choice': Dispositions Set the Atmosphere

Naturally, the way we are set in and approach our worlds prefigures our ability to build successful relationships, for it is there that any relationship with 'the other' begins. Quite simply, there is already a difference between being present in full flesh and blood compared to being visible through a camera, or even only audible with an anonymous avatar speaking.[13] An attitude of love, of "bringing to life, increasing his/her/its aliveness" (Fromm 2008, 37), as prefigurative for successful resonant relationships was equally difficult to sustain. As one interviewee coined it: as a "very analog person" it is hard to relate "to these abstract figures [one] can only see in a tiny box through a screen", "emotionally, and psychologically and sometimes rationally", especially since it is difficult to "physically detach" from one's primary environment. Although another fellow GSPian described feeling like "know[ing] a lot of [the others] to some extent" without having met and another one talked of advantages "especially for [this] generation who is more used to

digital technologies" in the sense that — because one could "switch [the] camera off and [. . .] walk around the room and then reset [one]self and sit down again"— one could "get more out of lectures than if [one had to] stare at the screen or face the two hours", they also lamented that "you kind of miss the human contact aspect of things". Neither feeling "as much personally involved" nor knowing whether GSP would actually meet expectations and how the situation would unfold, essentially "waiting" "for the program to start", "frustration [and anger] with the whole situation" grew. So did alienation, also because some had to join lectures at night due to time differences, literally at times where "[one's] body doesn't let [one] be". One fellow GSPian even described concerns how "available GSP" or how "meaningful this experience will be" while "very much looking forward to [GSP] hopefully getting better",

Hope in this regard might be interpreted as a driver working against alienation and actually facilitating moments of resonance since it was hope that allowed GSPians to cling to the thought that GSP would be "meaningful" in the future. Yet, from another angle, "looking forward to [GSP] hopefully getting better" also signals a stance towards one's own situation that is about 'waiting' for GSP to be more 'available', i.e. waiting for the realisation of a 'full GSP experience'. That recalls the Triple-A approach where, according to Rosa (2018, 44f.), modern subjects try to "increase [their] physical, material and social range" in order to meet the preconditions for 'the good life', but hoping to "arrive at a form of life that turns the world into a living, breathing, speaking, responsive, 'enchanted' world". Because of that hope that imagines an unknown future to be more responsive and prospective relations with and in the world to be qualitatively better, modern subjects remain in a hostile state, focusing on making their worlds' qualities and quantities available, accessible and attainable rather than being and engaging actively with the worlds they are in. Hence, instead of arriving at a more enchanted world, they "end up turning the business of increasing [their] scope and horizon of the available, attainable and accessible, and collecting resources into an end in itself, into an endless, escalatory cycle which permanently erodes its own basis and thus leads nowhere" (Ibid., 45). Thus, for the non-redeemed modern subject, resonance "is only *the flaring up of hope for [Weltanverwandlung] and response in a silent world*" (Rosa 2016, 750, italics i.o., cited in: Susen 2020, 328). Correspondingly, those fellow GSPians who waited for the programme "to start" and postponed their terms abroad as to get the experience they were longing for, felt more alienated and frustrated with online lectures than those interviewees — including myself — who opted for a 'regular' continuation of the programme, i.e. for adapting to the circumstances and accepting that — "although [. . .] it's not what [they] had in mind" — "a pandemic happened and [they] couldn't go [to other countries]". Through choosing their fate, they shifted their attention from 'increasing the scope' to 'acting and being' with their worlds in their worlds. This manoeuvre enabled them to be above rather than at the mercy of the situation (to some extent, at least), i.e. to have a "beneficial" GSP experience.

On the other hand, in summer 2020, it was not clear that the situation would last as long and that also 2021's terms would be majorly digital. Insecurity was a recurrent trait mostly apparent in 2020's interviews, equally fuelling a certain reluctance towards GSP, i.e. growing alienation, for both those who opted for postponing the continuation of their programme and those who continued digitally. Such an *agony of choice*, of being responsible for one's own fate, left GSP batch 2020 with the unavoidable question of 'What if. . . ', hence, a choice that could never surely be the best possible one. The result is a disposition where — in line with a modern approach to the world that is geared towards resource allocation — GSPians potentially remained concerned with the quantitative rather than qualitative issues within a digital programme.[14] This disadvantage becomes quite obvious when comparing answers given by GSPians from HU Berlin to those from the Global Studies Programme at the University of Freiburg, mostly a similar

graduate programme except that students did not have the choice whether to continue digitally or postpone their studies. They simply had to accept a digital version. One student told me:

> I think that we started during the epidemic is also something very unique. [...] I always think, well, the epidemic is such a global phenomenon and then we get to experience it. And yeah, in this program, I think it's also [...] a room or like a sphere where I can reflect on the epidemic as well. And I think I learned how to make contact with, for example, the students in India, also the professors in a very different way.

