Thesis
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Reaching out to your friend at the other end of the world might soon be as easy and seamless as to walk into another room of your house. With the dawning merge of digital and physical realm, the channels of communication which already today have become essential for staying in touch with loved people will continuously grow, become more complex and might eventually reach every last corner of ones habitat. Because the interfaces of such omnipresent media-environments are invisible, it gets difficult for users to maintain agency over their communication (Is somebody watching? Where did this message decent from?), and to resist the pressure of exposure. As a result, the user becomes transparent, communicating almost involuntarily through enigmatic, opaque channels which eventually leads to a "neuro-totalitarianism"[1].

Is this science-fiction? Yes it is. But already today the boundaries to our private selves and spaces have become porous, raising the question how to deal with a vast amount of virtual visitors. By viewing our communication through the lens of the public/private space, can we see whom we would allow to enter and to what degree?

The following journal embarks into the future of a post-ubiquitous[2] society, reviewing fictional writings that act as key witnesses for the rise of an opaque counter-movement, of users who manage to withdraw from self-exploitative and quantifiable communication, while staying in touch at a soothing distance. They take inspiration from cyber-culture phenomena like avatar encounters and collaborative online novels, learning about the potential of fluid identities and secrecy. And they hack the invisible channels of communication in order to re-situate them into their habitat.

1 Franco Berardi: Neuro Totalitarianism. 2014 by Semiotext(e)

2 Mark Weiser on ubiqutous computing: *"Its highest ideal is to make a computer so embedded, so fitting, so natural, that we use it without even thinking about it."* Pervasive computing, also called ubiquitous computing, is the growing trend of embedding computational capability (generally in the form of microprocessors) into everyday objects to make them effectively communicate and perform useful tasks in a way that minimizes the end user's need to interact with computers as computers. Pervasive computing devices are network-connected and constantly available. Quoted from: http://internetofthingsagenda.techtarget.com/definition/pervasive-computing-ubiquitous-computing

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editorial
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Dear explorer of written language,

this special edition of OBSCUREADER is committed to do a crisp review on one of the most influential Science-Fiction narrative of our times:
THE RISE AND FALL OF UBIQUITY ZONE, posted by Alan027 in April 2035 on litera-libra.hub – back when our platform for open-content literature was still in its infancy.

And yes, yes, many things have already been said about this writing as it once inspired a whole generation of bloggers, designers and scientists by sketching out alternatives to invisible communication pathways, alternatives to permanent connectivity and the the pressure to expose oneself.

Many things have been said indeed, but did it ever cross your well-read mind that THE RISE AND FALL OF UBIQUITY ZONE descended from an almost hoary novel(see fig. a): INFINITE JEST[3], written over fifty years ago by a university teacher called David Foster Wallace? We bet not.

Well, get a load of this – back in 1996, things like video-conversion where still something to fantasize about – and in Wallace's case: to be wary of. Imagining a largely mediated world, Wallace describes a possible rise and fall of this technology yet to come, comparing it to "good old voice-only telephoning"[4] in order to break a lance for the implicitness in human interaction:

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3 Corrie Baldauf's included a printed version of INFINITE JEST into her artistic process, "flagging all the references to color in the text — more than 2,600 of them — as a sort of mechanism to help her concentrate on reading David Foster Wallace's infamous masterwork, a notoriously difficult literary achievement that has divided readers on one side or the other, or in many cases, lost somewhere in the middle." https://hyperallergic.com/178866/reading-david-foster-wallace-for-the-colors/

4  D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

The user of an old telephone receiver, unseen and hidden behind the few pinholes, could "fugue-doodle and make little genital adjustments"[5]  while the person on the other end would still be convinced of getting undivided attention.
The same was true the other way around as "you got to believe you were receiving somebody's complete attention without having to return it. […] It would be like being able both to lie and to trust other people at the same time."[6] This created "a kind of highway-hypnotic semi-attentive fuge"[7], that appears as a true blessing when Wallace compares it to video-calls, evoking the opposite of intimacy: stress, judgment and superficial self-presentation. Exposed to the lens, a spotlight hits the users, revealing their blameworthy side-habits, and forcing them to "compose the same sort of earnest, slightly over interested listener's expression they had to compose for in-person exchanges."[8]

Reading this description of inconvenient proximity, it becomes clear that David Foster Wallace's story was almost prophetic in the way that it foresaw an epoch of industries' awkward attempts to bring people closer, to connect them by making distance disappear[9]. An epoch that has luckily come to its end as we can say now. But how did we get to where we are today? Already in 2015 philosopher Byung-Chul Han had stated: "Given the pathos for transparency that has laid hold of contemporary society, it seems necessary to gain practical familiarity with the pathos of distance. Distance and shame refuse to be integrated into the accelerate circulation of capital, information, and communication."[10] Simultaneously with the age of transparency, a tacit resistance rose, fueled by people's need for a certain opacity.

A Person like this was Madeleine le Blanc. You will read up on how she developed a truly odd way to think about her fridge – which revealed to her some major differences between "ubiquitous" and "situated"[11] interfaces, and how this would eventually influence not only the fridge industry. Very gladly we can furthermore announce that we managed to get an interview with Wu Ming – majordomo of the Opaque-Inn which is considered a key institution of China's opacity movement. Our correspondent had to travel to this remote place in order to meet Mr Wu Ming who refuses to give online  interviews.

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5 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

6 ibid.

7 ibid.

8 ibid.

9 By making channels of communication ubiquitous and rendering their interfaces invisible.

10 Byung-Chul Han: The Transparency Society. Berlin 2015

11  Paul Dorish: Where the Action Is. Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2001, p. 43

This journal will discuss Allan027's e-novel once more by tracing back its inspirational foundations, leading through a history of fictional writings on implicit and explicit communication media, art and technology. Hopefully by engaging with this array of several generation's thoughts we can fathom the precursors of communication culture as we know it today: subtle, secret and opaque. Yet rich in expression and variability. Fitting the topic, we decided to do something rather awkward: this must be the first printed issue of OBSCUREADER ever. So in case you are not reading the normal digital version: enjoy flipping through these pages, smell the sentences with your humble nose pressed against paper – or just roll this journal up if it bores you, and indulge yourself in a good scratch.


Sincerely Yours,

Litera Libra and Friends

two
updates
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on a writing
by D.F. Wallace
from 1997

Why - though in the early days of Interlace's internetted teleputers that operated off largely the same fiber-digital grid as the phone companies, the advent of video telephoning (a.k.a. 'videophony') enjoyed an interval of huge consumer popularity

— callers thrilled at the idea of phone-interfacing both aurally and facially(the little first-generation phone-video cameras being too crude and narrowapertured for anything much more than facial close-ups) on first-generation teleputers that at that time were little more than high-tech TV sets … and but so why the abrupt consumer retreat back to good old voice-only telephoning?

Good old aural telephone calls could be fielded without makeup, toupee, surgical prostheses, etc. Even without clothes, if that sort of thing rattled your saber.

But for the image-conscious, there was of course no such answer-as-you-are informality about visual-video telephone calls,which consumers began to see were less like having the good old phone ring than having the doorbell ring and having to throw on clothes and attach prostheses and do hair- checks in the foyer mirror before answering the door.

Why - though it was already clear to see in the early days of Interlace's Interconnected Telewalls that operated off largely the same face-tracking, voice recognition and motion-follow software as the public surveillance companies ,why did the advent of the virtually-interconnected-house (a.k.a. "video-house")enjoy an interval of huge consumer popularity?

Callers were thrilled at the idea of tele-interfacing aurally, facially, and spatially the little first-generation of embedded, furniture integrated cameras being too crude and narrow-apertured for anything much more than recording from twelve different angles: four room corners, top, face left, face right, torso front and back, feet, legs and a juicy shot of your butt) on first-generation Telewalls that at that time were little more than high-tech computers, scaled up to wall size—why did consumers fall once again for such a mousetrap, promising more meaningful ways to interact while at the same time introducing nothing more than an extended version of what they had been chocking from all along: obscenity?

