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Introducing
The Digital Ego Project

Tom Chatfield & Dan Nixon

Perspectiva is a registered charity operating as a collective of scholars, artists, activists, futurists and seekers who believe credible hope for humanity's future lies in forms of economic restraint and political cooperation that are beyond prevailing epistemic capacities and spiritual sensibilities. We work to develop an applied philosophy of education for individual and collective realisation in the service of averting societal collapse; and to cultivate the imaginative and emotional capacity required to usher in a world that is, at the very least, technologically wise and ecologically sound.

You can find more about Perspectiva at:

[*systems-souls-society.com*](http://systems-souls-society.com)

Dr. Tom Chatfield

Dr. Tom Chatfield is a British author, educator and philosopher of technology. He has authored ten non-fiction books exploring digital culture - most recently: *Critical Thinking* and *Live This Book!*. He is also a guest faculty member at the Saïd Business School, Oxford, for its executive leadership program, a former associate at the Oxford Internet Institute, and a guest lecturer and educational advisor at institutions across Europe and the US. His debut novel, *This Is Gomorrah* (Hodder), was published worldwide in 2019, and was a Sunday Times thriller of the month, shortlisted for the CWA Thriller of the Year, and won the France's Prix Douglas Kennedy for the year's best foreign thriller.

Dan Nixon

Dan Nixon is a writer and researcher specialising in themes around attention, environmental philosophy and digital culture. He has led projects in these areas for several NGOs, including Perspectiva's work on the attention economy and The Mindfulness Initiative's paper on developing agency in urgent times. Previously, he spent a decade at the Bank of England, where his essays on 'mindful economics' and the 'crisis of attention' were widely picked up by the mainstream media. Dan is an experienced mindfulness teacher and holds graduate degrees in Economics (University of Cambridge), Global Studies (Sophia University) and Philosophy (University of Wales Trinity Saint David), in the latter case receiving the highest grade awarded in the history of the programme.

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What does it mean to grow and flourish, together, in a digital age?

The Digital Ego Project is a *Perspectiva* initiative which seeks to speak at a systematic level to technology's mediation of modern life, asking what narratives and frames can connect personal experience to the global picture; can find virtue in the virtual realm; and can place a properly understood sense of self and soul at the heart of our mediated lives.

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Overview

The Digital Ego project is concerned with what it means to be free, to grow and to flourish in the digital age. Our starting point is an open-ended belief in humans' potential for individual and collective growth and self-understanding. Through the lens of the ego, we ask what it means to align technology with this freedom and flourishing; to map virtue onto the virtual aspects of our lives; and to speak more richly and meaningfully about our lived experiences of technology.

Freud saw the ego as the mediating aspect of the mind: one that tried to reconcile animal instincts with moral conscience. But its connotations extend far beyond the psychoanalytical tradition, and our account draws on a variety of psychological, spiritual and ethical accounts of the mind's assimilation of the world, and our sense of who we are, in its discussion of the 21st century context.

Central to this undertaking is the problem of getting “stuck” – psychologically, socially, spiritually – in the context of in our digitally-mediated lives.

The technologist Jaron Lanier alludes to this “stuckness” in his discussion of the feedback loops present in so many online environments:

The algorithm is trying to capture the perfect parameters for manipulating a brain, while the brain, in order to seek out deeper meaning, is changing in response to the algorithm’s experiments.... As the algorithm tries to escape a rut, the human mind becomes stuck in one.

Against this paradigm of behavioural manipulation, which has formed the template both for countless business models and apparatuses of state surveillance, the Digital Ego project asks: what are the conditions that can help us to escape such ruts, both in our day-to-day habits and over the course of life-long learning? How can we become “unstuck” as individuals and collectively—and what does it mean for our societies to permit and protect such growth?

Our inquiry focuses on three particular sets of problems, corresponding to the three domains – Systems, Souls and Society – of Perspectiva’s mission. These areas are:

- 1. The problems of self-fragmentation and self-objectification (souls)*
- 2. The problems of tribalism and polarisation (society)*
- 3. The problems of reducing lived experience to data (systems)*

Why is such change needed, and why is it urgent? At a time when global challenges of unprecedented complexity demand transformative change, it is a painful paradox of technologies’ power and ubiquity that they are too often obstacles rather than impetuses to such change; and that many of the assumptions about human nature embedded in them are, at best, unexamined, and at worst actively inimical to adaptation and self-knowledge.