Such a constructive perspective was not mirrored in any of the interviews conducted with HU Berlin's GSP batch 2020, yet it matches the theory of resonance which requires an open, emotive and affectionate way of acting and being in a (digital) world, i.e. a positive disposition.

Individualisation: Being a Formal Student at Home

That GSP's *social space* and *physical place* are transferred and transformed into the digital sphere means that GSPians' being (at least in the GSP related context), identity and positionality hinges on digital tools rather than being constructed via human and social means alone. As Sarah Hayes (2021, 57) points out, in the digital setting, people and their identities "are now partially formed by the mobile, communicative, wearable, implantable, programmable, transportable, connectable, invasive and disposable devices and data, that organise and co-construct how individuals perceive daily life". In such a context, the question is whether GSPians are actually able to perceive that self-efficacy or those transformative moments, Rosa is alluding to in his theory of resonance, hence, whether relations in a digital context are as successful as in a non-virtual world, as one fellow GSPian mentioned:

> I would definitely say that I'm closer to the people who I share the physical experience with. [...] we initially used the [study environment] to get together. And with people that are in some ways similar to us or with people that we could have clicked with even outside of this platform, I think we would have definitely been closer if we had physical classes that we attended. And not just because of the physical aspect, because I feel that when we exchange ideas, when we sit in the same room, it has a different, um, it creates a different relationship than exchanging ideas through a computer.

This student's observations and feelings reflect the limited possibilities for interaction in a digital setting as well as the subsequent reduction of roles and even identities; without interpersonal encounter at another place as envisioned by GSP, thriving especially in those moments between lectures, during lunch in the cantine, or for "chai sita [chai and cigarette]" — to use the example of one student from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi who had met GSPians in person — the GSP experience is reduced to its academic content and the little interaction within seminars. While in a non-digital setting, GSP was about "sharing houses, sharing rooms, supporting each other, being in solidarity when it comes to different struggles in everyday life or financially or..." with "the discourse [being] outside the classroom" and friendships arising through "living" together e.g. "in the same dormitory" or "several similar interests or common conceptions", as one GSPian from a previous batch told me, 'being there' digitally meant to be distant. A fellow GSPian described that feeling as being "a very timely visitor" adding that "even if [that GSPian] would have been there physically, [they] would have felt distant and or disconnected or out of place", although there was still "a very strong student experience, [...] learning things that were interesting for me and in an atmosphere that was enabling it". In line with Rosa's theory, such an atmosphere in a digital setting requires a "sensitive professor" and

the special engagement of students, but remains inconsistent with the meaning of GSP that — according to its description (IAAW 2018; GSP 2014) — is meant to be created (also) through *social space*, i.e. bringing together students of various backgrounds, differing, for instance, in terms of nationality, age and disciplinary qualification, and *physical place*, i.e. studying at universities around the world on three continents, in the Global North as well as in the Global South, being actually present.[15] Without moments of convenient and neither formal nor — in the truest sense of the word — mediated contact via e.g. Zoom, GSPians become mere students attending social science lectures *solely with anyone at anyplace* and, thus, lack multicultural encounter and feel alienated rather than motivated to actively engage.

Nonetheless, online learning is said to be as effective as the traditional format, once technological and knowledgeable requirements are met. According to e.g. Tuan Nguyen (2015, 315f.), "there is strong evidence to suggest that online learning is at least as effective as the traditional format", potentially more since online learning enables "personalized virtual online learning environments" improving "students' exam performance, satisfaction and self-efficacy". But, the more engaged and interactive the lectures are designed and the more GSPians felt they know and are known by the lecturers, the more GSPians "enjoyed the content of [the] courses". Although individually and solely studying at home in front of the computer allowed the students to study at their own pace, to un-focus and refocus whenever they felt like it, and to set their own priorities, this was, of course, at the expense of the encounter within a *social space*, especially regarding the contact with other students. If at all, interpersonal relations evolved more around lecture related topics and tasks, as one student from the University of Pretoria (UP) narrated:

> I feel like since we've been online learning we lost other aspects of social relationships that you would find in the university, for instance, conversations in a corridor before and after a lecture. So what happened was when I did get to engage with other students, particularly the international students [from GSP], it was mostly about things that were related to academia and things like that.

While such a strong academic focus means to be able to "really learn[..] a lot" as one fellow GSPian coined it, "the things [. . .] that bring us closer together are actually the non GSP related things and the informal meetings that we don't have", to use the sad words of yet another interviewee.