Good old single-perspective video calls could be fielded with some simple makeup, toupee, surgical prostheses, etc. Even bottomless , if that sort of thing rattled your saber.

But for the image-conscious, there was of course no excuse for any remaining trace of unstaged informality about 360° immersive video telephone calls, which consumers began to see were less like having the doorbell ring and to welcome one friend to sit on the couch with you, but rather to open the gates to a mob of strangers that would snoop around in every corner of the house, forcing users to consider the cinematic arrangement of every panty in the drawer  and do hair- checks in the multi-perspective mirror before answering the door.

Why — though in the early days of Interlace's Interconnected Immersive City that operated off largely the same synthetic neural network as the space travel companies, the advent of the virtually-interlinked-habitat (a.k.a.'ubiquity zone') enjoyed an interval of huge resident popularity

— streamers thrilled at the idea of tele-interfacing  aurally, facially, spatially and sensorial (the little first-generation of embedded, pavement- and tisssue-integrated sensors being too crude and narrow-apertured for anything much more than predicting your next five interests/actions, teaming up residents with similar interests in order to schedule meetings for the best RX – resident experience) on first-generation Immersive City that at that time was little more than a high-tech computer, expanding any estimable  size—why and how did inhabitants gather new strength and courage to spit out what they had been chocking from all along: transparency?

Good old 360°immersive  video calls could be fielded with some simple considerations about the scenography of your room, a cute Labrador hologram next to you, some cellulite-erasing videos filters etc. Even in a bathrobe , if that sort of amateur-look was your trademark.

But for the un-conscious, there was of course no point for any remaining dissimulation about a live in the ubiquity zone, which inhabitants began to see was less like having a doorbell that would separate between self- and external image, but rather like an ongoing cloud-conversation, a constant live-feed that did not distinguish between ones actions and thoughts, a body-less, free floating existence in a self-observing environment in which your best friend would not even care about your hairstyle - as long as he was not selling curlers -  because he was a charming little bunch of code, programmed by the same company that employed you: Interlace.

01.    The Rise and Fall of
the Video-Call

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You probably know the feel of a
"phone-call". Know about this moment
of leaning into a brief silence while
pressing the receiver to you ear. How
in this short pause the smallest sound
of exhalation may evoke an internal
image of the other person – not
exactly visual but something else. It
is as if you play a part in creating
your partner's presence.

Whereas for many of you the sort of
"video call" David Foster Wallace is
describing may sound foolish. Getting
seated in front of a static screen
and having a camera pointed at your
face seems as makeshift as simply
undesirable – seriously, who wants
to be bothered with someone else's
"blemish-scan, manicure and crease-
check"[12]? And who wants to appear that
way?

In fact, this is also Wallace's
point, assuming how "there was
something terribly stressful about
visual telephone interfaces."[13]
For us who are used to much more
humble and moderate ways of
interacting, this seems obvious,
but let's remind ourselves that
this was a different time with
different standards. To illustrate
this, I embarked into some heavy
virtual excavation: covered under
decades of selfies and cat memes, I
found an 2012 image series BE HERE
NOW, reuniting scattered families
with the aid of video-call-
projections.

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12 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

13 ibid.

Does this give you an idea just how enthusiastically people were exploring any of the new possibilities technology was offering – from television to personal computers to the internet with its manifold applications? But the portraits, shot by artist John Clang, also speak of a great urge to communicate: With haphazard familial diaspora and increasing mobility worldwide, people started to "rely on such networks to build and maintain their social contacts."[14]

People had their reasons, and it is pointless to be wailing about how they publicly "nostril-explored"[15]while calling. There is a more interesting alteration implied in Wallace's story. Let's take a step back and only look at the user-device interaction instead of the human to human communication:

The progression from telephone receivers to "Interlace's internetted teleputers" signified a change in interfacing-culture first of all because the device moved into a physical distance to the user – you could even say that the screen was less of an object but rather a gate, approaching immateriality. Simultaneously the options to influence this channel became fewer – not being able to withhold information about your facial condition, the tidiness of your room etc., and not being able to (if only symbolically) move the ear piece at a few inch distance when bored or irritated. The user, once opaquely hidden, became more visible. In order to make this contrast even more obvious may you please remember a much older form of communication: while writing a letter, a person could choose very carefully which information to leak, using written language as a handhold to regulate the stream. Where are the handholds in a video-call inducing such nuances? I am sure, you could name a few dozens – today one can enjoy the carefully designed boundaries across which we interact – but back in Wallace's days there where just two options for this channel: open or closed.

14  Amichai-Hamburger & Schneider : Loneliness and Internet Use, in: The Handbook of Solitude, 2014, p. 318

15 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

[d]
**Nicole Pérez,**
**MISSBEHAVING ROBOTS**
**2016**

The three robots are part of
Swiss/Mexican designer Perez's
graduation project
(MA in Material Futures
at Central Saint Martins,
London). The project, raises
the question: Can bots replace
the need for intimate human
relationships?

http://www.nicole-perez.com
image courtesy of the artist

However, coming back to human interaction, such
nuances – and I dare to believe that today we
understand this better than most people at Wallace
time – such nuances are integral and utterly important
to our communication. Designer Nicole Pérez's work for
example explored a rarely addressed aspect of intimate
relations: annoying pokes, pulls and involuntary
traces (like lipstick on bed sheets) - in this case
performed by little robots. Of course this implies
a somewhat droll and still quite explicit form of
interaction. But as it emphasizes very ordinary,
seemingly incidental gestures, MISBEHAVING ROBOTS
still counts as an early attempt to evoke the presence
of a person without having to reveal it.
What is more, these robots clearly were objects, very
prominently situated in the here and now. If intended
or not, this fact lets them appear almost as a strong
call for materiality, knowing about the bodiless
interfaces of our younger past.

However, examples like this stayed isolated while
communication proceeded to become visually strong,
quantifiable, and at times not very meaningful it
seems: Media scientist around 2015 warned that a
mere success of drawing more connections between
people would not talk about whether such encounters
were emotionally valuable, and that in many cases
"computer-mediated communication contributed to the
increase of mood-loneliness."[16] This effect was called
The Internet Paradox, meaning that applications which
were designed to bring users closer, where effectively
deepening the social isolation of individuals.[17] Why?
Looking back, it seems that users were "replacing the
quality definition of friendship with some quantity-
distorted definition"[18]. Many communication media
encouraged a mentality of proofs and quantity: the
proof of attention, the quantity of likes[19] for
example. Not only was the notion of friendship at
stake, but also of trust and esteem – like towards
money during an inflation.

13  Hu 2009 in: Amichai-Hamburger & Schneider : Loneliness and Internet Use, in: The Handbook of Solitude, 2014,   p.321

17  Amichai-Hamburger & Schneider : Loneliness and Internet Use, in: The Handbook of Solitude, 2014, p. 320

18  ibid. p. 401

19  "Likes" were a sort of currency on a popular social medai palttform called "Facebook" in the early 21st century

In Wallace story, the video-call technology is abolished, because people start to hide their persona from this medium. First, users cast their "enhanced facial image in a form-fitting polybutylene-resin mask"[20] (thus hiding their insufficient faces behind perfect attentive expressions) and later they go so far as to fit a retouched picture of themselves over the camera. What companies sell as fixes to ease the awkwardness to show ones real face in the video-call, eventually brings the area of the videophone to a sudden end: people loose interest in these frozen faces.

And at this point it becomes clear that Wallace text was written in a time where it was hard to predict what digital communication, what global connectivity would mean. Video-calls turned out to be very useful. Given the desire to be with other people – that ever more frequently where not present in person[21] – technologies like the video-call offered a tempting advance to phone-calls and users willingly traded this in for some side effects like exposure and the obligatorily performed "slightly over-interested listener's expression".[22]

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VIDEO-CALL simply did not go far enough to assume that communication culture would more and more align with paradigms of quick fixes, effectivity and profits. Explicitness is an easy to digest good - a fact that encouraged millions of people in the early 21st century to become one-man show masters on video and image platforms, exposing as much of their lives as possible in order to be seen. Related to this, Wallace overlooks how already with the rise of the video phone, users begin to perform for their device and less for each other. This may be seen as a bold claim, but will become clearer in the review of younger key sources.

