EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK

Contribution for Festschrift Thomas Klie

Thomas Schlag

The smartphone as a mirror of life (as of 13.2.2022)

Introduction: Smartphones at the Bataclan

The first responders at the Bataclan club in Paris were presented with a profoundly terrifying auditory image. In the dark, dead silent room, smartphone screens kept flashing between the attack victims lying motionless on the floor. At irregular intervals, vibrations and ring tones made it audible that the outside world was trying to contact the missing relatives. The users were dead, but their smartphones continued to glow in the dark. They produced individual signals in which the desperation on the part of those looking for a sign of life became manifest.

Extinct and functional matter at the same time in dramatic non-simultaneity - and in the midst of all this the smartphone as the global, individual and collective networking centre of an existential death and life situation.

Around the crime scene, the smartphone also played an essential communication role. People used it to call for rescue. Still others filmed the dramatic scenes of the Paris events on 13.11.2015, which were communicated and retrieved as a "news alert" in real time throughout the world like wildfire in images and sound. Horror, suffering, empathy and solidarity were shared "live" digitally and are still available today - for example, the start of the shooting during the concert[1] - as a digital memory. At the same time, as was learned a short time later, the Islamist attack had been coordinated with the help of smartphone communication. In another simultaneous attack in the French metropolis, a man was saved, according to self-disclosure, by his mobile phone in his breast pocket, as a flying metal part had drilled into the user interface.[2]

And politically consequential dynamics of use developed quickly after the attacks. On the one hand, supposed Islamic celebrations of the event were spread as digital fakes via smartphone communication.[3] On the other hand, there were spontaneous Muslim expressions of solidarity and the production of religious memes after the attacks - for example under #prayforparis or #NotInMyName - which also revealed the productive and globally communicative compulsion to use the smartphone.[4]

---

[1] Le Bataclan Concert's Interruption by Gunmen, Shown in Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXZG8QbT7jA, retrieved 15.1.2022.
[2] Cf. Paris terror: Man reveals he was saved by his mobile phone as survivors share stories, Independent, 14.11.2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/paris-attacks-survivors-and-witnesses-share-accounts-of-deadly-paris-attacks-a6734401.html, accessed 1.12.2021.
[3] Fake video, images claim to show Muslim joy over Paris attacks, Washington Post, 18 Nov 20215, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/11/18/fake-video-images-claim-to-show-muslim-joy-over-paris-attacks/, accessed 5 Feb 2022.
[4] Cf. https://esmemes.com/t/pray-for-paris-images, retrieved on 1.12.2021.

1.   The smartphone in a practical-theological perspective - objectives

Why should one concern oneself practically-theologically with the performance, interaction and resonance of this "smart thing"? Wouldn't the events in Paris have taken place in more or less the same way without this digital helper and could they have been described in a similarly dramatic way? What is the religiously significant dimension of this technical artefact?

In contrast to other things - also discussed in this volume - the smartphone is undoubtedly not characterised by an immediately religiously identifiable form or a more or less self-evident liturgical purpose. It would hardly be placed in a set of religious utensils. It does not play a significant role in the practice of worship and participation - at least not so far.[5] The smartphone is not a religious artefact in the sense of a thing that can be used for classical religious purposes.

On the other hand, this technical thing[6] is intensively connected to individual and collective lifestyle and communication practices through its self-evident everyday media use - in dramatic moments of fate as well as in the very everyday, undramatic worlds of life.

The smartphone - according to the thesis to be elaborated in the following - is prima facie different in its material performative, interactive and resonance-enabling character - from much more easily recognisable and decipherable classical things of religious practice. However, smartphone use, together with the associated experiences of performance and resonance, forms a specifically material-virtual mode of encountering the world in the [7]midst of the culture of digitality.[8]

It is assumed that the smartphone represents a material-spiritual mirror of individual existence or existential search movements in the face of the fullness of life.[9] From its shiny *surface* to its largely hidden (absent-present) *undersurfaces* and *layers of depth,* it comes to bear for its users as a manifest medium of freedom and at the same time as a medium for opening up reality.

At the same time and *from this point of view,* it is at least as significant in religious terms as many other objects in whose attribution of meaning and use religious practice manifests itself. We will discuss the extent to which facets of lived religion are reflected in this material artefact, the smartphone, and its everyday use as a sign. For even this material thing is made to speak in a thoroughly religious sense in individual cases through its use and

---

[5] Cf. the objective, design and initial results of the ecumenical and international CONTOC study (Churches Online in Times of Corona) at www.contoc.org.

[6] From the perspective of educational science, which can also be inspiring for later reflection on the didactics of religion, things are defined more closely against the background of their performativity as "media, since they create relationships between people and the world, between individuals and their fellow human beings and between themselves and themselves". From there, "the performative educational habitus of things" consists of "ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes. Education is the response to the possibilities of things.", Jörg Zirfas and Leopold Klepacki: "The Performativity of Things. Pedagogical Reflections on Education and Design." In *Journal of Educational Science* 16 (2013): 52.54.

[7] Here we should recall the figure of the mode of world encounter of constitutive rationality, which is relevant to the didactics of religion; in other words: the use, purpose and meaning of the smartphone can certainly be linked to questions of "where from? ", "what for? " and "where to" of human life.

[8] Cf. Felix Stalder, *Kultur der Digitalität* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2017).