Importantly, the roots of these problem lie not so much in technologies themselves as in the larger systems and assumptions they automate and embody. For instance, the political economy of what Shoshana Zuboff has labelled “surveillance capitalism” is rooted in behavioural manipulation: in business models centred around reconceiving personal and social experiences as artefacts to be optimised towards ever-greater utility and “connectivity”.

Beneath the rhetoric of connection and empowerment, however, there too often lies a narrow, static view of what it means to be human, and a structural logic ripe for manipulation by authoritarian regimes and bad actors.

The following sections set out the project in detail, beginning with an exploration of what it means to be “stuck”, before considering how this can be redressed by inquiring into our basic relationship with technology and what “virtues for the virtual” might look like in practice. Finally, we consider the need to reimagine the nature of our online environment across various domains – systems, souls and society – in order to meet our aspirations for human growth and thriving in a digital age.

1. The problem of getting stuck

In psychoanalytic traditions, the ego plays the role of the mediator between different drives. In various branches of Indian philosophy and contemporary cognitive science, the ego constitutes our view of who we are: the set of qualities and beliefs we might each put forward in response to the question, “who am I?”. On this account, the more tightly we hold to any such view of ourselves, the stronger the egoic charge. Meanwhile, in everyday speech, accusations of egotism suggest a disproportionately inflated view of one’s own importance—and a corresponding lack of insight.

A common thread across these approaches, and the starting point for our investigation, is the idea that becoming “stuck” is deeply problematic for us individually and collectively. On a personal level, it is associated with an excessive level of attachment to a rigidly held self-image. Interpersonally, it speaks to the adoption of an “Us vs Them” mindset that overrides everything else – and to the lack of empathy, compassion and genuinely open engagement that follows from this. Societally, it speaks to a dearth of fundamental debate around common causes, and to a collective failure to contemplate new ways of engaging with the great challenges of our age.

In talking about the “digital ego”, we have in mind not so much a thing-in-itself as what Robert Kegan calls a “zone of mediation” between us and the enveloping context of our 21st century technologies. We therefore use the ego primarily as a lens through which to look at several deep-rooted, interconnected problems of our digitally-intermediated lives (individually and collectively) rather than as an object of analysis in itself. Similarly, we loosely refer in what follows to the “digital arena” and “digital sphere” of our lives; but in doing so we mean not a domain that is separate from our otherwise “analogue” lives, but rather to the enveloping context of contemporary technology. For all intents and purposes, there is no longer any such thing as a personal or collective identity that isn’t touched on or mediated in some way by the information systems surrounding us.

We contend that this digital context brings new opportunities but also novel and fundamental challenges to our freedom: that, in particular, it has the potential to amplify our “stuckness” from the perspective of the ego and our mental habits.

We contend that this digital context brings new opportunities but also novel and fundamental challenges to our freedom: that, in particular, it has the potential to amplify our “stuckness” from the perspective of the ego and our mental habits. We argue that this owes not to an inherent feature of our technologies as to the contingent systems which surround them, which embody a particular vision of power, profit and humanity. In particular, we note the now-familiar narrative of how, over the last two decades, we have arrived at a point where a handful of corporations have the power to shape what news we read, what opinions we see, and what character traits are selected for in our online activities; and where the resulting system is dominated by platforms for whom advertisers are the paying customers who count—and users (as represented by patterns of data) are the product.

As Zuboff and others have noted, this makes the relationship of platform-to-user inherently manipulative. These companies’ business models rely on the user producing as much “behavioural surplus” – clicking, and then buying (products) or buying into (ideas) – as possible. Furthermore, the set-up of the digital arena allows authoritarian governments and covert manipulators to deploy similar models of monitoring and control as those used by market actors to influence the beliefs and actions of their own citizens and, increasingly, those of other nations. Where can the digital ego lens offer fresh and original insights?

First, let us expand upon the three key problem identified in the overview, and their correspondence to Perspectiva's domains of interest:

Many digital environments promote scattered attention, mindless browsing and states of disembodiment, while encouraging us to perceive others in "bits and pieces".

(a) The problems of self-fragmentation and self-objectification (souls)

Many digital environments promote scattered attention, mindless browsing and states of disembodiment, while encouraging us to perceive others in "bits and pieces", to quote Sherry Turkle. At the same time, these platforms encourage the shaping of identity into a public object in ways that promote superficiality and performativity. Against this, we believe there is an urgent ethical and pragmatic case for habits, practices and technologies that support our freedom to flourish and grow, and which create the space for a fuller and more integrated sense of self: one more able to tolerate paradox and complexity, to forget and forgive, and to be structurally permitted to do so by the tools at its disposal.