Despite all what Wallace could not foresee, he still put a finger on a sore spot with his  stressing of a soothing distance which was about to get lost with more advanced technological bridging. Why did people not react on such warnings?

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20  Amichai-Hamburger & Schneider : Loneliness and Internet Use, in: The Handbook of Solitude, 2014, p.

21 ibid., p. 325

22 ibid., p. 325

We can only presume: did the lack of more tacit forms
of interaction paradoxically cause the wheel to spin
faster,  bringing forth ever more explicit channels
and  – as a sort of over compensation – causing an
even larger consumption of this slightly nauseating
products?

As a matter of fact, no "self- obliterating logic
in the microeconomics of consumer high-tech" caused
a return to good old voice-only calls, although it
survived until today, which proofs its qualities.
Yes, there were some sparks of a different approach
to communication, like MISBEHAVING ROBOTS shows, but
actually around 2018 – the time when one of the first
updated versions of Wallace text, THE RISE ANE FALL OF
THE VIDEO-HOME appeared on the internet – transparency
was just tapping at the door.

02.
From Video-Home to Ubiquity-Zone
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From static Teleputers to Telewalls
to an Immersive city  thanks to our
yottabyte-sized article hub, we can
meticulously trace back the changes
that occurred with each updated
version of David Foster Wallace's
original writing. We are now really
getting to the core conditions
which caused the awakening of an
opacity-counter-movement, concerning
interfacing within the domestic space:

While Wallace's narrator was concerned
about Makeup, toupee and surgical
prostheses in order to answer a phone
call, Luther Blissett foresees how
the teleputer-screen would emerge
from it's fixed location and immerse
into the whole surroundings of one's
domestic space, thus extending the
area in need of cosmetic preparations
largely.

Again, with concern to our young
readers I have to admit that it sounds
almost unbelievable when telling you
that such self-intimidating practices
where really nothing special only
thirty years ago. Don't believe me?
You're welcome to listen to Lirikk
(see fig. f), begging his followers
to accept his decision to take a few
months break from streaming 5-7h per
day on average.

↑
330|

Hello  ( self.DatGuyLirik )

submitted 3 months ago * by ▦ Lirikk  ◉

I fucking hated this subreddit.

But now I get it.

(Also fuck you for making me write this 1000 word essay.)

Guys, I have been doing this shit for 5+ years. I decided to not follow a typical route and take a risk on my future.

Isn't that how life works? Isn't that how everything works, at least how society tells us? Aren't you taking a risk going to college and hoping it allows you to get your dream job?

Ask yourself this, how many of you are willing to drop your studies/work/main job now and instead try playing video games, while not being a pro, just for the fuck of it, and seeing if you can just.... do it for a living. [...]

I'm not some God figure. I'm a nerd, who is shy, who happened to just decide to stream and see what the fuck happens. Looking back, I don't know what the fuck I was thinking. Maybe it was my addiction, or love, for gaming. I just always thought I had funny moments in video games so why not just broadcast it and see what happened?  [...] To me, I feel as though you watch for the entertainer not the game. I get self conscious I guess, I don't fucking know.

I never thought I was entertaining nor did I even think to grow an audience this big. This is absolutely insane to think about. How the fuck did I even get here? Because, honestly, I don't know why people watch me.

But it's fine.

[...]

**639 comments**  share   save   hide   report

[f]

**Blogger Lirik,
post on reddit.com
10.01.2018**

One of the Twitch's biggest streamers has announced he is taking a break from the platform. Lirik, who has just under two million followers on the streaming platform, says the temporary break is a result of feeling "burnt out" with the platform.

https://www.pcgamesn.com/twitch/twitch-lirik-break

While Lirikk's stage was limited to a "computer room" as he called it, other users soon went further by turning their whole apartment into a showcase to perform for a large amount of people. When designers of home accessories and furniture reacted to this trend[23], experimenting with prop-like products (consisting of cheap foam-cores painted with popular colors or material structures), they learned that consumers where not only willing to buy these, but that they even preferred slightly smaller versions e.g. of couches that would fit better the camera picture. Quite accurately described in THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VIDEO HOME, these developments meant that all sorts of former online content[24] began to leap onto private moments at home, turning it into a space of self-exploitation rather than -expression (as it had been seen during 20$^{th}$ and early 21$^{th}$ century). Accordingly one's apartment or house became more and more associated with and optimized for this kind of 'friendship work'.

But now, before you railroad a whole generation as exhibitionists/voyeurs, be aware that there was a cultural shift taking place: in a time of growing spatial distance to watch and being watched was simply a new form of togetherness – although not necessarily an intimate one as one side was potentially faking "privacy", the other often seeing with half an eye.

Artist Lauren McCarthy explored such ways of favored surveillance in her work GET LAUREN, stressing this issue as early as 2018. LAUREN was an intelligent system, able to access and control several functions in a connected home. It was designed to observe and take care of a person within his or her domestic space. What may come as some surprise: there was no program but a a real intelligence (RI) behind the switches, the artist herself. According to McCarthy, she wanted to perform "better than an AI" in "adapting to your desires and anticipating your needs."[25]

By scrolling through the heavy-retro-look reflection blog, one can still follow up on how people at first felt obligated to treat LAUREN as the human companion that she was, but soon abandoned the attempt to "engage with a home assistant 24/7"[26], arriving at a more distant, cool interaction.

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23 Otto von Bush interviewed in 2017: "Speaking of Australian terms, I can certainly see a vast number of start-up companies selling home accesoirs, blankets and bed linen. Instagramm and Pinterest have fueled the demand and the items are created to fit the medium. It's a self fulfilling prohecy." In: Notes on Ghosts, Disputes and Killer Bodies. Design Academy Eindhoven 2017, p.54

24 Like Instagramm, Youtube and Tinder

25 https://get-lauren.com/

26 For example Iona, first person to use GET LAUREN in the netherlands: http://get-lauren.com/reflections/

[g]

Ioana:

always being there is a powerful tool

11 December 2017 @ 21:13

When I said yes to this performance, I imagined Lauren would come along for the technical set up in my home. Looking back, after experiencing LAUREN myself I realised that would have been weird and silly. Seeing Lauren in person would have broken the magic of LAUREN as a home assistant. Though she was with us for only 3 days I got used to her watching over us and felt at ease. Me, someone who never uses Siri.

Waking up this morning I knew I had to turn on the lights myself and that made me in a strange way miss LAUREN. I would have liked to experience more aspects of LAUREN and interact with her more intensely but because of the language barrier and some technical issues we could not make that happen.

In the near future I can imagine people treating their home assistants as family because the intimacy of always being there for someone is a powerful tool. By the way I find the word home assistant a very distant word, I think it does not define the relation you can develop with an AI. This experience made me even more aware of the complex situations we are going to encounter in the near future with our personal assistants that will probably know what we want, before we act on our impulses. That sounds crazy but I couldn't have imagined 10 years ago that someone in L.A would be able to control my lights in my living room in the Netherlands. And it happened.

