Being Inside Out
Sociology of Nearness in Times of Internet Communication

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This contribution discusses the changes of communication with regard to its construct of nearness. It is working with the hypothesis that internet based communication has to be understood by analytical sociological concepts. It is furthermore supporting the argument that internet communication might deliver new opportunities, but it is not regarded as the total other. Internet communication is part of an overall historical and social development.The socological analysis is based on a few key concepts deriving from social analysis of communication: As a starting point, nearness is introduced as the main field of research interest. It provides us with a solution for the most problematic dualism like space and spacelessness, time and timelessness. Concentration on nearness generates a shift of the research focus in looking at nearness in time, rather than in space. In the paper, the basic line of argument is working with the difference of absence and presence. Both are seens as timely framed experienced frameworks of nearness, whereby the absent is prefigurating main assumptions and expectations with regard to the meaning of communication. These prefigurations are embedded into lifestyles which are the product of complex socialisation processes. Virtualization is underpinning the "borderlessness" of the cylces of absence and presence. The paper works with the idea that these cycles are enforced by the degree of communication via Internet and see as final point that essential processes of giving meaning to personal life are related to a high speed acceleration of absence/presence dynamics. Finally, place comes back into the debate at that point, because it enables these dynamics to take shape.