(b) The problems of tribalism and the polarisation of views (society)

As Zeynep Tufekci and others have noted, the reinforcement of fixed positions and the promotion of extreme views in our digital spaces is an immense challenge, fuelled by structural factors that work against uncertainty, nuance and context. Rapid, highly emotive reactions are privileged by information environments geared towards polarisation, groupthink, and zero-sum interactions. Against this, we make the case for richer, slower and more humane interactions that encourage a plurality of views, geared around common values and causes, with deeper respect for what it means to connect and to build community. In turn, this requires information systems that are able to support such interactions instead of ones which merely weaponise "triggering" content; something that, in turn, demands new norms and infrastructures of design, regulation and accountability.

(c) The problems of reducing lived experience to data (systems)

What are the richer accounts of our humanity that we need to place at the centre of our discussions?

Among the digital age's most urgent challenges are those of misinformation, manipulation and information overload, which threaten both the foundations of a well-functioning democracy and the very possibility of meaningful decision-making and self-understanding. Clearly, societies need to respond with bold measures around education, citizenship and legislation. At a deeper level, however, there is also a need to challenge the picture of humanity often assumed in digital settings; a fundamentally instrumental, behavioural and deterministic picture of humans and their relationships, in which lived experience is reduced to data that is constantly monitored, modelled and influenced by powerful systems.

Each of the above sets of problems highlight a human-technological context that incentivises and reinforces stasis and rigidity in some form. As the third problem in particular suggests, this is aligned with a worldview in which problems are above all solved by optimisation while moral and rational debates are outsourced to systems via nudges and default settings (as the philosophers Brett Fischmann and Evan Selinger explore in *Re-Engineering Humanity*).

Amidst the forces of distractions and aimlessness that often drive the attention economy, it is only too easy to become stuck in a digital "hall of mirrors", to borrow a phrase from Iain McGilchrist, in which we fixate upon decontextualised fragments of information and opinions, rather than inhabiting shared experiences and finding ways to relate richly to others. What are the richer accounts of our humanity that we need to place at the centre of our discussions? In which areas does human growth demand a reconfiguration (or selective withdrawal) of our current uses of technology? The answer, we suggest, is rooted in a rigorous ethical account that privileges the potentials and plurality of virtuous, self-authored human actions. Here is Jaron Lanier again:

When we're all seeing different, private worlds, then our cues to one another become meaningless.... Not only is your worldview distorted, but you have less awareness of other people's worldviews. You are banished from the experiences of the other groups being manipulated separately. Their experiences are as opaque to you as the algorithms driving your experiences. This is an epochal

Thus throughout the project, we will ask: which technological environments – and the underlying causes and conditions beneath them – lead us to get “stuck”? Which, by contrast, are supportive of growth and flourishing? We believe the richest answers to these questions—and thus the meta-ethical underpinnings of this project—are to be found not so much in deontology or utilitarianism as virtue ethics, enriched by a phenomenological attentiveness to our lived and felt experience.

2. The process of getting ‘unstuck’

Solutions to the problem of getting “stuck” vary by tradition: whether it’s seeking to dissolve, quieten or transform the ego, for example, or to focus on transforming one’s relationships with others. What is crucial, though, and common across many traditions, is an emphasis on overcoming the basic rigidity of those selves whose experiences and ways of seeing the world underpin every subsequent layer of thought, expression and interaction with others.

To take one example, the psychoanalyst George E. Valliant, approaching this problem within a cognitive developmental framework, writes that:

*The capacity to sustain paradox is a hallmark of ego maturation...
to mature beyond formal operations we must be able to entertain
two competing viewpoints at once.*

This verdict echoes the emphasis placed in Zen Buddhism – albeit from quite a different angle – on escaping from the mind’s tendency to get “hooked” on rigid thought patterns. In this tradition, the Zen writer David Loy suggests, the enlightened mind is characterised by a state of awareness that is fully liberated from such fixations.

How, then, might we look to get “unstuck” in the context of our digitally-mediated lives? To begin with, we need to push back against unexamined assumptions of “inevitability” around the trajectories of current technologies.

For instance, our notion of speed has changed with the invention and widespread adoption of new technologies over the ages, bringing with it a disingenuous rhetoric of “inevitable” acceleration that is in fact open to fundamental dispute.