However, such pity — if shared — can also create moments of resonance and break the feeling of being isolated and lonely at home in front of the screen, reduced to the student part of one's identity. The first thing that one fellow GSPian thought of when asked about moments of resonance, were "moments of, like shared disappointment [. . .] disappointment of the situation, so that we can't meet and we can't have proper discussions face to face discussions, and we can't have like interpersonal connections". To be "able to express [. . .] frustration [about visa issues] with [names of fellow students]" or to "talk about basically the struggle" just in a WhatsApp-group without "even talk" as another interviewee phrased it, created some sense of group feeling, of being in this situation jointly and created moments of recognition and resonance, of being both heard and able to speak — in short: of being pulled out of loneliness and placed into a social context. Such a feeling of 'being in this together' was seemingly even stronger for students from partner universities who were not part of GSP and thus did not have similar experiences to long for (and to mourn) in the first place:

> We were all alone in our rooms or in our houses sitting behind this computer or laptop or whatever, [. . .] simultaneously together, but alone in our own individual spaces.

[. . .]; we all said 'something weird is happening' at the same time, [. . .] we were all feeling a sense of grief, [. . .] a sense of slowdown.

On the other hand, as another student from a partner university told me, "everybody was caught up in their own things", increasing the urge to reach out to fellow students even with those limited possibilities. At this point, I want to recall the elusive quality of moments of resonance. Requiring both parties to meet and to constitute a relationship in which they interact, as individuals and — in this case — students with some common ground, the elusiveness of such possibly irritating encounters is of another quality in a digital setting than in a physical one for it is not more or less elusive but just limited to it respectively its professional and individual functionalities.

Of Inspiration and Intimidation: Engaging with Lecture Content by Oneself

While the virtual setting limits the potential for interpersonal encounters and fosters a situation where every student remains 'in their own individual spaces', students' rather functional relationships with their digital study environments are also a result of the suddenly required adaptation to unprecedented levels of (independent) learning with and through digital technologies. Moreover, as Limniou and others (2021, 12) describe in their research report, those students who were not "well-adapted to the new emergency online teaching approach" and who did not present "a combination of high self regulation, technology use, and a positive attitude to digital study practices", felt "disrupted by the speed and the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to their university and personal life" and "struggled to continue their studies and presented difficulties in establishing a new 'normality' due to lack of the face-to-face interactions and self-regulation skills". Suggesting that the physical encounter enhances self-regulation, facilitates adaptation and increases motivation, their study sheds light on how at least some students perceive the digital study setting as alienating and difficult respectively — to use Rosa's terminology — *silent* rather than resonant and *inspiring*. "We're speaking in front of a screen, that will always lead to a very specific and closed communicative situation; we will never be [. . .] in an open communication that allows to [. . .] just see wherever it goes", were the words of one fellow GSPian. Accordingly, one GSPian from a previous batch who experienced both the physical and the digital version of GSP told me about "being disconnected from this collective energy which connected me to the world" as the world went into lock-down and life shifted to home respectively to the digital sphere. Similarly, another fellow GSPian from batch 2020 described feeling "so many times [. . .] very alienated from the discussion, either because [of being] distracted by [their] own things or because [of having] a hard time sitting in front of the computer for so long or because [of just not being] connect[ed] to the subject", not as "connected" or "focussed" as usual. Such a condition hinders moments of resonance to unfold for it is the "receptive as well as active connection [that] brings about a process of progressive self- and world transformation" (Rosa 2017, 450), along with perceived self-efficacy a key aspect of resonance. Thus, although GSPians "know [. . .] that [they] could find a lot of the things interesting" — as to phrase it along the lines of one interviewee — they had "a very hard time relating emotionally and psychologically and sometimes rationally to the things that [were] discussed". In a physical classroom setting they "could have related to the content more easily, [. . .] could have been more motivated and more committed to it".

With the general feeling of being partly disconnected to the study environment — to the fellow students, to the teacher and the lecture content — prevailing as GSPians are not set in their social space at a physical place, many of my interviewees described a feeling of *intimidation* and a lack of self-confidence — a feeling I could recognise — wrapped up by a fellow student

from UP as "that whole exchange in your mind, whether you decide to share or not to share and then you end up not sharing and then you regret it". In part, Sherry Turkle (2011, 280) offers an explanation for such reluctance and intimidation as she points to — enhanced by the logics of social media[16] — a "pressure of performance" on the internet with "our work bleed[ing] into our private lives until we can barely discern the boundaries between them", as well as "many new encounters" which we might come to experience as "tentative, to be put 'on hold' if better ones come along." Exemplarily, one fellow GSPian mentioned feeling "a little bit out of step with [. . .] the general level of understanding", a need "to just push [one]self harder to understand things a bit better", but admitted that they "would never ask a question in the group discussion" as to not "sound stupid" since the online class is "a little more exposing to, like, put your hand up and say something". Contrary to the perception that a computer-mediated environment avoids face-to-face interaction and thus eases feelings of intimidation (cf. Price and Lapham 2004), these GSPians lamented how not having face-to-face interaction impaired their self-confidence to engage with those "abstract figures on the screen", especially since — for some — lectures were at "horrible times" at night. To give an impression:

> I literally could not think of anything to say. Well, it was also really early for me. [. . .] I was just like, oh, my God, it's so early. I can't think right now. I feel like I got off on this [. . .] foot of just being so quiet and anxious all the time that I just [. . .] struggled to break out of it until I met everyone in person. [. . .] I could [. . .] portray my personality better and get to know people on a more personal level versus just like seeing a screen and [. . .] being scared of it.

While individual engagement with the lecture's content can even enhance learning in a virtual setting, a lack of interaction potentially means that subjects become intellectually isolated, left alone within their own bubbles of thoughts.[17] Although somewhat cozy, comfortable and self-assuring safe spaces, such 'echo chambers' as Rosa (2016) names them, are hinderances for collective knowledge production and by no means facilitate resonance since resonance "does not mean to hear oneself amplified or to simply feel re-assured, but it involves encounter with some real 'other' that remains beyond our control, that speaks in its own voice or key different from ours and therefore remains 'alien' to us" (Rosa 2017, 450). With limited space for encounter and discussion in a digital study setting, a fellow GSPian lamented accordingly: "That I myself, when I read something like readings that we need to do, assignments that we need to do, I need to get feedback on it, and I need to have someone who knows how to explain this in order to confirm my thoughts or to oppose them also. [. . .] I've had seminars in the past where I had very fruitful discussions with people. And I think one thing that digitalisation did [. . .], and the shift from presence lecture to like online lecture, is: it took a little bit away the part of having meaningful discussions among peers". In this regard, *meaning* seems to unfold through the confrontation with a possibly irritating other, indeed, an encounter inhibited by the limited and functional setting of the digital sphere. In contrast, a non-structured, casual and informal physical encounter among peers maybe collectively engaging with and debating GSP's content, can — as a GSPian from a previous batch narrated — culminate in "standing outside in a circle discussing [. . .] very lively and having much fun while doing that until, I don't know, 05:00 a.m. Or so. And this was a very, very, very vibrant moment, I guess. And I went home and was yeah, very inspired or happy".

An 'Illusion of Equality': of Abilities and Willingness to Relate Digitally

> So we were kind of hoping to hear their perspective while they were maybe [. . .] hoping to hear our perspective. [. . .] I felt that the platform [. . .] had created an atmosphere

of inequality because I felt that it was easier for us to participate because it's very common in, uh, say, the German way of things to take an active part in classes.

This is how a fellow GSPian described experiences within online classes at a partner university. After wondering why it was mostly GSPians participating in the online lectures, a student from that partner university said "that they were [. . .] interested to hear what [the GSPians] had to say". Indeed, that is "super sad" — to use that fellow GSPian's words — because "we have been missing out on the things [. . .] that we were there for" for engaging with each other is at the core of the multicultural encounter envisioned by GSP, i.e. the programme's very meaning. I remember that there were moments when I felt reluctant to say anything because I had already made two or three comments in a row whereas none of the partner university's students had given any statement. Moreover, bearing the results of my first study in 2020 in mind and being as committed as possible to make the term a meaningful and 'resonant' experience, I turned on my camera as much as I could, hoping to be more present in the digital setting. Yet, I found myself often being one of the very few showing their faces instead of silent black screens with their names written on them. If the potential for moments of resonance shrinks accordingly to the amount of *being*, of presence that we put into our relations with our (study) environment, then those who do not — or *cannot* — turn on their cameras are disadvantaged in a digital study environment. While some of the students I spoke to, equally from GSP as well as from the partner universities, told me about "struggles with technology" and "connection issues", some explained that they saw it as an advantage that they were able to switch the "camera off and [. . .] reset" or to "leave the room", actually being grateful that "nobody could really see [them] the times whereby [they were] just disinterested because it just felt so bad that everybody was just so far away, although everybody was connected at the same time". But once one was willing and able to connect to the classroom or to participate in a digital study setting in the first place, the anonymity of the digital setting with everyone similarly being in their own individual spaces creates a misleading sense of equality, i.e. an "illusion of equality", as one student from a partner university — on a personal note: intriguingly[18] — explained:

> If you didn't turn on your cameras, everyone is equally anonymous. So, if everyone is equally anonymous, then there is [. . .] an illusion of equality [. . .] because everyone's screen is black and only their name shows. Right? [. . .] There is the sense that all of us are human beings behind this laptop, whatever, and maybe we all have the same kind of contribution to make. But at another level, [. . .] when the camera is looking into my room or my house, it is able to index certain qualities of my status, my social status, [. . .] which was not there in the class before. I think in the classroom, it's still like flip flops and sneakers and jeans, even if you wear Levi's and I wear like the Philby's jeans, jeans are still jeans, they have that hegemony of bringing us together, if I can say so. Right? But at home, when you look at the color of my wall or the lack of books or electrical wires running, I don't know, I'm just saying random things, right, I think [. . .] that can be seen as an invasion of privacy or it gives out more than maybe sometimes people would be comfortable giving out or revealing. And that might be a reason why people don't even want to turn on their cameras, maybe because they're sharing their room with like five other siblings or however many people. So, I think that at one level, it does allow people to be able to share things [. . .], but at the same time, like it comes with it, all the obstacles and hurdles. [. . .] So, if your camera is turned off, you can control more of the information you give or you don't, right? If my camera is off, you can't see me, you can only hear me, and there is only so much judgement you can make from my voice whereas in the classroom the way my hair

> is tied, if I am wearing make-up, the kind of shoes I am wearing, the clothes I am
> wearing, the bag I carry, the way I smoke a cigarette will tell you so much about me
> that I don't have control over. [...] In that sense, this online space [...] alienates
> everyone at the same level whereas physically the level of alienation might vary.

In this regard, to be able to turn on the camera has to be interpreted as diminishing digital communication's potential to superficially hide previous inequalities.[19] In fact, turning on the camera in a Zoom call where some are not able or willing to switch on their camera bears the potential to intimidate, thus, might discourage some from bringing themselves into discussions, relations and interactions, and ultimately, impedes resonance to unfold. On the other hand, if all turn off their camera, voices are the only possibility to judge one another, potentially also increasing intimidation and bearing the fear "to say something stupid", i.e. resulting in reluctance to speak for oneself, but (!) potentially for different people than those who were intimidated in a more visible world. Actually, these observations bring another perspective to the perception that the digital is "reducing the humanness" by making everyone equally a "cloud with a name" for they just seem to require some sort of new habituation to other distinctive features than our used and more comfortable, mostly externally expressed and visible ones. In fact, they draw our attention to what is spoken only, with every word and every intonation presumably out on trial. It is in the relative lack of familiar distinctive features (cf. Bourdieu 1984 [1979]) of our identity and belonging, of those accustomed characteristics that enable us to notice differences and similarities, to define ourselves and the other, that we can find an explanation for both moments of alienation and moments of resonance within the digital context.

Conclusion: Remote Interconnectedness and Meaningless Knowledge

This paper's findings suggest that while there can be difficulties to engage with a digital study setting for some, digital environment's interpersonal relationships lack the potential responsivity for all and students — in this case: GSPians — start alienating from their study environment, not being individual humans of social interest anymore but rather students fulfilling their roles devoid of the original meaning. For Rosa (2018, 46), resonance — in contrast to alienation — is a "'good' or fulfilling way of relating to places, people, time, things, and self", i.e. a way of relating to the world that is not without responsivity or without (meaningful) relation, that allows both the subject and the other *to be*. Although theoretically, the digital sphere enables everyone *to be* on an illusive equal level without those distinctive markers of class and status that might usually render inequalities visible and hamper interaction in a classroom, students in this study perceived precisely this lack as alienating, bearing in mind resonant relationships develop through differences that constitute the other. Moreover, albeit one subject's identity can be understood as an eternally divisible construct beyond the physical body, communicable also through technologies (Bollmer 2018, 134), students were more aware of the mere functional or formal part of them as students because they mostly engaged with their studies and their fellow students — either GSPian or student from a partner university — within the structured premises of digital lectures. Depending on their familiarity and comfort with digital technologies, such partial images of the students' selfs in the virtual world were hinderances for successful relations in Rosa's sense: it was more difficult to engage in relating and to move beyond the fear that one could say something stupid, especially because to say something was also the only way one could be judged by others, at least when the cameras were off. However, once students entered a relationship and actively

put themselves into the new situation, not longing for any missed experience and allowing the new and *uncontrollable* (cf. Rosa 2020 [2018]) to happen, they were — even within the limited modes of digital encounter — able to experience moments where they were *swinging* with each other, moments that related to their human lives beyond a student's name on a screen.