[h]
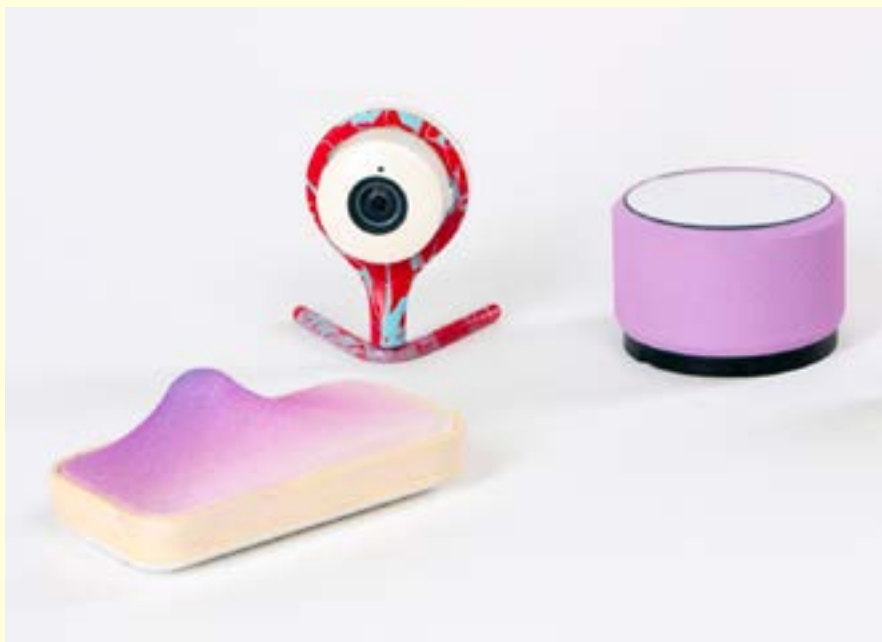
LEARN MORE LAUREN GET LAUREN

[g]     LAUREN,
        by Lauren Mc Carty
        2018

        "LAUREN is a meditation on the
        smart home, the tensions between
        intimacy vs privacy, convenience
        vs agency they present, and
        the role of human labor in the
        future of automation."

        http://lauren-mccarthy.com/
        image courtesy of the artist

[h]     ibidem

        The performance lasts several
        days. It begins with an
        installation of a series of
        custom designed networked smart
        devices. The US based Artist
        then remotely watches over the
        person 24/7 and controls all
        aspects of their home.

        image courtesy of the artist

[i]     Participant of the Quantified-Self Fair in
        Frankfurt 2016

        image courtesy of
        http://quantifiedself.com/

[i]

This shift in manners of communication reflects well what was going on at the domestic sphere at a  larger scale: a shift towards the post-pudic home.

After LAUREN's popular example, ubiquitous computation which started as an attempt to make human-computer interaction more natural  eventually became the displays and eyes of a huge communication infrastructure:

In 2022 social network companies made the step out of the screen onto the physical walls – and here we don't speak about the lame attempts of smart speakers launched a few years earlier. The new crystalline interfaces connecting private space and media platforms where truly designed along the lines of Mark Weiser, considered the father of ubiquitous technology[27]: "Its highest ideal is to make a computer so embedded, so fitting, so natural, that we use it without even thinking about it."

Not even thinking about it. Yes, it where most likely such events that inspired the third and last (known) update of Wallace' writing:  THE RISE AND FALL OF UBIQUITY-ZONE by Alan027. Although today we can gladly tell that the sheer Neuro-Totalitarianism[28] forecast in this story did not become reality, its potential rise wasn't made up out of thin air since in Alan027's days a weave of networked perception began to wrap every space, every place every thing and every body on earth.[29]

Just think back to the Quantified Self community for example: A group of techno-euphorics that had started out to massively self-monitor their bodies, making use of latest biometric hardware and cloud-based analysis software in order to achieve Self-knowledge through numbers.[30] What might have seemed just like somebody's quirky little hobby appears in today's light as a sad confession to efficiency: Here, a not-insignificant percentage of the population had so decisively internalized the values of the market for their labor that the act of resculpting themselves to better meet it's needs felt like authentic self-expression.[31]

And some members even dreamed of expanding their Quantified-Self to an Exoself, described as a sort of technologically enhanced  Fourth-person perspective that facilitates the conveyance of humans into a new realm of extended self and eventually into different groups of joined selves, providing a richer, more detailed, controllable, and personal

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27 Already in 1995, researchers from the former University of Toronto had fielded a study series called "The Reactive Room – Making the User Interface Disappear". The result was a meeting room for "physical and virtual encounters"1, changing automatically to the needs of users thanks to its embedded sensors, cameras and screens. The scientist's aim was it to "exploit the fact that the people's activities happen in a context, which can be available to the software in order to disambiguate action."

28 Franco Berardi: Neuro Totalitarianism. 2014 by Semiotext(e)

29 Adam Greenfiekld: Radical Technologies, The Design of Everyday Life p.31

30 ibid., p.31

31 ibid., p.35

relationship with the world.[32]

The idea of relating to the world in such excessive ways must have seemed exciting for many people  maybe some of you where even part of the QS community and can verify my claim that this group had the best intentions, maybe something like a global empathy between all things, connected by technology. But as we ask why this attempt failed nonetheless, we are coming full circle with David Foster Wallace's observation: that connections must not be mistaken as social bounds.

Wasn't it exactly this brief silence while pressing a phone receiver to the ear that allowed both listeners to reach out to each other emotionally? By turning the organism itself into an interface, by eradicating the gap between human mind and external world, by weaving a multi-sensorial highway between people, the QS community was approaching a total communication.

Total communication is not audible, but it isn't silent either. It is ongoing and involuntary  even unconscious. It does not know pauses. It does not know clumsy body gestures or pudency. And what is worse: as it reduces communication to the exchange of information it abolishes formality, the struggle to express, charisma  most of what makes human communication significant.

Before talking about Alan027's ideas on how to challenge such a future, let's wrap up the changes that occurred across the three versions of rises and falls:

The transition from phone-calls to open, ubiquitous communication channels turns a formerly opaque user with transparent devices into a transparent user with opaque devices. This user transparency is due to more and more user-information which is revealed without consent. Whereas the opacity of the device is caused by its increasing complexity but to a large extent also due to its design that aims to usher users into a comfortable experience of consumption free from the struggle of its underlying structures. With fewest sovereignty on the enigmatic channels of communication however, users change from actors to mere Terminals of multiple networks[33].

And what happened to the meaning of the domestic space? In the video house scenario, this realm has become a venue of the world, but was still operating according to some rules of private space. Rules that were shaped in Wallace's time when ones house was a safe haven for intimacy. The new home was not simply a non-private one, but rather a house with porous walls, unnerving due to it's instability. The ambivalence and confusion about the degree of discretion or openness resulted in a feeling of unbearable proximity  of im-mediate exposure.

From this blurriness, Alan027 goes one step further into a complete merge of realms, a hybrid space

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32 Melanie Swan: The Quantified Self: Fundamental Disruption in Big Data Science and Biological Discovery, 2013

33 Jean Baudrillard: The Ecstasy of Communication, Paris 1987, p. 23

in which terms of public and private hold no significance
because communication is everywhere, regardless of space:
We're not lost in a labyrinth, but instead thrown out into
the open, watched, and manipulated, with no centers of
command in sight.[34]

It is obvious but at the same time crucial how the design
of interfaces reflects and supported the changes in the
domestic space: The Teleputer was situated at a specific
location in the house, Tele-Walls were surrounding the user,
and finally the Immersive Cities as envisioned by Alan027
became omnipresent, unavoidable.

In opposition to such dawning one-sided exposure, Alan027
called for a review of human-technology-relation:
Interfaces, he argued, could serve users much better in a
visible, emotive form. Although they could impossibly always
be in the focus of attention, they could still take on forms
which could enrich, inspire and challenge people in their
interaction and bring them back into an active position.
Alan027's idea was to render the bridges to digitality more
approachable instead of hiding them. Like this, he was
convinced, users would find back to a level of engagement
equal to face-to-face interactions:


  "Humans are used to deal with each other socially  what
  if one could use this ability to interface with digital
  guests?", he stated.


Speculating about a renaissance of the medium in this
way, he also brought back into memory that there was a
large spectrum of qualities missing in the definition of
communication of his time, qualities that where essential
for negotiating one's need for proximity.

Sitting next to each other in silence, for example. Merely
appreciating the others presence, a slight movement of the
shoulders maybe, that could give indication about plenty of
things easily where spoken words would only exhaust one's
lungs without even getting close to what was meant.

Such qualities could not be reproduced by electronic screens
or hidden sensors, a whole new generation of interfaces had
to be invented to meet these needs. Where and how these
ambitions where further explored in order to eventually find
practical use will concern the next two pieces of literature
as we recap on two thrilling main incidents of a young
opacity movement.