The philosopher James Williams highlights this in his work, noting that, whereas new forms of media historically took years, if not generations, to be adopted, new technologies today can rapidly scale to millions of users in the course of months or even days. This constant stream of new products can result in users being thrown into a constant state of learning and adaptation: familiar enough with their technologies to operate them, “but never so fully in control that they can prevent the technologies from operating on them in unexpected or undesirable ways.” If this is true, a discerning assessment calls on us to challenge the logic of constant “upgrading”—and to give greater weight to the “degrading” of control and comprehension that may be associated with it.

More centrally, at the heart of our approach to getting unstuck is the question of what constitutes the relationship between “humans” and “technology”. Following the philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek, we suggest the need to heed the “moral charge” of our technological artefacts; to see humans as technological beings and technologies as social entities – that is, entities that play a constitutive role in our daily lives, helping us to shape our actions and experiences, and inform our moral decisions. As the philosopher LM Sacasas puts it:

Do artefacts have ethics?” I would argue that they do, indeed. The question is not whether technology has a moral dimension, the question is whether we recognise it or not. In fact, technology’s moral dimension is inescapable, layered, and multi-faceted.

This approach can be best appreciated within the context of life-long learning and development, one in which we seek ways to support our ability to grow and change, not for change’s sake, but in response to the evolving needs of the societal, political and ecological context that we find ourselves in (while factoring in what Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey call our in-built “immunity to change”).

Central to the project, then, is an inquiry into which “virtuous” principles can help us navigate the “virtual” era we find ourselves in. We will do this through engagement with, among others, leading ethical thinkers, spiritual teachers, technologists, cognitive and developmental psychologists and civic organisations. In particular, we will bring together individuals whose professional work is aligned with the aims of the project into a collective movement, and work to synthesise and integrate the best conceptual and practical ideas across the multi-faceted set of issues we are focussed on. Besides thought leadership, we will produce practical, easy-to-use resources for public dissemination around what form the enduringly virtuous takes amidst the setting of the virtual. Along these lines, Sacasas sets out several interrelated lines of inquiry for us to consider, including:

Central to the project is an inquiry into which “virtuous” principles can help us navigate the “virtual” era we find ourselves in.

What sort of person will the use of this technology make of me? What habits will the use of this technology instil? How will the use of this technology affect my experience of time [and] place? How will the use of this technology affect how I relate to other people [and] the world around me? What practices will the use of this technology cultivate? ... Can I be held responsible for the actions which this technology empowers? Would I feel better if I couldn't?

This list speaks to the need for an ongoing vigilance as to what we are cultivating, online and offline. It also suggests an open-ended spirit of questioning towards our lived, shared experience in the digital sphere as a foundational principle for our “virtues for the virtual”.

Other qualities that will be essential to meeting the problems of the digital arena listed in Section One include: emphasising those capacities that support considered, open-minded, ethically-reflective engagement; those capacities that permit an attendance to our deep aspirations for growth and connection; and those social capacities lacking (and actively selected against) in many online environments, such as care, attentiveness, kindness, humility and forgiveness. Drawing insight from the *Oxford Handbook of Hypoegoic Phenomena* and other sources, the Appendix outlines some of these capacities, together with practices that might help us to cultivate them and thereby to “quieten” the ego.

One particular “virtue for the virtual” worth mentioning is the ability to let go as a means of overcoming the “I’m right, you’re wrong” mindset that is so prevalent in online spaces and a driver of polarisation. Instead, an attitude we might look to cultivate, suggests the Buddhist scholar Ajahn Amaro, is that of “not holding to fixed views”, as it’s put in the Metta Sutta. This means letting go, not clinging, not grasping, not getting attached. Amaro concludes:

It’s not just a matter of what we do, but the way that we do it. It’s not just the opinion we have or the way we see things, but how we express them that makes the difference.

A key area of inquiry for the project will therefore be around finding ways to encourage us all—individually and collectively—to reflect not just on what views we have but on how we hold them. Are they fixed? Do we hold them tightly or loosely? What sense of purpose underpins how we hold and express our views? How might we better put ourselves in the shoes of our interlocutors, as far as we’re able to, as a starting point for our interaction with them? How do the answers to these questions vary across different (existing/possible) online platforms?

Of course, how we adopt new technologies and further adapt to existing technologies will be central to all such efforts. To give one example, Carl Miller notes the digital reforms which Audrey Tang has led in Taiwan. These have included the use of platforms that are designed to generate consensus across different stakeholders involved in the formulation of new policies: all involved are invited to draft statements, but the ones that receive greatest visibility are those that garner support from both sides. As a result, he writes, greater nuance is a feature of the most visible posts, which clearly contrasts to how many social platforms operate.