[9] Cf. Thomas Schlag, "Gebildete Wahrheitskommunikation unter den Bedingungen digitaler Bild-, Wort- und Zeichenfülle - eine praktisch-theologische Perspektive", In Daniel Bauer, Thomas Klie, Martina Kumlehn and Andreas Obermann (eds.): *Von semiotischen Bühnen und religiöser Vergewisserung: Religiöse Kommunikation und ihre Wahrheitsbedingungen* (Berlin und Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 109-123.

interpretation.[10] Or to put it provocatively: through a specific religiously connoted use and the corresponding theological practice of attribution and interpretation, the smartphone can be experienced in and through use, together with the bodily practices of seeing, hearing, touching and speaking, as an existentially significant object open to religious interpretation, if not even as a "holy" object.[11]

In this respect, the practical-theological exploratory process "in view" of the smartphone is of enlightening, enriching and eminently practice-relevant significance. Practical-theological reflection should know or at least suspect what is being talked about in each case when this thing is in use, comes into speech and brings itself into speech. In any case, the individual and interactive logics of use, which will be discussed in more detail, open up diverse possibilities of interpretation that fall into the very own field of practical-theological understanding.[12]

Does the smartphone "endow" and thus make sense in its own materiality? Or asked even more pointedly: "If you definitely can't get rid of things, what theological significance do they have? " [13]

It is not so much about attributing a pseudo-religious quality to the material medium from the outside. And the focus is not on the currently intensively discussed question of the chances of digital transmission media for new attractive forms of communication of the Gospel.[14] Rather, the aim is to plead for its own material logic of use and utilisation to be examined in terms of its existential, individual and collective and *thus* - this "thus" is by all means of a programmatic nature! - to consider its religious connotations.[15] Then it might even be possible to speak of a reference to transcendence in the medium - perhaps in the sense of that which *absolutely concerns us,* or even more appropriate to the technology: that which *absolutely concerns us or remains on for us*.

The *far-reaching* everyday significance of this technical medium, which for its part is far more than a mere object, calls for theological-religious hermeneutics. Within this horizon, the dynamics of digital resonance and relationship formation, which are made possible or impossible by the smartphone, are to be examined more closely and critically. From this

---

[10] Cf. the contribution by Klaus Hock in this volume.

[11] That the smartphone, on the other hand, is a small, inconspicuous, often even neglected or forgotten thing should rather not be claimed, cf. Hans Peter Hahn: "Materialität zwischen Alltag und Religion. Lebensweltliche Verwandlungen der geringen Dinge". In *Die religiöse Positionierung der Dinge: Zur Materialität und Performativität religiöser Praxis*, ed. by Ursula Roth and Anne Gilly (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2021, 15. Rather, unmistakable power is attributed to it or is inscribed in it, which nevertheless differs from the fullness of power of sacred objects in the classical sense, cf. on this Karl-Heinz Kohl*: Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (Munich: Beck, 2003).

[12] In view of the sign-related practices of use specifically associated with the surface ground of the smartphone as well as the typical bodily gestures associated with it, it is worth recalling Thomas Klie's prompting dictum that practical theology "as a science interpreting life [should] also and especially turn to gestural forms of manifestation. Be it in liturgical performance, in pastoral penitential situations or in the opaque transitions of everyday life", "Everyday Religion - Sunday Culture. The practical-theological interest in surfaces", In *Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?! ,* ed. by dems, Martina Kumlehn, Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 149.

[13] Stefan Altmeyer: "Is that all? Die Dinge theologisch denken mit Bruno Latour", In *God, Gaia und eine neue Gesellschaft: Theologie anders denken mit Bruno Latour,* ed. by Daniel Bogner, Michael Schüßler and Christian Bauer (Bielefeld: transcript 2021), 29.

[14] Exemplary Christian Grethlein: "Communication of the Gospel in the digitalised society", In *ThLZ* 140 (2015), 598-611.

[15] Cf. the interdisciplinary research approaches and topics of the Zurich University Centre of Competence in Research (2021-2032) *Digital Religion(s). Communication, Interaction and Transformation in the Digital Society*, www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch.

perspective, a whole series of aspects that can be interpreted hermeneutically and theologically can be pointed out on the basis of a broad concept of digital religion or digital religious practice, which in turn can be connected to the basic questions of the materiality and virtuality of a religiously connoted use of signs or can be examined more closely and scrutinised from there.

But this is also to be noted: The various approaches to this specific material thing of the 21st century should not and cannot, from a practical-theological perspective, be about a pure critique of technology and media. On the other hand, all too obvious and pleasing analogies - for example between technical ubiquity and divine omnipresence - are also not indicated, because this threatens to undermine the complex attributions of meaning of digital performance, interaction and resonance.

2.   Material Revolution

It hardly needs to be explained in more detail here how the invention of the smartphone has almost revolutionised the worlds of perception and everyday life. This technically tangible form is certainly the most conspicuous material expression of current digitalisation processes and logics of use and communication. In fact, there are good reasons to speak[16] of a revolutionary transformation with considerable effects on almost all areas of life, at the latest with its introduction.

There is indeed a fixed creatio-ex-nihilo date for this technical birth - and it is by no means just a matter of myth-making - optimally staged, "reliably" illustrated and lastingly documented in another digital medium[17]: On 9 January 2007, Apple founder Steve Jobs presented the "revolutionary product that changes everything" to the astonished auditorium and quasi digitally to the whole world. From the "three revolutionary products" - ipod, phone and internet communicator - a new one was created and launched both audiovisually and in terms of blessing: "we are calling it iphone". If you look at the entire production, the closest connection between the latest technology and physical accessibility is unmistakable: via a "multi touch" function, the inventor promises "something wonderful in your hand". It becomes possible to "touch your music" and have the[18] "internet in your pocket". This physical handiness reaches its peak when the tip of the classic pen is broken off, so to speak. Almost ironically, inscription with a pen is rejected as archaic: "We don't need a stylus". In contrast, the finger is elevated to the "best pointing device in the world".