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34 Geert Lovink: Overcoming the Disillusioned Internet. In: Notes on Ghosts, Disputes and Killer Bodies.
Design Academy Eindhoven 2017, p.71

03.
An Interview with
Wu Ming
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To admit it right away: I failed to interview Mr
Wu Ming. Did I not try hard enough though, traveling
all the way from Beijing, riding two hours on the old
Jingzang Highway in southwest direction, taking exit
No. No.53, then still having to bump along for another
twenty-two minutes through bamboo forest before
arriving at the old building, hardly distinguishable
from the plants in the background due to it's
facade of – seriously, bamboo? To be fair I was a
bit disappointed to see this house in its brownish
plainness – had its architect Japanese Kengo Kuma, not
once been a big shot? I had excepted a bit more from
the GREAT (BAMBOO) WALL[1], which since a few months
frequently hosted members of an "opacity-counter-
movement", the reason for my visit.

Apparently inspired by the writings of David
Foster Wallace and his copycats, various people had
started to meet here, trying to reestablish some of
this "semi-attentive fuge" [2] and other joys of tacit
communication. There were rumors that they were even
wearing masks! – but if so, didn't they get something
wrong? Wasn't the whole point of  "high-def-video
phonic-masks"[3] to wear them at home conquering the
"vanity-problem" while streaming with other people[4]
and not to bring them outside? Why did these geeks
come here anyway? To escape their houses, their cities
that where getting too buzzy in their opinion?

Mr Wu Ming, a sort of majordomo of this place, had
refused to talk to me over holo-call. Even the phone-
call had been more than brief: "I'm afraid you'll
have to leave the city if you want to know more", he
had muttered, and cut the line. So here I was, just
another junior correspondent of dusty old Beijing This
Month[5], trying to make a living by chasing an old men
between bamboo bushes. An old man who did not make any
effort to talk even now. Instead, Wu Ming was guiding
me through a narrow side-door of the building, down a
flight of steps.

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1 The Great (Bamboo) Wall, desiged by japanese architect Kengo Kuma

2 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

3 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

4 D. F.Wallace: Infinite Jest. Cited from: http://declineofscarcity.com/?page_id=2527

5 Beijing This Month (BTM) is a free monthly English language magazine, published in Beijing by the Beijing
Foreign Cultural Exchanges Centre in association with the Beijing City Government. Wikipedia

Arriving at the bottom, I saw where we were bound for:
a tea-room, floating like an island in central position
on a black-granite water-basin. Carefully walking over
the stepping stones that lead across the water, I felt
like moving through a picture – as if the builder of
this path had intended to introduce the room from
a specific angle. The room was actually not a room.
With minimal efforts, hundreds of bamboo beams were
sketching walls into the emptiness around it. Sitting
down at the floor my gaze was wandering across the gaps
between beams, catching hints of threes until it came
to a rest at the large door-like opening. Like a frame
for staggered mountain ranges, fading out in endless
nuances of green and purple. This place seemed to be
in breathing correspondence with the surroundings and
was yet weirdly aloof. With the compositions of beams,
the architect was telling me a story – one of inside,
outside and inbetween, of space and air, and bodies
moving in it. It was a weird thought how my experience
at this very moment must have been planned years ago.

    Later, showed around by my mute host, I walked
though the house, through dim corridors, meandering
between paper cabinets filled with muffled voices. I
must admit that it was a funny thing, sensing the
presence of so many people without even seeing them –
only sometimes a silhouette would appear, lured into
appearance by the absence of light, distorted and
faint. By the time I had almost stopped hoping, I was
eventually allowed to peek trough a slit of the door
panels, bursting with curiosity:

    Behind it, I could see people. And what ever
filthy scenario I had expected did not come through.
Yes, people were wearing masks. Beautiful were these
artifacts, some of them apparently original props
of Beijing Opera, some of them more contemporary,
resembling animals or fantasy figures, or were
completely abstract. A woman – or is it a woman? – was
wearing a grotesque archaic costume that resembled a
wolf: gray fur around her shoulders, the holes for
eyes and mouth minatory dark circles in the red mask.
In a quite engaged manner she was disputing with two
other disguised people sitting on pillows. There was

something odd about their conversation but I could
not easily tell what it was. Then I understood. They
were reciting lines of what seemed to be a fairy
tale or theater piece? Throughout this formal speech
however, sparks of self fabricated, personal bits were
flaring up, weaving a strange interplay which seemed to
have no clear direction or ending. These people were
performing – for who? – for themselves, for nobody.

     I looked around the cabinets. I was surrounded by
a theater. With no audience but many little stages.
What David Foster Wallace had mucked about with – a
weird fix, a remedy – had become a sincere matter for
people of the opacity-movement. And there appeared to
be a lot of joy in this.It reminded me of something I
had read a long time ago about "coffee-house speech"[6],
that had taken place in 18th centuries cafés and pubs
of larger European cities. Addicted with theater,
citizens of all social position had adapted "forms
of address, turns of phrase and gestures"[7]from what
they had seen on stage, thus establishing a unifying
language.

     Had we arrived at a point in history where
people, deprived of their most intimate realms at
home, had once more began to spread out to find new
havens to explore their selves? I looked inside the
cabinet again and saw how people were re-arranging
their disguises, taking out other masks and artifacts
from drawers integrated in the floor. How releasing it
must feel, I thought, to change identities so fluently,
especially now in these times of the obsessive
individual self. What if after all the face of flesh
that one showed at home, the face that one showed at
work, the face that one showed to the networks – this
one forcefully spanned face – was the actual mask
that people had learned to wear? Regarding the guests,
swaying in their round dance of fluid selves, I could
not deny the impression that by disguising their
facial traits they were stepping out of the shadow,
revealing themselves in a much different way.

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6 Richard Sennett: Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation. Penguin Books 2012, p.31
7 Richard Sennett: Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation. Penguin Books 2012, p.32

How would it feel to be getting to know somebody
not considering their name, origin, job or life
history, but only by means of sharing a story, by how
someone acted a part?

Mr Wu Ming had dismissed me, with a politely
indifferent bow. I had, once again tried to get behind
his silence, addressing questions. But he had only
smiled indulgently and secluded himself into one of
the cabinets.  Finding my way out of of the GREAT
(BAMBOO) WALL was easy but as I reached the entrance
hall, I passed by a detail in the building that had
slipped my attention earlier: a Tokonoma[8], an alcove
containing several pieces of pottery, an ikebana flower
arrangement and a Kakemono[9] spelling the lines of a
haiku:


    I like to wash,
    the dust of this world
    In the droplets of dew.[10]


I came closer to see the artifacts of this
showcase and I could not resist to touch the cold
silken fabric of the Kakemono, the tea bowl which
was sprinkled with tiny drops of glazing, milky
shimmering in the faint light of the corridor.
This arrangement in its continuity was a message
of objects, raised in meaning by their ritualistic
composition. An interface of symbolic augmentation.
What would David Foster Wallace have to say to such
minimalist, tacit interaction? Maybe it would not
meet his idea of a practical communication device.
But maybe he would have liked it even more for it's
extreme confidentiality that was still able to address
a lot of commitment to meaning. Before returning to my
car I went out into the damp night, cut a young branch
of Bamboo and put it in between the ikebana flowers.

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8 Tokonoma is a built-in recessed space in a Japanese style reception room, in which items for artistic appreciation
are displayed. Wikipedia

9 Kakemono is a Japanese scroll painting or calligraphy mounted usually with silk fabric edges on a flexible
backing, so that it can be rolled for storage. Wikipedia

10 Haiku by Matsuo Basho,  the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan. Wikipedia

Maybe next time I should rather try to communicate
with Mr Wu Ming in such forms, I though with a slight
resigning sight. Although, thinking about it, he had
told me quite a bit throughout the evening.