3. Reimagining the digital arena

Finding ways to cultivate particular human qualities, and specific forms of tech development and usage, can go some way to meeting the problems of the digital arena.

But there are also several structural factors at play which make the problems around getting “stuck” deeply entrenched. Many of the problems we are concerned with will be impossible to resolve without engaging at this structural level. We highlight, below, three sets of issues in particular.

What would a reimagined digital realm look like, in which deep and rewarding forms of human connection are genuinely promoted?

(a) Reimagining the form of the personal domain

The first set of issues relates to the level at which the forces of the attention economy operate. It is not only that personalised, targeted algorithms steer us to consume particular media content, hold particular views and buy particular products – that is, mass persuasion. In addition, the digital attention economy can systematically prevent us from “wanting what we want to want” in the first place, as Harry Frankfurt puts it. Similarly, James Williams talks about distractions at the “epistemic” level: beyond getting distracted away from the pursuit of our goals, he argues, we are hindered in our capacities to even set our own goals. For this reason, he calls the liberation of human attention the defining moral and political struggle of our time.

Understanding what is going on here requires us to see human attention as much more than a mere resource, and to engage with the question of what we “want” by adopting a critical stance towards narratives of our online lives that are built around reductive, behavioural models, or those which pursue efficiency as an end in itself.

(b) Reimagining “connection” in the interpersonal and ecological domains

The second set of issues concerns what we mean by connection, kinship and community in the digital era. Against the endless possibilities for greater “connectivity” which Big Tech companies stress, we see a need to engage experts from different disciplines and walks of life regarding perspectives on what “connection” means in its deepest senses. What would a reimagined digital realm look like, in which deep and rewarding forms of human connection are genuinely promoted?

A useful starting point is Buber's distinction between "I-It" and "I-Thou" relationships: the latter respects the irreducible humanity of relating to another person, whereas the former sees the other person as essentially an "it". In our inquiry, we will therefore consider: what does it mean for technology to ensure this irreducible respect, rather than leading us towards seeing others as "it"?

Another key angle to consider is the need to find common ground in the digital sphere of our lives. As mentioned in section one, as well as bringing people together in various ways, the online world can drive a loss of shared experience. Lanier writes that in the social media world, "the version of the world you are seeing is invisible to the people who misunderstand you, and vice versa". As a result, "public space lost dimensions, but also commonality in general has been desiccated."

Equally, there is the question of our how our connection to the non-human world is affected by our digital technologies and the way these shape our worldview. This goes in both directions. On the one hand, Rosalind Watts and colleagues have noted that our digital technologies can foster a narrower, less ecologically-contextualised worldview (more "ego" than "eco"). Meanwhile, thinkers such as Bonnitta Roy have made the case for our using technology to converse better with the natural world (what she calls "digital naturalism").

Throughout the project, we will consider which forms of connection we might wish to value most; the social and ecological attitudes and capacities we might look to cultivate; and what this means for how we design and use our social platforms – including questions as to which forms of social interaction are best served without any "digital footprints" at all.

(c) Reimagining the structures which shape the digital intermediation of our lives.

The third set of issues relate to the political and economic structures which govern the digital arena, focussing on the issues that directly bear on the digital ego, and the kinds of solutions that could make a fundamental difference.

For instance, as noted at the outset, there is the question of the perverse incentives built into business models of the major tech companies. Or, linked to this, the issue of how politics has changed in the digital era due to the kind of authority that our information technologies now have over us. Thus James Williams suggests that we ought to understand these technologies as “the ground of first political struggle”, what he calls “the politics behind politics.” Lanier, too, notes that the structural effect of social media is alarmingly “neither left nor right, but down”; that is, it exerts a Darwinian pressure in lowering behaviours towards a brutally effective common denominator of affective victory at all costs.

With regards to these and other structural issues, we will consider: how do these questions intersect with the digital ego framing? What options for transforming the system that are being discussed could contribute most to helping us to become “unstuck”? Which stakeholders should be tasked with enacting changes that fundamentally alter the way the system works as a whole? And finally, beyond relatively “concrete” issues around things like data privacy and competition policy, what are the questions and framings of the issues which political and business leaders need to consider in order to support genuine human growth and flourishing? If we fast-forward ten or twenty years, which structures would best support these aspirations?