The smartphone is thus part of an ingenious and consistent line of development of digitisation processes since around the 1950s. What is new and thus of essential connection in its

---

[16] Jürgen Habermas describes the "revolutionary character of the new media" as follows: "Nothing changes in the content of press, radio and television programmes when they are received via smartphones. ... the changed reception and the regrettable emaciation of cinema have long been heralded by the competition of television. On the other hand, in addition to its evident benefits, the new technology also has highly ambivalent and potentially disruptive effects on the political public sphere on a national scale. This is due to the way in which the users of the new media make use of the provision of limitless linking possibilities, i.e. of 'platforms' for possible communications with any addressees. ", "Reflections and Hypotheses on a Renewed Structural Change of the Political Public Sphere" In: *A New Structural Change of the Public Sphere?* Sonderband Leviathan 37, ed. by Martin Seeliger and Sebastian Sevignani (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 486f.
[17] Cf. Oliver Ruf (ed.): *Smartphone-Ästhetik: Zur Philosophie und Gestaltung mobiler Medien* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018).
[18] *Steve Jobs iPhone 2007 Presentation*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vN4U5FqrOdQ, retrieved 28.1.2022.

consequences for the materiality of this artefact is the established technology and logic of a "user interface" as a combination of hardware and all conceivable software possibilities in one device. The telephone thus becomes a comprehensive or physical-holistic information, communication and storage medium that "functions similarly to a passenger car, the inner workings of which seem equally opaque as a *black box* [italics J-.F. S.] to the vast majority of drivers. "[19]

If one wants to make clear the revolutionary character of this technical innovation or the claim associated with it by its creators, it is worthwhile to briefly recur to the term "smart". What is meant here is first of all quite banal "smart". But of course the personal connotation is obvious here - because smart things are usually not material things, but persons! In this respect, the possibility of personal resonance is already inherent in this almost ingenious naming within the framework of this emotionally fuelled overall production.

One could therefore say: this materiality becomes smart only and only by becoming clear in its personal functionality, usefulness and - then also - indispensability.[20] From this holistic and also extremely simple accessibility, there was really no need for the inventors to advertise the significance of this thing any further or even to take sides apologetically. This artefact understood itself from the very beginning - as the digital baptism production and the spontaneous applause that kept breaking out show. At the same time, the bridge to everyday use by everyone was built as a matter of course.

3.   A permanent companion in everyday life - on the materiality of a thing of existential significance

3.1   Instructions for use

Everyday observations on the use of the smartphone can be made practically every day on ourselves and on others. In the truest sense of the word, everyone has their own usage behaviour in front of their eyes and ears. At the same time, every observation of public spaces opens up insights into the far-reaching culture of smartphone use - which, fascinatingly, now *functions* practically independently of educational and cultural background, milieu and even age.

At the same time, individual use fits into an impressive *big picture of* current usage figures - in other words: In the midst of this material culture of use and resonance, we are anything but

---

[19] Jan-Felix Schrape: *Digitale Transformation* (Bielefeld: transkript, 2021), 9.

[20] The fact that the very first public presentation in view of the product, which at that time was not at all fully developed, allegedly made the developers sweat in advance may be seen here as a kind of inventor's aetiology, which, by the way, may have tended to intensify the amazement and murmuring about the dignity of this almost religiously staged birth process with a kind of baptismal liturgy at the beginning. Incidentally, this first staging also incorporated a kind of salvation historiography, insofar as Steve Jobs explicitly set himself apart from the previous generation of mobile phones and nota bene from the competition in general in the first part of his speech and visualisation. Incidentally, however, it may be a coincidence that the presentation itself, at just over 51 minutes, corresponded quite exactly to the length of a "traditional" church service. Going even further, even the new connection of previously three separate devices to a new device presented here - which, by the way, is also impressively demonstrated pictorially - could almost be described as Trinitarian-charged - or in this case perhaps as a kind of digital "unio mystica".

alone: in 2020, 88% of all German citizens and a staggering 99% of all 14 to 2914-year-olds will be equipped with a smartphone.[21]

In its "24/7" availability and use, it represents a constant vademecum and, so to speak, an informational heart-lung machine. Incidentally, this availability also applies "vice versa": the corresponding providers access the smartphone unobserved every two minutes or so, determine locations, usage behaviour and content prioritisation and algorithmically perfect the determination of the respective user identity.[22] Paradoxically speaking: The providers of the software are considerably more active than the smartphone users themselves. What may appear to the individual user as "sacred", "intimate", "worth remembering" or "absolutely to be forgotten" has long since been regarded outside of him or herself and is registered, guarded and monitored, stored and used for completely different purposes. The fact that the providers know more about him than he himself suspects and perhaps still remembers and knows is, as is well known, no longer a vision of the future.

The - in the truest sense of the word - decisive pointer is that the smartphone differs in its properties and thus also possibilities of use from other technical objects of use and their use in a number of "respects". It is precisely this artefact that becomes a life-determining *thing in itself* through its interactive and resonant self-use in many senses. It may just be a coincidence that the term own-use is normally used for drug use - if it sounds peculiarly more innocuous when used for digital use, this may also give pause for thought.

3.2   Material connections and smudges

As a technical connection object, the smartphone is reasonably easy to describe, at least in terms of its hardware. The material outer shell and also the individual technical parts are no secret. There are around 60 different raw materials in the smartphone.[23] At the same time, it consists of a number of components, here above all the processor and the respective operating system, which in itself does not reveal everything that is available, effective and possible: through the linking of *hardware* and *software* with "*habitualised action routines*", certain socio-technical process contexts that are highly effective in society unfold from these three socio-technical core systems. [24]

In view of these co-evolutionary dynamics of technology and society, the smartphone literally contains the whole world. This refers not only to the precarious global relations of production, but also to the power of these socio-technical data production and use dynamics to shape society.[25]

Thus, we can assume a whole series of dynamic and inherently complex, tense modes of use and attributions that, depending on the performative use, come to light in one way or another - or, in the case of the algorithmic-mysterious, not at all. It is fair to say that this use reveals

---

[21] ARD/ZDF-Forschungskommission: ARD/ZDF-Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation 2020, https://www.ard-zdf-massenkommunikation.de/, accessed 3.2.2022.