    Anyhow I cannot sell this interview to anyone.
The editors of Beijing This Month will split with
laughter if I return with dew on bamboo leaves. So
I just uploaded it on litera-libra.hub, I'm sure you
guys know what to do with it.
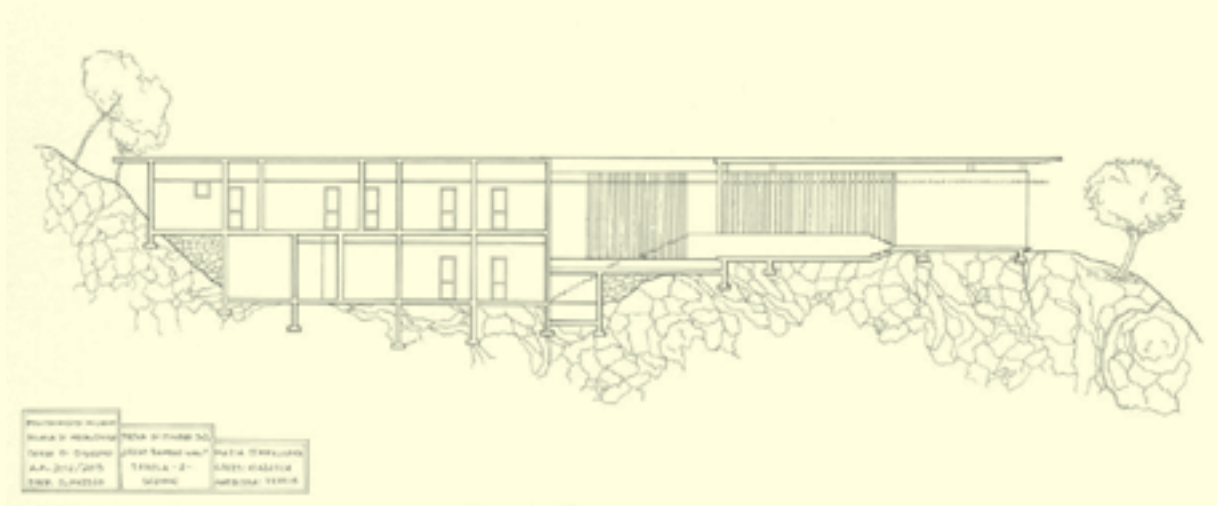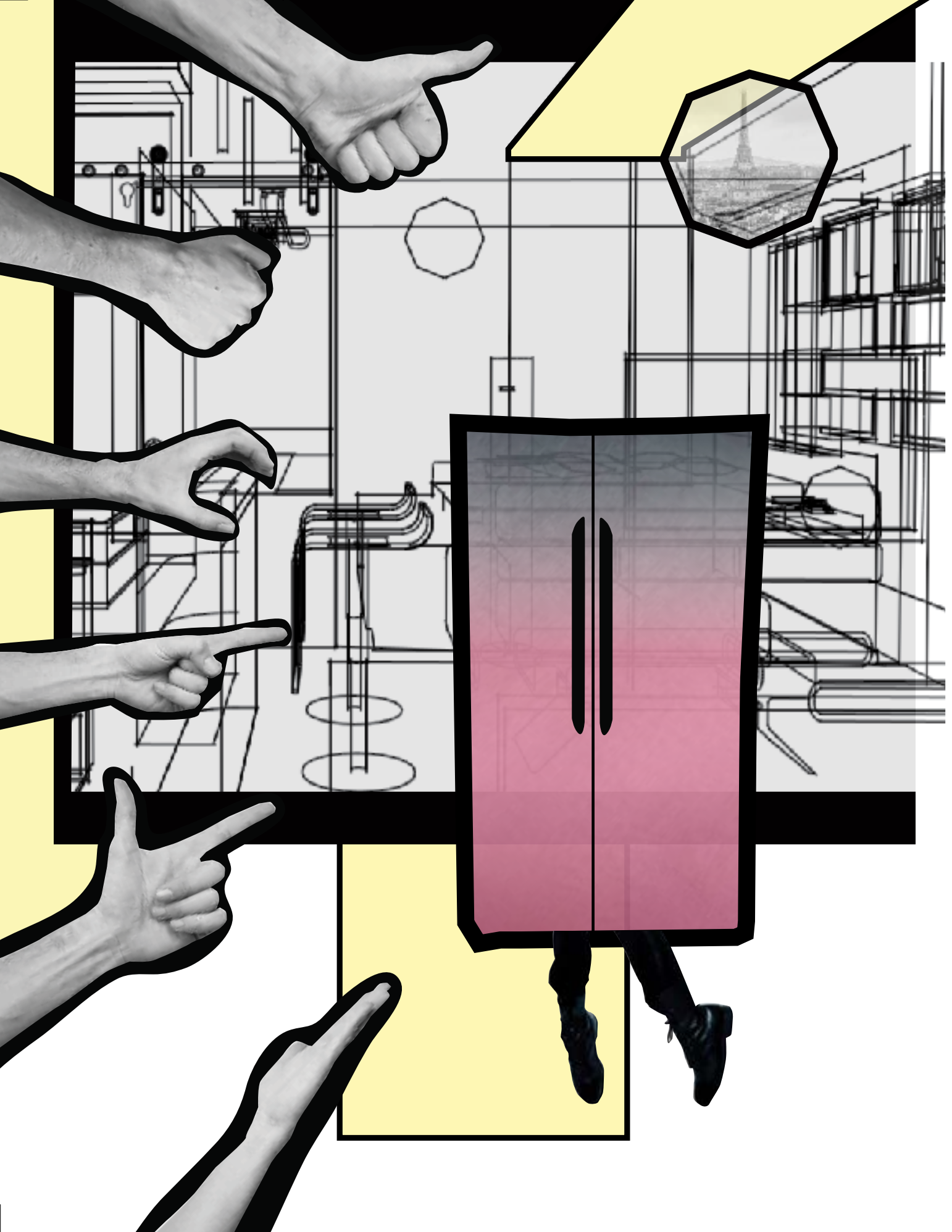
04.
Mr Fridge
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Madeleine le Blanc's specail relation to a mundane object

Madeleine was staring at the fridge. Fiercely.
And this wasn't at all due to the fact that there was
nothing else to look at. On the contrary: from her 10<sup>th</sup> floor
apparent with frameless crystalline windows which even had a
digital zoom function in case someone felt the sentimental
desire to bring closer a sunset – let alone somebody else's
revealing panorama window – she could literally see whole
Paris. However, Madeleine was no looking out of the window.
She was starring at the fridge.

The fridge was so damn white and clean, it annoyed her.
The glazing of the door was shimmering, not glossy and not
mat, something in between, maybe "satin-gloss" was the best
way to put it. Yes that was it: Satin - an indifferent,
professional sort of shimmer. It reminded her of a business
shirt. The fridge was just doing it's job. Or was it?
It was true, that at this very moment that Madeleine was
staring at the fridge, she was thinking of her husband
Antoine. It was a habit that had developed over months,
certainly encouraged by the frequent absence of her
workaholic artist partner. At this point, Antoine and the
fridge had merged in her head as if his soul wandered
between two bodies – one of flesh and bone, and one of glass
boards, cooling liquids and sensors.

Bemused, Madeline was scratching behind her ear – when
out of nowhere, a blazing triangle was popping up in front
of her. Apparently the pondering gesture had triggered it to
come to Madeleine's aid.  "Anthropomorphism",  the sonorous
voice of the domestic counselor declared, dramatically
pausing before continuing with a more explicit definition:
"Anthropomorphism describes the tendency to imbue the real
or imagined behavior of nonhuman agents with human-like
characteristics, motivations or emotions."[1]

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1  N. Epley, A. Wazty, J. T. Cacioppo: On Seeing Human: A Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism, 2010

Annoyed Madeleine tried to swiped away the triangle, but she had to slide her hand multiple times through the projection until this idiotic software registered her attempt. Disgusting.  Anthropomorphism? But it was more than that: Antoine was actually communicating through this device, and she was talking back. It had started one day – her husband visiting an art fair in Pyongyang - when she had found a little package in front of her house door. The note on the top said:

"I checked my boards and found them almost empty. Thought you might enjoy some food this evening. Love, Mr Fridge."

