

August 2020

"...OK, let's see... I guess that I'm confused again. Am I here, or am I there? I don't know. Over there, I'm everywhere. I know that. But here is connected to over there. Is that right? But then, where is the real me after all is said and done. Oh! There is no real me. I guess that's it. I only exist inside those people aware of my existence. But what about this me that I can hear talking right here and now? It's me, isn't it?"

– Lain, Serial Experiments Lain

The city of Zurich as a geographical common ground or the exhibition at TOXI as a spatial-temporal one is simply out of reach for different people for different reasons. The exhibition of the collaborative efforts represents just one of many cross-sections that constitute this project. Measures were to be taken that enabled the sharing of ideas over great physical distances and individual timeframes. A lot of people, myself included, always had an aversion towards speaking on the telephone. And now, due to an urgent need to keep up with our lives *in these trying times*, there emerged a new sensibility towards meeting up online on video conferences and that can be even more unnerving (I know I sound like a boomer, but hear me out).

With the dynamic of verbal and nonverbal markers, the synchronization of video and sound is supposed to emulate a more natural feeling face-to-face conversation as a surrogate for the physical presence, the real thing, as it were, that we are ever so often deprived of. But sooner or later you feel that the space you are sharing with your framed conversational partners is weirdly difficult to get a grasp of: You hear their awkward voices squished in bits and bytes through your device's speakers as you contemplate whether it makes sense to look them in the eyes. Often when I participate in such (mostly rushed) video conferences, something just seems *off*. In the worst cases, that *Lynchian* sense of dread sets in and makes me question the authenticity of what I perceive. 'Is this real or is this rendered?' I think to myself, and then I almost cannot take it seriously anymore. There is a ghost inside my computer and it is trying to mock me. All of my colleagues' faces are arranged in a grid like superheroes, and in the back of my head I am anticipating a fullscreen *bombing*² by some clownish villain. Eventually, when I tune out completely and I don't know what to say, I can blame a bad internet connection for the awkward latency. Or I can simply walk away from the Wi-Fi to slowly increase the chop and screw of my transmission until I reach the offline oblivion where all the people working on this project eventually meet, be it as an artwork or as a publication. But that is just a fantasy. Everybody knows the online/offline paradigm doesn't exist anymore. You cannot possibly be *AFK*³ anymore in 2020. You shouldn't even be outside.

Sorry for that rant. That sudden outburst of online anxiety was uncalled for. After all, social interaction via the internet constituted the greater part of social interaction in my adult life. I have much to be thankful for from *staying in touch* via social networks and messenger apps to the *parasocial*⁴ relationships I entered through follows and subscriptions. In these relationships, I contribute in the establishment of an online persona via comments and likes, and through further interaction I could possibly even push them in

different directions. Or I can just fully give in to voyeurism and let the live stream play out on any of my devices to *just watch*. Obviously this is easier and a more instant satisfaction than what is considered to be a real-life relationship (which eventually happens⁵ online for the most part anyways) and that fact has only strengthened my inclination towards escapism, especially in the light of the past six months. Okay, maybe my online anxiety is not that unfounded after all, as it is not always easy for myself – being on the side of the *multitude* in the parasocial relationship – to differentiate between the real life and online. At least I am, at this point, still self-reflective enough as not to get fully absorbed by gamer boy alienation (I am not a simp!). As a conclusion to these observations, I present to you a *new adult* fear of mine: technology gradually and radically changing life as I know it in ways that I can neither comprehend nor control. If you think I have watched too much anime or played too many video games, you are most likely (and hopefully) correct. It is certain though that it is getting increasingly easy for us to shut off from the world and live in an artist's bubble, for example. Mainstream technologies and the philanthropist slogan of late capitalism are telling us that we are now freed from a lot of the societal structures that used to hinder us from our full potential and that we can somehow *make it* on our own. They tell us *the world is in your hands* or something like that.

Collaborative projects, however, can work against this type of slow choke atomization and towards a sense of solidarity, away from individual nihilism and towards notions of class consciousness. This project is doing this by weaving a wide-reaching network of differently conditioned people who are working on the execution and documentation of the exhibition. By working on an artwork together, the artists are also entering a deep relationship which requires a great deal of trust and initiative in which each artist's ego has to take a step back. And yet this was only possible thanks to the cyberspace, and therein the future formats we created for ourselves. These spaces must be inclusive and public, and at the same time they have to be defended. Enough with my cyber paranoia.

1 IRL = in real life

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoombombing>

3 AFK = away from keyboard

4 "Parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships, where one person extends emotional energy, interest and time, and the other party, the persona, is completely unaware of the other's existence..."
"Parasocial Relationships: The Nature of Celebrity Fascinations,"
"Find a Psychologist, <https://www.findapsychologist.org/parasocial-relationships-the-nature-of-celebrity-fascinations/>.