[22] Cf. the Bavarian Radio documentary "Euphoria or hysteria: the possibilities of digitalisation", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06QeMSP7bPY, accessed 1.2.2022.

[23] A good quarter of the smartphone consists of a total of about 30 metals, such as copper, iron, tin and rare earth metals. Around one per cent of the total metals used are gold, silver, platinum, palladium, rare metals such as cobalt, gallium, iridium and tungsten, and rare earth metals such as neodymium.

[24] Cf.J. -F. Schrape, Digitale Transformation, 24f.

[25] Ibid. , 47.

primordial human practices of orientation towards oneself and the world. In this respect, the smartphone, even if it is lying down or one is walking with it, stands for far more than just what one thinks one sees and understands. Its *chargedness* and *resonance power is* not only proven by the amount of battery charge nor by the number of reception signal bars and arcs.

In this respect, the classic binary distinction between materiality and virtuality, sacred and profane, superficiality and profundity, substantiation and fetishisation[26], stability and ephemerality[27], soul or soullessness makes no sense with *regard to* the smartphone, if only because very different attributions occur in the eye of the observer as user and the user as observer. In the phenomenon of the smartphone, the boundaries between human and thing become blurred "because the typical modern separation between silent objects and intentionally acting subjects no longer works. "[28]

In a radical sense, the digital tabula on which one wipes back and forth nimbly is not simply matter, but even "conditionality of thought": said against a problematic dualism, the "conception of the mind as a writing tablet, a tabula ... does not exclude matter and even presents the mental as a result of the traces and changes of matter. " [29]

3.3 Liquefaction of the subject-object relation

Of course, it is true for all technical products that they can only fulfil their function at all through their more or less active use. Nevertheless, the smartphone is a special case of how this thing is made to speak in a tangible and interactive way. It thus does not acquire its actual meaning in the mode of a subject-object relationship, but through an interaction in which interaction and resonance are initiated and made possible, as it were, from both sides - that is, from the product as well as from the user.

The sense of its use thus does not lie in the fact that the smartphone *has a sense in* itself, but *makes* sense from the user's point of view - and incidentally also from the point of view of the technology corporation, although here the sense is completely different.[30] This sense of use lies in an intensive mixed dynamic of receiving and passing on, consuming and producing (hence the talk of "prosuming"), seeing and being seen, searching and experiencing discovery.

Thus, it is precisely not the *surface properties,* but quasi the *undersurface properties that* bring the raw material product to life in the first place. And this applies both to the undersurface of the smartphone itself, i.e. its "hidden software-related properties", and - metaphorically speaking - to the undersurface of the user. This is to say: only because there is an interacting human ego below the surface of the retina and thumb skin can interaction and resonance take place from two sides at all.

This thing is worn on the body, looked at, taken in the hand and - supposedly independently - put into constant use for its own life-relevant everyday accompaniment. From this original logic, movement is then introduced into this usage process. The smartphone can only generate reflexes and reactions through concrete signals, sounds and symbols because it appeals to

---

[26] Cf. the contribution by Silke Leonhard in the volume.

[27] Cf. the contribution by Jakob Kühn in this volume.

[28] Stefan Altmeyer: "Is that all? Die Dinge theologisch denken mit Bruno Latour", In *God, Gaia und eine neue Gesellschaft: Theologie anders denken mit Bruno Latour,* ed. by Daniel Bogner, Michael Schüßler and Christian Bauer (Bielefeld: transcript 2021), 33.

[29] Maurizio Ferraris: *The Soul - an iPad?* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2014), 59.

[30] See Shoshana Zuboff: *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for the future at the new frontier of power* (London: Profile Books, 2019).

something in people that goes beyond a pure stimulus-reaction mechanism. This interaction is "sensible" in that it appeals to people with almost all their senses at the same time: touch, hearing and sight - and in individual cases it might not be far to the senses of smell and taste - at least the corresponding reflexes are already being set within the framework of the technical possibilities, as experiments with the so-called "Ophone" show.[31]

3.4 Short-lived matter - long-lived content: Surface hardware and subsurface software

Paradoxically, the emotion of use does not depend on this *thing as an object* itself. As is well known, it can be exchanged at will because the decisive information can simply be transferred to a newer version by the corresponding software - or is stored on an external cloud anyway. The product itself is not distinctive, but technically standardised and, again, economically intended, programmatically short-lived. In this respect, it is not surprising that users do not usually give their smartphones a name, but at best wrap them in an "individual" cover. Accordingly, the type designation is no more than an expression for the respective current version. Unlike a car or a sailing ship, users seem to be very aware of the difference between the technical product and what is inside it. In this respect, a name would not be able to do justice to this specific mixture of materiality surface and identity subsurface.

The real long-lasting things thus take place in the background and in the invisible. For it is precisely through its technically enabled, individualised undersurface DNA that this thing quite smartly offers the material space for unmistakable content, such as its own app catalogue, individual user profiles - and this in close connection with the algorithms that are also programmatically invisible.

3.5 Dynamics of use: Pictorial emotion and resonance generation

The power of images and the power[32] of the image are unmistakably closely linked in the smartphone - the dramatic Bataclan example has already demonstrated this. Visibility is on a double level: on the one hand, it is the visibility of the matter of the technical thing itself, and on the other hand, the visibility with which certain contents are shown to us - perhaps even played and mirrored to us - and thus can themselves become a mirror of the soul.[33]

Technically speaking, icons are used to approach the respective content - in other words, the image at least acts as a certain visibility wall or a kind of visual gatekeeper in front of the text worlds that may be discovered behind it.