It had contained some smoked Surimi Steak, bread and Pinot Bleu.  The fridge – equipped with everything a device should provide these days: camera, temperature- and scent-sensors as well as a WiFi-antenna – was remotely accessible, allowing Antoine to "be there for her" in another appearance. Soon they had developed a game from this: the delivery service getting permission to enter the house and secretly letting products appear in the fridge, Madeleine arranging food carefully on the shelves and creating little smell-compositions, the light inside twinkling slightly as if it was just waking up when she was opening the door, she baking a cake and putting it inside when Antoine could not be there for his birthday.. many situations that had felt good and very different from typing a message, or interacting by putting on some AR[2]-retina-lenses and to meet each other at some hybrid-space date like so many people did these days.

She had not told her friends about this. Maybe, because it felt too intimate, or just because she was afraid of not being able to explain what it was that soothed her about the the idea to meet Mr Fridge when she got home. It had something to do with the fact that it belonged to "her world" as she would call it. But then, what did not belong to her world? Actually a lot of the things in her house: the digi-bill was piling up, steadily but invisibly, all of her friends or even brief encounters that could appear on one of the screen-windows at any given moment, her health insurance speaking to her from her mirror one morning and suggesting to use a different tooth paste.

A lot of technology these days were promoted to
be "seamlessly integrated into your wold", and thus
becoming friends[3] but often this would come with a certain
nuisance (that had nothing to do with the taste of the
new toothpaste), as she felt intruded by them without a
possibility to react.
It was not until now that she had understood the difference.
She looked at the dancing little letters on her backhand –
Skinput[4],  another interface that seemed awkwardly close to
her –  and read again what Antoine had doodled a few minutes
ago: "Good evening darling, I'm on my way. I can't wait to
see you." There was only one thing wrong about this message,
written on her skin: It was not meant to be sent to her.
Antoine was officially attending a lecture in Rome.

        Instead of pulling on her index finger in order to
activate the reply function, Madeleine stood up from the
couch, whit a scornful gesture wiped down the Skinput-
Message and walked over to the drawer where she kept the
household tools. She took out the Iron (wirelessly power
supplied) and turned around to the Fridge. Slowly turning
up the temperature until it reached the maximum position
(Cotton), she walked up to Mr Fridge, opened him and put the
steaming and spitting Iron on the highest shelf.
The plastic edge of the glass board melted, producing a
sharp stench. She grabbed a bottle of wine from the inside,
slammed the door shut. And with a rather grim satisfaction
she spilled a dark red stream
over Mr Fridge.

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3 The COE of Honda recently announced, that their future self-driving car would also be a "friend",
equipped with an "emotion engine (…), using an array of cameras and other sensors throughout the
cabin" as pathways to clients hearts. Surely it is not only the heart that Honda aims at, but also the pocket
of clients.

4  Skinput: Appropriating the Body as an Input Surface.
"Appropriating the human body as an input device is appealing not only because we have roughly two
square meters of external surface area, but also because much of it is easily accessible by our hands
(e.g., arms, upper legs, torso)."
Quoted from: http://www.chrisharrison.net/index.php/Research/Skinput

[k]     **My Mother the Fridge**

Short movie, part of my trimester project.

A woman modifies her smart fridge so that instead of an AI, her mother may be with her in her house.

This new relationship between mother and daughter develops and undergoes some crisis as the caring fridge begins to articulate truly motherly concerns.

How emotive do we whish the interaction to domestic systems to become? How much of our indepenence are we willing to give up for this "good care"?
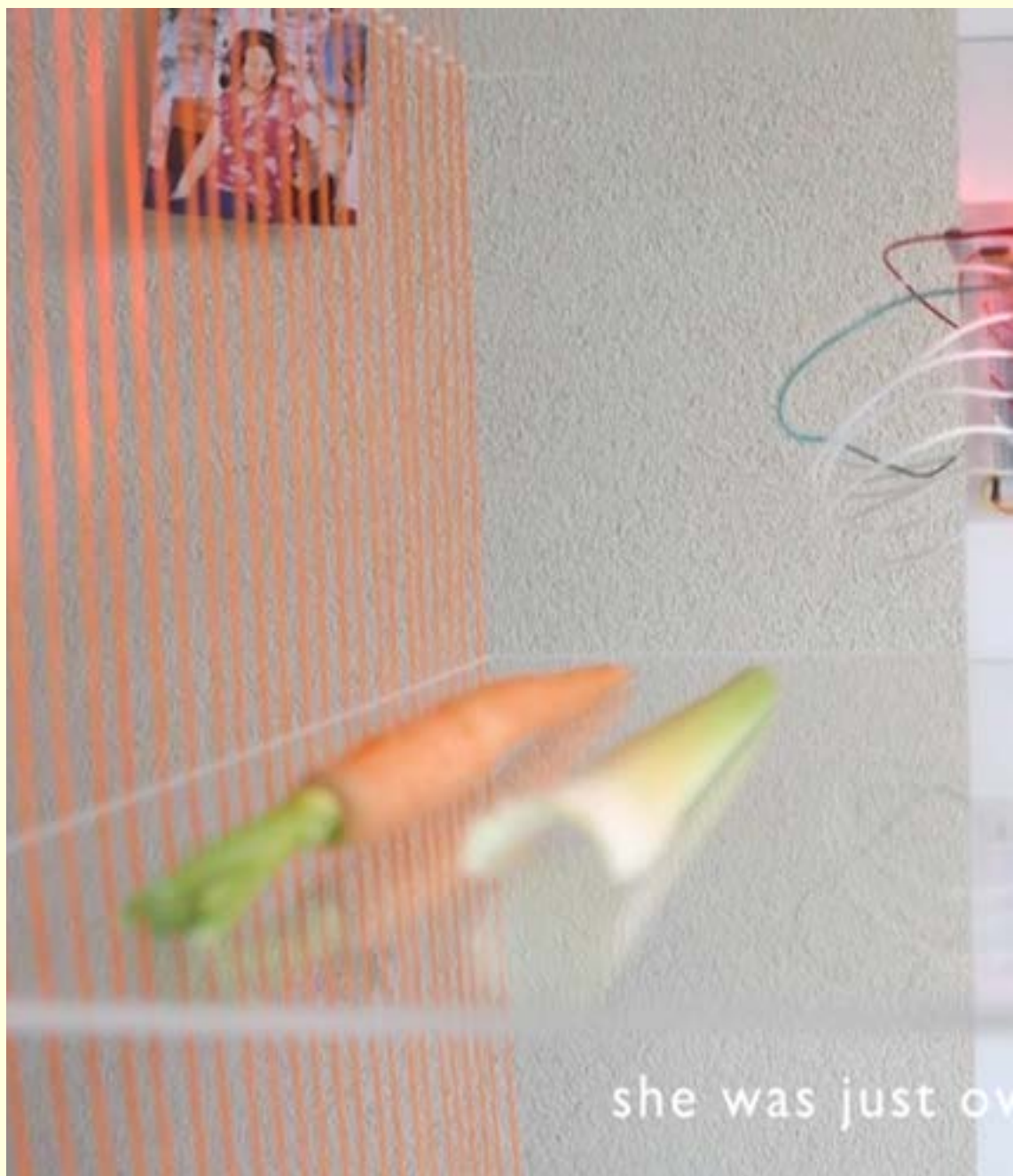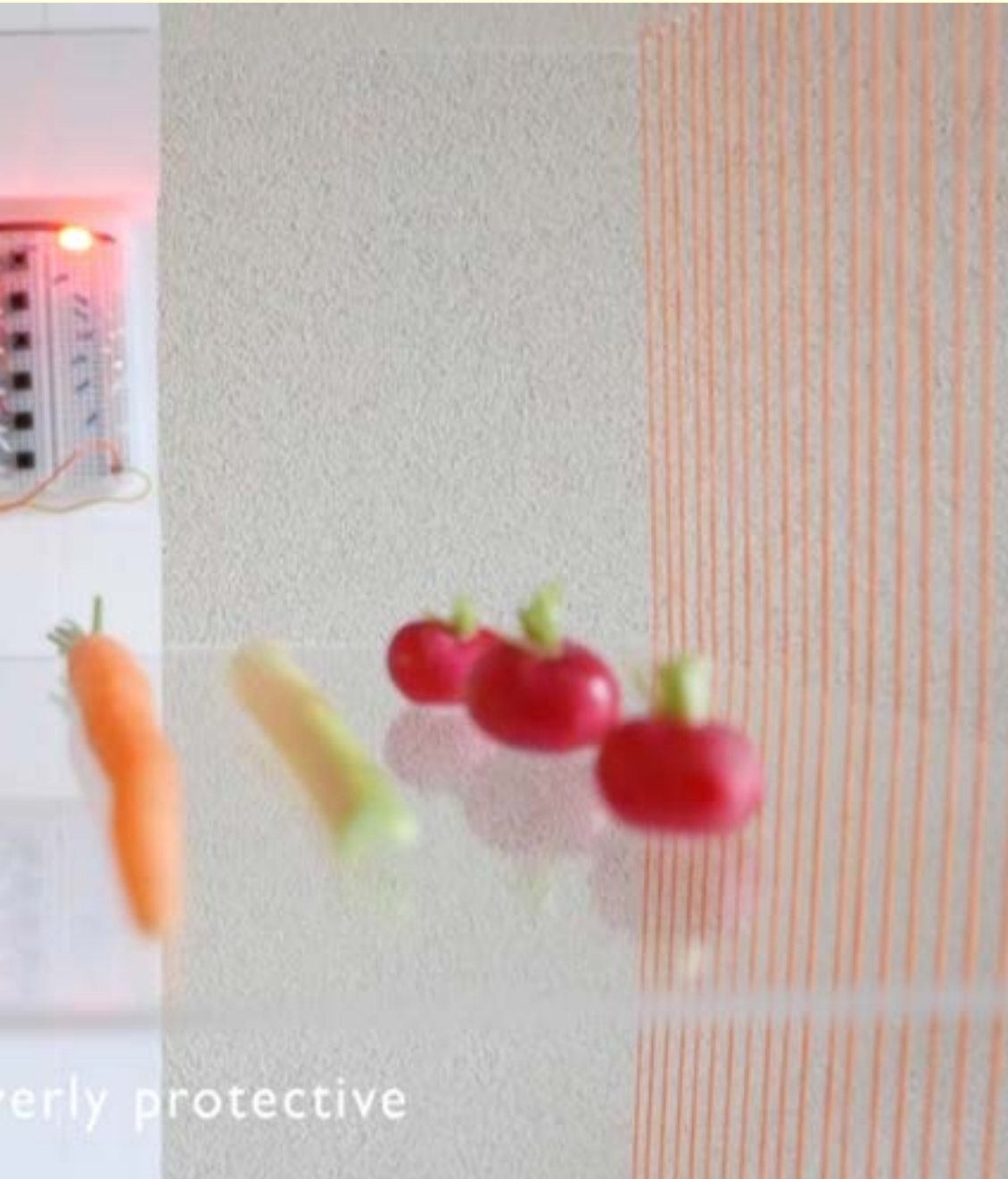
i loved how she would surprise me