Taken as a whole, the Digital Ego project calls for a reinvigorated paradigm of human relationships with and through technology: one rooted not in behaviourism or efficiency, but rather in the “virtuous virtual” notion of technologies that serve human growth and thriving; and that are debated and configured outside of the relentless predictive pursuit of attention, data and velocity as ends in themselves. As the philosopher Shannon Vallor puts it in *Technology and the Virtues*, our situation is at once urgent, wickedly complex, and of our own making:

Our aggregated moral choices in technological contexts routinely impact the well-being of people on the other side of the planet, a staggering number of other species, and whole generations not yet born. Meanwhile it is increasingly less clear how much of the future moral labour of our species will be performed by human individuals... [thus] a theory of what counts as a good life for human beings... must include an explicit conception of how to live well with technologies, especially those which are still emerging and have yet to become settled...

4. Next steps for the project

The Digital Ego project is committed to a programme of public awareness, expert engagement and community-building surrounding the problems of the digital arena set out here, and what feasible, desirable and constructive ways forward look like, for all stakeholders involved. We will be:

- Setting out the project's meta-ethical underpinnings and three-part focus on Systems, Souls and Society and how this complements (or, in cases, runs counter to) the approaches of other organisations in this space
- Convening events that bridge between thinkers, practitioners and makers in and around the digital space, bringing together experts from the disparate worlds of (inter alia) technology and spiritual traditions
- Publishing an ambitious series of thought leadership opinions and essays from our project leads and collaborators
- Establishing an interdisciplinary advisory board and featuring and profiling opinions and insights from our experts and their organisations
- Building a community around these activities involving those with practical experience of creating, regulating and deploying technology
- Producing educational resources for the public – in particular, guidelines and programmes around human growth and development focussed on ways of getting “unstuck” that align technology usage and innovation with human thriving
- Outlining a practical policy agenda around the social and economic models aligned with the solutions we recommend in relation to the digital ego problematic.

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Appendix: Qualities and practices to quiet the ego in the digital age

Attention is central both to the problems of the digital arena and the possibilities for human growth and flourishing. We will therefore pay particular attention within the personal domain to practices and capacities like mindfulness, which involves deliberately paying attention to one's present-moment experiences with an attitude of openness and care.

The relevance is threefold, since it supports people to pay attention with intention, against the forces driving aimless and passive behaviour; it supports responding to others with care and compassion, against the tendencies towards reactivity and outrage in the online world (as described, for instance, by Molly Crockett); and it supports seeing things from multiple perspectives with an appreciation of context, against tendencies towards automatic self-identifications. As Jamie Bristow and colleagues have noted, such practices push back against the co-option of mindfulness by many in the tech/wellness movement as a feel-good panacea aimed at promoting productivity, locating it instead among the foundational skills that can help ensure self-awareness, ethical engagement and a fully considered engagement with others and society.

Notions of intentionality and presence also enter into the cultivation of qualities like empathy and intimacy. In the digital context, Sherry Turkle warns that for all the positive affordances of our technologies in terms of how we connect, we put at risk the quality of our interactions and the development of these social capacities when we blindly replace in-person conversation with electronic communication without due care as to the new forms of interaction we are building.

What might it mean to cultivate something like “digital presence”? One clue is offered by a particular way in which our online experience is fragmented: our online disembodiment. For instance, Linda Stone argues that we are typically not aware of our bodies or phenomena like irregular breathing when engaged online (what calls “screen apnea”).

Body-awareness practices, focussed specifically to online contexts, could be one way to reconnect to ourselves better and support “wholeness” in how we show up and relate with others online.

Among the other social qualities in short supply in many online environments are humility and forgiveness. In her contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Hypoegoic Phenomena*, June Tangney and colleagues have described humility as a “forgetting of the self” that involves the recognition that one is part of the larger universe and relinquishing any indulgent self-preoccupation: In relinquishing a narrowly egocentric focus, the humble person becomes more open to recognizing the ability and potential worth of others. As Julie Exline notes, humility serves as a “shock absorber for the ego”, one that reduces the number and severity of “egoic jolts and bruises”. She links forgiveness, meanwhile, with the capacities for perspective-taking and an awareness of one’s own transgressions, Exline writes. She concludes that empirically, when people are able to see themselves as capable of committing certain types of transgressions, they tend to be more forgiving of others’ offenses.

These interconnected, embodied qualities of attending, caring, acting with humility and forgiving are deeply entwined with the healthy “quieting” of our egos. It is these qualities that we seek to emphasize and articulate in the Digital Ego project. We will consider: what do they look like in practice and in specific online contexts? What role will different stakeholders need to play to help us build them?

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