Inspiring moments occurred whenever there was space for it, i.e. when the lectures were designed interactively and when students felt they know and are known by the lecturers and other students, or through e.g. a casual chat over WhatsApp or active engagement with each other because of an assignment. Indeed, it seemed almost like there was a longing for human encounter, for resonant moments with a human other in a digital environment that was mainly perceived as hostile, intimidating and alienating, not being able to meet most GSPians expectations and only giving very limited possibilities for the familiar physical face-to-face encounter. Moreover, while the students were simultaneously alienated as equal abstract figures or just names on a screen, "a collective feeling of being" unfolded through being not together as a collective but within their individual private spaces. On this basis, there was actually the potential to experience moments of resonance, to be more than just a "blob on the water", and to regain or mutually discover identities, not only as GSPian or student x or y, but actually as selves. Indeed, those moments require feeling comfortable with a digital setting which most GSPians did not, partly because it was not how one's GSP experience was imagined, and partly because it was (and is) not the usual and thus comfortable mode of presenting one's personality. For online teaching and learning in general, these findings suggest that once students self-consciously and purposely *choose* a digital setting without having longed for an alternative at any point, a digital study environment might actually be perceived less alienating. Under such circumstances, students might well be capable and willing to adapt to the conditions, engage openly in digital encounters beyond an illusion of equality, fear and intimidations, and experience moments of resonance.

Nonetheless, as for GSP itself and not the students' individual and phenomenological relations to their digital environment, this paper sheds light on the difficulties of sustaining the social space and physical place that the study programme had foreseen as to facilitate multicultural encounter and a — literally — global study environment. On the one hand, intriguingly, especially students from the partner universities felt somehow connected and GSPians were able to learn a lot, but on the other hand, there was always a level of remoteness, of not being there together, not having that level of interaction, that same energy, that strong spirit, that physical encounter of previous batches. Accordingly, one GSPian from a previous batch told me that once the pandemic struck and one was not able to e.g. live together anymore, conversations became "a lot less". Being put into one's own individual spaces, scattered across the earth, one was left more with one's own thoughts in one's own bubble. Being complementary at first anyway, digital encounter seemingly was barely able to replace the previous physical one. Hence, education in the digital age is less a collective than an individual project although "[m]eaningful knowledge creation happens [. . .] in a collective". Moreover, in a digital setting, occasions for encounter and moments of resonance are limited which — in our modern mind shaped by the Triple-A approach and geared towards resource allocation — bears the threat of trying *to make resonance happen* on those few occasions, quite effectively: *to control resonance.* Of course, that is not possible: resonance is of an elusive and uncontrollable quality. However, a condition for resonance to unfold does not lie in a state of mind in which we try to make the world as we wish it to be and mourn a "missed moment", but rather in an open, affectionate and emotive attitude. It is essentially about being both actively in the world and passively with (the flow of) the world.

Coda: a Limited Digital Experience of Being with the World

It has been a while since I thought I had finished this article. Now, working on a seemingly unrelated research project in Tanzania, I am experiencing that 'being with the world' contains more than just the oral exchange of thoughts and ideas, both being processed by the mind rather than the full body. The virtual setting — at least at the current stage of technology — cannot grant that full sensory experience of which our body is capable of. Our body which itself shapes the mode of interaction substantially, overcoming a mind/body dichotomy of visual Western culture and acknowledging the diverse sensory characteristics in different cultural settings, as among others Elisabeth Hsu (2008, 439) has argued:

> ... the sensorial is intrinsic to the social. [...] The materiality of sociality resides [not only in objects but] also in our bodies, odours and movements, vision, hearing and speech, sensations of heat or pain, the taste of what we eat and drink, and tactile interaction. [...] People communicate not only through words and mental meaning making, but also in instances of simultaneously felt emotions, physically instantiated memories and sensations.

A digital mode of communication does not address the full range of the body's sensory abilities and, from the start, phenomenologically confines the potential for resonant relationships between people, notwithstanding their environment.[20] Among people, 'digital resonance' dwells on the exchange of what are expressed units of symbolic communication (language), the marker of human cognition: words.[21] Thus connecting minds rather than bodies means that the content of the relationship itself is limited to what is processed by the mind. Indeed, we have seen that the interviewees perceived themselves as not being able to physically detach from their environment, meaning that they were concerned with the physical places they were in. We have also seen that many of them described their digital studies as a functional rather than vivid experience where GSP became merely studying social sciences applied to a global setting and did barely provide the intercultural experience they were longing for. Mutual engagement was limited to the formal setting of seminars and evolved mostly around the academic content. Moreover, being bound to their own individual physical places, students were unable to dive into the full experience of the physical places they were studying at and remained mostly in an alienated and functional state within their own social spaces. Even though individual experiences of once own place are sharable with others, these communicated stories are not the experiences themselves. In the virtual setting, a shared mode of being with the world seems out of reach; the intercultural dialogue unable to move beyond individual stories. And, since the lack of sensory impressions in the virtual encounter with one another causes intimidation and uneasiness to speak, some stories even remain untold.

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Notes

[1] Daniel Stich is a student enrolled in the social sciences' graduate Global Studies Programme at the Humboldt University of Berlin whose current academic focus lies on witchcraft practices and posthuman relations beyond Cartesian binaries.