The hybrid connection between materiality and digital iconography can be examined more closely by referring to the concept of resonance - in the sense that resonance expresses and reveals a certain way and manifestation of man's relationship to the world and reality in its relationality.

In other words, the smartphone, in its own claim to wholeness, enables a range of primal human emotions, which in turn have to do with the specific materiality of the thing, the

---

[31] Cf. https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/webwelt/article137177999/Wenn-die-SMS-nach-Braten-duftet.html; https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/is-digital-smell-doomed, both retrieved 30.1.2022.
[32] Now, in an insightful and profound theological interpretation, Dietrich Korsch, "Rechnen und Verstehen. Beginnings to the Critique of Digital Reason." In *Unambiguity and Ambivalences: Theologie und Digitalisierungsdiskurs*, ed. by Ralph Charbonnier, Jörg Dierken and Malte Dominik Krüger (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 195-293, especially on the dialectic of images 246-264.
[33] Cf. M. Ferraris, *Soul*.

experiences of successful interaction and resonance, and the attributions of meaning that emanate from it:

First of all, the "sovereign" use already conveys the experience of *autonomy and self-efficacy* and thus generates a *positive resonance towards oneself.* Through creative personal use, this is combined with the experience of the smartphone as an *often primarily pictorial narrative medium, i.e.* it is used and experienced as a *medium of self-presentation, confession and often also intimate confession.*

Such an experience of performance makes the thing itself a *resonant thing that is meaningful and relevant to the life of the individual.* One could well say that in the positive case, the smartphone is experienced as an *emotional place of vivid awareness of unconditional and lasting affection.*[34]

Connected to this and going beyond it, the *touching use* - in the double sense of the word - is a holistic bodily phenomenon (of eye and thumb action) [35]that also releases a *productive and resonance-increasing dynamic from within itself. In* this way, nothing less than a *visualisation of one's own reality and power to create the world,* generated by the artefact itself, takes place.

This interaction with oneself is connected with the *interaction with the outside,* insofar as the smartphone in its material-spiritual meaning enables *contact and communication and* provides a kind of *fulfilment resonance of longing for connection.* The technical possibility of *pictorial vividness and being seen as a picture* further increases this *experience of resonance with the other.*

The emotional and identity-forming *experience of recognising and being recognised* - even if often only in the very mundane sense of a selfie-driven bella figura attention grab - is also an essential attractive moment of *resonant smartphone use to the outside world.*

In the truest sense, the signal-like sharing of personal desires opens up the dimension of *digital platforms* on which privacy and the public *sphere* enter into an almost *physical connection with* each other. In the individual, active and passive participation on such platforms, resonances can create a sense of connection and community through which the individual finds himself integrated and recognised.

Finally, the *permanent presence and availability of the artefact* enable a positive resonance of the user with the *artefact* itself. Through certain visual and acoustic triggers - such as Likes as signs or certain individualised message tones - permanent resonance generation takes place between the digital tabula and the individual sense of longing - and, incidentally, in the absence of signals, also violent feelings of lasting disappointment, up to and including physically manifest withdrawal experiences.

---

[34] For positive interaction experiences with digital technologies, the clear connection between basic needs for autonomy, competence and connectedness as well as positive emotions is pointed out from the psychological side, cf. for example the research work of Marc Hassenzahl (University of Siegen) or Jörn Hurtienne (University of Würzburg).

[35] Apparently, excessive smartphone use can even cause the so-called repetitive strain injury syndrome on the thumb because, anatomically, it is only designed to hold the other fingers against it, but not for fine motor typing on the smartphone surface!, cf. Lina Timm, Du böses Handy!, FAZ, 7.2.2014, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/stil/leib-seele/smartphones-und-gesundheitsschaeden-du-boeses-handy-12784725/wie-entsteht-das-12789052.html, accessed 11.11.2021.

H. Rosa describes this emotionally charged dynamic against the background of his characterisation of digital media as "axes of resonance": "Thus it is no wonder that we wince every time the smartphone vibrates in our pocket, for every incoming message represents a 'world call'. " At the same [36]time, he plausibly points to the low sustainability of these signals, which seem to shrink "inversely proportional to the growing amount of resonant signals" and accordingly [37]lead to "addictive, increase-oriented behaviour". In a certain respect, the smartphone in this respect also refers back to itself again and again as a thing that is available and thus shows, as it were, permanent *resonance referentiality.* [38]

So even if the smartphone unquestionably does not have its own consciousness - at least not yet! - has no consciousness of its own, it is nevertheless a *resonance container for the individual user's consciousness*. For this materiality can *generate or "scatter"* a kind of *consciousness resonance and release it from itself*. In this respect, the physical concept of radiation-related range generation should indeed make considerable sense for both the artefact and its attributions of meaning.

3.6   Everyday use as ritual sign-use

The interaction and resonance dynamics described can also be played out in terms of ritual theory. Because of its permanent presence or permanent availability, the smartphone has become a fixed ritual component of many users' own highly clocked sign and pointing practice. It is even possible that we are dealing with a much more intensively timed ritual practice, insofar as it has been proven that people look at or listen to their smartphones several hundred times a day. [39]

In this respect, this digitally induced permanent ritual consists of the punctual-permanent self-assurance of one's own contact possibilities - or even the assurance of still being alive. What may once have been the daily breviary is now taking on a new material form. In any case, increasingly insistent algorithm triggers open the door to ritualised permanent imprinting and indoctrination - and distancing oneself physically, emotionally and also socially is already a highly difficult undertaking for this reason. That is why it is essential to avoid interrupting the rite or making it impossible to participate in the ritual: The fact that this thing no longer has any energy is to be avoided at all costs - and the loss of the smartphone is demonstrably associated with tangible withdrawal symptoms.