[2] According to the website of the IAAW, the "programme focuses on multicentric social theory and politics"

(IAAW 2018). In order to approach global social theories, the world and globalisation from various angles and regional perspectives, participants of GSP are supposed to spend two terms at partner universities and encounter various cultures, an experience which "is enhanced by the multicultural composition of the group of students" (Ibid.)

[3] I use the term 'GSPian' generally for people who study and have studied GSP, but when I write of '(my) fellow GSPians' I refer to those GSP students who — like me — had their programme's first term in 2020.

[4] To some extent, younger students from the Global North match with 'Digital Natives', "a description now typically identified [...] with a young person who has grown up with digital technologies and the Internet as ever-present parts of their lives" (Thomas 2011, 3), whereas older students and those from the Global South might correspond more to 'Digital Immigrants', not being as comfortable with digital modes of communication as those from the Global South or their younger fellow students: "being a Digital Native is not [...] about capabilities, or even knowledge, regarding all things digital [but] much more about culture. It is about younger people's comfort with digital technology, their belief in its ease, its usefulness, and its being generally benign" (Prensky 2011, 17). Age-wise, the difference between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants can be used to describe the difference between the so called Generation Z, born after 1996, and Millennials respectively the Generation Y, born between 1984 and 1996 (Bresmann and Rao, 2017)

[5] Lupton (Ibid.) also elaborates that "Digital technology use and practice are structured through social categories such as gender, social class, geographical location, education, race/ethnicity and age". This itself indicates how multicultural encounters and relations across physical boundaries are subject to power dimensions and inequalities which hinder peoples ability 'to speak' and be heard, hence their ability to experience moments of resonance.

[6] Actually, GSPians should be considered somewhat homogenous in their socioeconomic and even cultural backgrounds for they were able to enter an international programme with all its financial and logistical implications, to participate in it and to access higher education in the first place, to boot — if I may add with a wink — in social sciences and humanities, or rather: in 'breadless arts'. Thus, while there might be differences in whether the use of digital tools is perceived convenient, or in digital competences indeed affecting the students' academic engagement (cf. Heidari et.al. 2021), most GSPians probably have rather similar digital skills and access to necessary hardware.

[7] Throughout the paper, I will sometimes give some further information on the quoted interviewee wherever necessary and helpful but expect the reader to understand some restraint in this regard (e.g. not indicating sex) as to assure confidentiality and to enhance readability. In general, all quotes without references are taken from the transcripts of my interviews.

[8] I remember that I did not imagine the situation to last over summer 2020, an estimation shared by my study coordinator and fellow students. At the beginning, the tendency was "to think that it will be under control by the end of spring [2020!]", a phrase used by my study coordinator in a mail on March 16th with the subject line: "GSP 2020: Newsletter: Year2020: Month3: Week12: No1"

[9] Influenced by the European hellenistic tradition, the concept of individuality puts the individual at the centre of interest. This train of thought is fundamental in both the foundation of Rosa's theory (cf. Marcuse, Fromm, Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer et al.) and my own structure of mind being born and raised mainly in Europe.

[10] The notion of love I draw on is not to be confused with the romantic concept of relationship as commonly understood. As Eva Illouz (2018, 179) points out extensively, this romanticised version can be seen as an "affirmation of emotional autonomy" and as such "became central to the project of the modern individual". Moreover, throughout modernity, love was linked to happiness "as a utilitarian project to maximize one's pleasure", i.e. "maximizing the pleasure of two people" — merely "a Hollywoodian invention". Imagining and idealising happiness to be a matter of love through the romantic relationship of two individuals who are 'meant to be together' presupposes an exclusiveness resembling a consumerist idea of having and possession. Contrarily, but subsequently to Rosa (and Erich Fromm), I refer to a notion of love which is an attitude enabling moments of resonance rather than a relationship itself.

[11] The role of sharing within small group life, its processes and performance is substantial and manifold. For instance, "shared information tends to lead to shared preferences, as does a shared identity." (Tindale et.al. 2001, 21) Meanwhile, sharing can also be influential even though the shared content does not reflect the majority's opinion. For the sake of the size of this article, I don't want to elaborate the aspects of sharing in a group further here, and shall focus on group interaction.

[12] In fact, they wondered about the reasons for that and if they were intimidating those students, essentially reinforcing global power relations. I will come back to this point soon.

[13] That is, of course, if one was able to connect at all in the first place, as one interviewee coming from a rural area in the Global South mentioned: "the entire semester was not really a great experience because I had connection issues". While some platforms seemed to work better and had more advantages than others, e.g. break-out sessions in Zoom, some digital tools were not as accessible for some as for others with those coming from a background equipped with less infrastructure generally not being as able to engage in relationships as others.