3.7   The foreign gaze

"It" - that is, the artefact itself - as a represented and representing "I" naturally also wants to be fed. In this respect, it is a highly voracious thing that can mercilessly devour the user with regard to his or her attention resources. In the sense of black technology pedagogy, one could say: those who do not follow are deprived of resonance, those who look in the wrong direction are threatened with alienation. Corresponding threats of exclusion and addictive

---

[36] Hartmut Rosa, Resonance: A Sociology of the World Relationship (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 159.

[37] Ibid. , 159.

[38] This ties in with the threefold proximities of the forms of digitality, namely "referentiality", "algorithmicity" and "communality", cf. F. Stalder, Kultur der Digitalität, 96-128.

[39] A thought-provoking criteriological provision for the distinction between classical-community and digital rituals is: "Communication without community can be accelerated because it is additive. Rituals, on the other hand, are *narrative* [italics here and following B.-C. H.] processes that do not allow for acceleration. Symbols *stand still*. Information, on the other hand, does not. They *are* by circulating. *Silence* only means a standstill of communication. It produces nothing. ", Byung-Chul Han, *Vom Verschwinden der Rituale: Eine Topologie der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Ullstein, ⁴2019), 22.

phenomena are not to be doubted even beyond their popular and all too catchy dramatisation. [40]

From the point of view of resonance theory, it is of course just as worthy of consideration as it is worrying that a "smartphone-fixated *culture of lowered gaze* [italics, H.R.], which also replaces eye contact with screen relationships in social space, harbours a potential for alienation per se".[41] It should be added here that these alienation dynamics do not only have an effect on the view - or lack of view - of the outside world and world relations as a *loss of the world,* but also on the individual person and their self-relationship as a *loss of the self.*[42]

The fact that the development and now also the steady further expansion of smartphone technologies is already linked to tangible commercial and not least military interests cannot be emphasised often and clearly enough. In deliberate analogy-making across the ages, there is talk in ideology-critical terms of digital "recording, [total] mobilisation and standardisation" as the "soldier face[s] of the internet"[43]. In this respect, the holistic and tangible logic of use of the smartphone always puts the far-reaching and tangible critique in its rightful place.

4.   Theological reflections

At the beginning, it was asked why one should concern oneself practically-theologically with the performance and resonance of this "smart" thing. It is rightly stated: "Digital culture is productive of religion and challenges theological criteriologies. "[44]After what has been said so far, it should be noted that the fundamental goal of theological engagement with digital dynamics cannot be to cleanly separate the human from the non-human in the sense of a "cleansing work of modernity".[45] In any case, ideological positionalisations between "analogue" and "digital" from the theological side or even presumptions of ultimate interpretations of meaning are to be avoided.[46]

Thus, the characterisation of the smartphone, its surface-subsurface logic and the life-relevant interaction and resonance dynamics emanating from it immediately suggest a more differentiated theological reflection.

The fact that the emotional experiences generated here interactively and resonantly by the so to speak "profane artefact" differ rather little from the orientation functions of explicitly religious artefacts should at least be expressed in the form of a thesis.[47] With all caution against too quick and flat analogies: In a certain sense, these logics of use can be interpreted

---

[40] Cf. for example Manfred Spitzer: *Die Smartphone-Epidemie: Gefahren für Gesundheit, Bildung und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2019).
[41] H. Rosa, Resonance, 311f.
[42] Cf. ibid. , 716.
[43] M. Ferraris, Soul, 85.
[44] Michael Schüßler, "Latour's Hybrid Creation: Transformations of a Theology of Digitality", In *God, Gaia and a New Society: Thinking Theology Differently with Bruno Latour,* ed. by Daniel Bogner, Michael Schüßler and Christian Bauer (Bielefeld: transcript 2021), 172.
[45] Cf. ibid, 178.
[46] Cf. R. Charbonnier, J. Dierken and M. Dominik Krüger, Unambiguity and Ambivalences.
[47] Basically, once again on the "incidental meaning" of some things, which is assumed in this article - even if it is not small, inconspicuous and forgotten - also for the smartphone: "In that these things are deeply embedded in everyday life and their meaning often only appears implicitly, they can express the intertwining of religion and everyday life through subjective or objective processes more than other objects", H.P. Hahn, Materialität24.,

as a kind of self-produced revelatory experience in the mirror of one's own productive existential questions.

To take up again the basic idea of performative resonance generation: One should not regard this technical medium as god-like, but it obviously fulfils certain emotional functions that can perhaps be interpreted as facets of what necessarily concerns one. The fact that this puts the understanding of revelation and experience to the test in the first place should at least be hinted at here.

One could even go further and ask whether we are really "only" dealing with a technical machine here, if we can apparently trust it "day and night" due to its visible presence. In any case, these performance, interaction and resonance dynamics represent something like a present absence, omnipresence, omniscience in the sense of god-like ubiquity. Incidentally, this is not only a *theological* interpretation possibility. Rather, such a determination is also quite intentional on the part of the creators, which makes the necessity of a serious theological interpretation all the more essential.