[14] These considerations are in line with the phenomenon of *choice overload* as elaborated by Sheena S. Iyengar and Mark R. Lepper (2000, 1003f.): They found that "choosers in extensive-choice contexts enjoy the choice-making process more [...] but also feel more responsible for the choices they make, resulting in frustration with the choice-making process and dissatisfaction with their choices", although "it is not that people are made unhappy

by the decisions they make in the face of abundant options but that they are instead unsure — that they are burdened by the responsibility of distinguishing good from bad decisions". While "prior research has indicated that people will necessarily be intrinsically motivated to make their own choices", Iyengar and Lepper (Ibid.) argue that "the more choosers perceive their choice-making task to necessitate expert information, the more they may be inclined not to choose, and further, they may even surrender the choice to someone else — presumably more expert". Moreover, as Benjamin Scheibehenne and others (2010, 419-421) specify, *choice overload* is reinforced by time pressure, increased cognitive efforts in complex decision making processes, the urge to justify one's option, or the pressure to maximise outcome, i.e. to choose the best possible option (Scheibehenne et al. 2010, 419-421). Hence, it is not surprising that GSPians tended to be overwhelmed by the decision making process and were more frustrated and unsatisfied with their digital study environment than those students who had no option.

[15] Actually, this becomes very apparent when quoting more of that interviewee who — for an 'enabling atmosphere' — drew on an example of one particular class: ". . . it was a very critical class with a lot of input from the teacher within an Indian context regarding things that were very relevant to me or very interesting for me. And I guess that was the most meaningful experience that I had. And also [. . .] I was the only foreign student in the class. [. . .] It felt like the most sincere experience, I guess". Being the only GSPian in that class implied more encounter with and more engagement by other students for this GSPian because of reasons which will be dealt with later in this paper.

[16] In her work, Turkle refers mostly to our behavioural patterns on social media, such as electronic messaging apps like WhatsApp and platforms such as Facebook, rather than to video communication technologies such as Zoom. However, her observations (Turkle 2011, 258-261) are helpful to understand people's behavioural patterns and circumstances on the internet in general, for they (1) are "challenged by the persistence of people and data", i.e. leaving an "electronic trace" while supposedly being in their private space, their "cocoon", and (2) — as they are haunted and possibly caught by that "electronic shadow" — are limited in the freedom of their selves' expression and the usually twisting and turning development of their identities. Moreover, she (Ibid., 292) highlights that the limited modes of interaction on the internet are deprived of human beings' "infinite combinations of vocal inflection and facial expression", that "We recognize, and are most comfortable with, other people who exhibit this fluidity" and that "Humans need to be surrounded by human touch, faces, and voices."

[17] I chose the term 'bubble' here on purpose as to draw attention to similarities with 'filter bubbles', a term invented by Eli Pariser (2011) describing how the algorithms of the internet's popular search engines create individual universes of re-assuring and opinion based information, i.e. little affirmative comfort zones for all of us.

[18] Keeping in mind that "the prior relationship [...] between interviewer and respondent is one of the myriad contexts that precede and shape the interview encounter" (Warren 2012, 132), my positionality as a fellow GSPian has to be considered as an influential factor for the conduct and outcome of each and every interview. I want to highlight that I particularly enjoyed the interviews with fellow students from the partner universities for it gave me (and us) some time to share each others' perspectives, reflect on different experiences and get to know each other a little more. Unfortunately, they also gave me some more idea of what many fascinating people I would have met under other circumstances. I chose to quote this student here at length as to give some more detail on this thought provoking 'illusion of equality' although the idea definitely deserves it's own paper.

[19] Of course, some possibly discriminating identity markers remain such as names leading to prejudices about origin and gender. Also, the spoken word is not only about it's content but also about it's tonality and language. Quite interestingly, a student from South Africa told me: "For many international students, English was not their first language. [. . .] So I was playing home advantage". But there is a bias that is not "applied in a similar manner because [. . .] we deal with international students coming from a prestigious university" in a way and we "don't give South African students who" also don't speak English as a first language "the same benefit of the doubt in terms of how they represent English as what we do international students." In this sense, even in a 'neutral' online setting, power relations are persistent.

[20] It is worthwhile to note that the current modes of virtual interconnection rely on auditive and visual information, as "'vision' is central to Wissen and 'wisdom' in Enlightenment Europe, while other senses are cultivated in other cultures"; "ever since antiquity vision and sound have been valued higher than taste, smell and touch [. . .] — vision was an attribute of men, touch of women", i.e. consolidating European 'superiority' and the patriarchal system of modern reason. (Ibid., 434f.)

[21] Anyhow, words are not the basic units of language (cf. language-thought interface; Wolff and Malt 2010).