In fact, this raises the question of the theological interpretation of the claimed creative power of the developers and their interest in ubiquitous positioning strategy. It is no longer a secret that the leading technology companies and their protagonists have long since stepped into the role of alternative new religions and religion founders themselves. Perhaps they are not doing so in the sense of consciously wanting to enter into the traditional role of divine instances of creation. But it is obvious that from the technological side, the hopes for a manifest experience of God are made materially tangible in their own way, or a kind of available space of reliability is made available through these technical possibilities. From here, concrete practical-theological groundings and spaces of possibility can be pointed out, at least exemplarily, for the area of challenges in the didactics of religion.[48]

5. Follow-up considerations in the didactics of religion

Should and can we even sensitise people to this significance and the use of this technical artefact in educational processes, or is this not an encroachment in the sense of colonising young people's lives? If religious education in a culture of digitality has the claim to critical media and self-education, the answer is fairly clear. Digital forms of communication are unquestionably legitimate forms of individual expression and communication of faith.[49] For further didactic concretisation, it is worth remembering the distinction between ethical

---

[48] The author refrains from the extremely delightful attempt to spell out the use of the smartphone as a possibility of the worship-liturgical event. The possibilities of generating resonance beyond previous boundaries are actually sensational for all church proclamation practice. But then, in view of the pandemically conditioned transformations of worship practice, one would have to ask, for example, how the already highly controversial digital Lord's Supper would be presented if one imagined its liturgical performance via smartphone and the corresponding intersection of the most diverse dimensions of materiality. What would happen, for example, if one were to carry the communion staging digitally in one's pocket, so to speak, for free use? It would depend on the attempt to participate in a digital communion with all the necessary utensils via smartphone in a crowded suburban train or even to stage it. Would the other passengers then become the worshipping community through the audible and visible performance of the liturgical act - and what would be the material effect - even without an explicit invitation to participate?

[49] Cf. Ilona Nord: *Realitäten des Glaubens: Zur virtuellen Dimension christlicher Religiosität* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008); cf. in a religious education perspective Thomas Schlag and Ilona Nord, "Religion, digitale", In WiReLex 2021, https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/fileadmin/buh_bibelmodul/media/wirelex/pdf/Religion_digitale__2021-02-03_12_26.pdf, accessed 5.1.2022.

learning *with digital media* and ethical learning *about* digital media or, in principle, *about digitalisation processes as a whole,* as well as ethical learning in *a post-digital era.*[50]

But then it is also clear that a truly subject-oriented and existentially life-relevant education cannot dwell on the acquisition of competences regarding the use of digital media. At the same time, the above-mentioned diversity and material-spiritual ambivalence of the smartphone as an expression of digital lifeworlds must really be brought up in the concrete case.

Analytical approaches to smartphone use that attempt to capture the ambivalent dynamics, uses and effects of digital transformation in pairs of terms such as "enabling and channelling", "flexibilisation and control", "opening and closing" and "decentralisation and centralisation" are helpful for this.[51]

Against the backdrop of the religious or theologically interpretable "meaning dimension" of the smartphone, it is important to be careful with a kind of general criticism that it *will definitely* make people dependent per se - but at the same time not to exclude that it *could* of course do so. Because this artefact is not an object in the external sense, such a critique would be tantamount to the accusation that one should not be dependent on oneself, which would logically be absurd.

In this respect, what Thomas Klie "once" said with regard to the promises of advertising culture and the coming Telekom videophone (!!!) still applies.): "In order to develop religious interpretive competence and assurance, what is needed today is a didactics of religion in which religion becomes thematic primarily in relation to the attribution of identity that takes place through it" - and materially he himself offers a closer definition of this realisation when he continues: "The Protestant religion confesses this attribution of identity in its belief in the promise of the gratuitous acceptance of God's redemption (Rom 4,5).[52] Interestingly, this is unfolded by him against the background of the thesis that religion in "resonances ... acquires a perceptible and communicable form and can thus be opened up and discovered itself." [53]

From such a profiled, promising theme of ambivalence, individual phenomena can be made more closely the subject of media criticism and intention: This includes the sensitisation for emerging identity possibilities *and* constraints[54], for gaining freedom *and* incapacitation intentions, productive attention generation *and* superficial attention attraction. In addition, it must be addressed that an increase in options and range "felt" through the smartphone, if it appears as an absolutised "attitude of being in control", could ultimately undermine the possibility of "making things talk" at all. " [55]

---

[50] Cf. Ilona Nord: "Ethisches Lernen im digitalisierten Raum", In *Handbuch ethische Bildung: Religionspädagogische Fokussierungen*, ed. by Konstantin Lindner and Mirjam Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 354-360; surprisingly, this media-critical perspective or even the sensitisation for the meaning and use of the smartphone is only mentioned very marginally in the most recent, otherwise elaborate didactic reflections on the topic - apart from some rather general remarks (29-32); cf. Andrea Dietzsch and Stefanie Pfister: *Digitaler Religionsunterricht: Fachdidaktische Perspektiven und Impulse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021).

[51] Cf.J. -F. Schrape, Digitale Transformation, summarising 202-205.

[52] Thomas Klie: "'You will see'. Eine didaktische Miszelle zum Berufsschul-Religionsunterricht", In *Spiegelflächen: Phänomenologie - Religionspädagogik - Werbung,* ed. by dems. (Münster et al.: Lit, 1999), 244.

[53] Ibid., 247f.

[54] Cf. Tanja Gojny, Kathrin S. Kürzinger and Susanne Schwarz (eds.), *Selfie - I like it: Anthropological and ethical implications of digital self-staging* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016).

[55] H. Rosa, Resonance, 430.

And to follow up on the Bataclan example chosen at the beginning: It could well be that precisely these forms of global-universal real-time communication promote the formation of empathy and solidarity in a new way: "Social media ... offers the possibility not just of information about, but of a relationship with, those distant to us. Digital media has the potential, at least, to create new kinds of communities separated by huge distances. Thus, its mediation of distant suffering is perhaps qualitatively different from what has gone before."[56]

Ultimately, this is about enlightenment-oriented religious education in general.[57] In this respect, the following insight is helpful for a meaningful theological-religious-didactic approach: "Man is neither completely at the mercy of nature and the technologies he has created (as the very other), nor is he conversely endowed with those abilities which the Christian tradition attributes to God. "Incidentally, [58]it seems as astonishing as it is hopeful that one finds this sensitivity for a "different" theological description of reality not least among some digital experts themselves:[59] The central questions raised from there, "What does a humane future look like? " and "What does a humane future look like? " and "How can we support those working to catalyse change? " as well [60]as the constructive reflections associated with them are in this respect also a considerable inspirational source for theological reflection work.

Such a critical-theological consideration of material-spiritual hybridity remains a risky border crossing in the context of religious education processes, which is always connected with new considerations and should in any case neither clearly side with technology euphoria nor with technology condemnation. But it is precisely then - not least in the context of media-ethical reflection[61] - that the critical theologically induced question arises as to what actually constitutes a human being as a relational being in the midst of the possibilities of media performance.

If a technically generated thing sets all the essential senses in motion, does the "real" counterpart made flesh still need it at all? Or are we technically induced and driven enough ourselves at some point? The possibility of VR glasses and the vision of the metaverse suggest that we will soon have our very own spaces of possibility at our disposal. But then the question arises all the more as to how theologically a reality of creation and a vision of present and future reality can be described that does not reduce human beings to data

---

[56] Jolyon Mitchell and Joshua Rey, "Religion, Evolving Media, and Distant Suffering". In *Religion: Material Religion,* ed. by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2016), 164.

[57] Cf. Kirchenamt der EKD (ed.): *Evangelischer Religionsunterricht in der digitalen Welt: Ein Orientierungsrahmen* (Hannover: Gütersloher Verlag, 2022).

[58] Schüßler, Latour's hybrid creation, 183.

[59] Luc Cachelin: *Internetgott: Die Religion des Silicon Valley* (Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2017) and in novel form Willemijn Dicke and Dirk Helbing: *iGod* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

[60] For example, the activities of the Center for Humane Technology (CHT), which has raised the questions listed here, are extremely inspiring here, especially since its commitment also refers to the "state of the art" in technological terms, cf. https://www.humanetech.com/, retrieved on 12.1.2022; from the abundance of digitally competent reflections, reference is made here only to Dirk Helbing (Ed.): *Towards Digital Enlightenment: Essays on the Dark and Light Sides of the Digital Revolution* (Cham: Springer, 2019) as well as, with reference to the democratic challenges, the so-called Digital Manifesto, also co-authored by the latter, https://www.allmytraveltips.ch/?tag=digitales-manifest-der-neun-wissenschaftler-dirk-helbing, accessed 11.2.2202; for further classification, cf. Carsten Könneker (ed.): *Unsere digitale Zukunft: In welcher Welt wollen wir leben?* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2017) and Adrienne Fichter (ed.): *Smartphone-Demokratie: #fakenews #facebook #bots #populismus #weibo #civictech* (Zurich: NZZ libro 2017).

[61] Cf. Susanna Endres and Alexander Filipović: "Medienethik". In *Handbuch ethische Bildung: Religionspädagogische Fokussierungen*, ed. by Konstantin Lindner and Mirjam Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 166-173.

information or allow them to be absorbed into data traces "at the end of time". On the other hand, the insight that a VR reality can only seem so real so far because we have had real experiences beforehand gives us hope.[62] If, on the other hand, this existentially significant distinction between bodily human and virtually generated experiences is programmatically blurred, the free, responsible use of digital artefacts will probably finally come to an end.[63]

Conclusion: Where is the journey heading?

At the very end, a heretical question should be raised: Has this article been about the smartphone as a technical thing and above all as a resonance-enabling thing? Or have we not actually been talking pars pro toto about something else, something much more far-reaching?

Yes and no: Obviously, the smartphone currently has its very own time and dignity. As an artefact that is obvious for religious interpretations, it fascinates and radiates its own significance. At the same time, it may have already become obsolete faster than we think. The latest version of what we currently use may soon give way to an already quite real vision and lead to the still material object dissolving into its individual components. The shift of the material outer thing into the bodily inner world is foreseeably possible. It then [64]seems that it will soon no longer be easy to distinguish between "body spaces" and "space bodies". Intermediate stages to a completely incorporeal form of media linkage are already literally in sight with "google smart glasses". The vision of nanoparticles in the body that hold and produce information has long been technically possible. And with the "metaverse", a material thing shell is promised in which physicality and consciousness merge. Then the smartphone will possibly give up its ghost at some point and technical and physical materiality will combine to form a new state of aggregation, the consequences of which are as yet quite unforeseeable.

In the end, will we ourselves possibly become the physical surface of a sub-surface that is productive within us - and if so, where will we be *with ourselves*? Whether this will then make sense and what will then happen to the human being is not foreseeable for the time being. In a *worst-case scenario,* the vision of a *technically inscribed and incorporated thing* would give credence to the Pauline words "We now see through a mirror in a dark image; but then face to face. Now I know in bits and pieces, but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12) would have a terribly smart new meaning.

---

[62] The most impressive example is the case of the South Korean mother who meets her deceased daughter in a holographic VR figure and obviously experiences grief,pain, but also happiness in the most intense way, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0p8HZVCZSkc, accessed 2.2.2022.

[63] Thomas Klie's developments on body-spaces and his understanding of religion as a body-spatial event as well as his characterisation of religious education as a play space that is "constituted by performative acts of interpretation" could be made productive in order to take a closer and critical look at the foreseeable technical artefacts that are becoming reality from a theological anthropology, see Thomas Klie: "Geräumigkeit und Lehrkunst. Raum als religionsdidaktische Kategorie". In *Schauplatz Religion: Grundzüge einer Performativen Religionspädagogik*, ed. by Silke Leonhard and dems. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 192-208.

[64] Thomas Klie and Silke Leonhard, "Performative Religionspädagogik. Religion leiblich und räumlich in Szene setzen", Schauplatz Religion, 17.