Oh shit, my mother...

[k]

[k]

she was just ov

rerly protective

05.
Why "Mr Fridge" turned things upside down
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To which extend was the short
story by Madeleine le Blanc's
autobiographic? It remains
inscrutable for our editors,
as well as the whereabouts or
her husband Antoine. Certainly
however, Mme le Blanc's writing
points right at the heart of what
prevented Alan027's dystopian
scenario about the fully passive
user to become reality, which also
explains the rousing excitement
about her writing at that time.

Despite, or maybe exactly because
of the fact that industry had made
it amazingly easy to interact with
media by making communication-
interfaces disappear more and more,
certain people's sentiment about a
life in such hybrid-environments
began to shift from disaffection to
rage.

Because they felt both utterly dis-empowered and
benumbed by the unavoidable communication that came
with ubiquitous computing. Because they realized,
helped along by the exaggerated picture in THE RISE
AND FALL OF UBIQUITY ZONE, that an interface that
was not situated in, but was the habitat, would cost
them dearly as it would lead to unbearable proximity
to all sorts of incoming and outgoing streams. In
a blog discussion on litera-libra.hub an anonymous
user interpreted Mme le Blanc's  story accordingly:

> "What good is it if technology is all around
> us, ubiquitously taking care of the right
> temperature of the room, the best route to
> drive or the best tooth paste, if it is still
> behind glass, an inaccessible concept: not
> engaging, not allowing for ones own routine, own
> configuration? I'm sick of it! How refreshing
> would it be to literally collar these services.
> This is it, what makes Mr Fridge so special to
> me ..."

This remark disproves Wallace's and Blissett's
hypothesis about returning to an earlier form of
technology for the sake of privacy because it speaks
of the dawn of a novel user-activism which would
eventually transform both interfaces and forms of
communication. Oh for sure, I can imagine that most
of you already guessed what I am about to recount.
So let's come straight to the point:

People took this story literal. Very literal. The
idea of exclusive, highly configurable phygital
communication interfaces hit the market like Cultured
Kobe Beef – thought not through the front door to
be fair. Naturally, big Industry had no interest in
re-organizing the channels to be more perceptible.
The demand was first only poorly accommodated by
broke maintenance-services, hackers and online-
tutorials. In theory the personal habitat – already
over saturated with sensor technology only needed a
few adjustments to be broadcasting to a dear person
(instead of the cloud service).

However, people soon noticed that their ever-day objects had little but no physical qualities to fiddle around with. Where were the door knobs? The dangling chandeliers, the sighing floorboards? Where the yearning woolen carpets, the cheeky tea-cups, the deferential coat-trees?

All these things you might have seen in antique interior blogs or in design museums had been slowly disappearing over the years as projections and video-filters had gained more importance, rendering walls and objects to austere, disregarded props.

It was up to designers to change this. A new formal language emerged from the idea to give virtual visitors a physical appearance, one that used materiality in order to characterize one's acquaintances. The first attempts looked still rather clumsy: A translucent silky curtain which articulated itself by moving slightly and getting concerned wrinkles, (see fig. m) a set of lamps that where connected over distance so that users could sense each others presence when passing by, a carpet that squeaked pitiful in its struggle to lift itself a few inches of the floor. And, maybe the most advanced model by that time: a teapot (see fig. l) with camera and microphone which would silently attend peoples breakfast – a humble proxy for some far distant friend.

Ironically it was in fully automated supermarkets that the first-generation of these devices would appear in shelves – unaware of their shop owners. How was this possible? The business model of such supermarkets was not to make money by selling products, at least not primarily, but to train the company's AI on package- and facial recognition[39]. One thing about in this setup that wasn't considered soon enough (and which became the reason why such shops are not around anymore today) was that instead of taking things, one could actually also bring things and put them into the shelves. Things that looked like usual products to the eyes of a machine. A different bar-code, a simple manipulation of the check out application – and a black market appeared in bright daylight. One where you could buy the brand new series of hacked devices, disguised as mundane toasters, radiators and curtains.

---

39 "The Seattle shop, known as Amazon Go, relies on cameras and sensors to track what shoppers remove from the shelves, and what they put back. Cash registers and checkout lines become superfluous: customers are billed after leaving using a credit card on file."
www.theguardian.com

This is considered the crucial strike of the opacity movement: being able to launch products which entailed a completely different approach to communication. Obviously it was only a matter of time until this system was revealed, automated shops closed and big companies took over the business model of the young designers.

But what was more important was what happened to people's homes and to their mental spheres:

Equipped with tangible ends to their communication channels, they were able to arrange them, and to take an almost forgotten active part in moderating whom to speak to, in which appearance, and most of all: how.

Needless to say, the development of satisfying devices did not happen over night, it was a rater tricky thing. Enjoying quite some popularity among the growing members of the opaque counter-movement, the Attentive Teapot hype still did not last much longer than a few months. Surely, the fact that one would integrate the means of communication in an every day ritual, picking up his friend in the morning, pouring water in it, placing it in between jam and butter to sit down and having a chat with it (or to stay silent if preferred), was quite a dramatic shift towards re-contextualized interaction. And the fact that the person on the other side would merely catch a glimpse of ones shoulders, belly and breadcrumbs was a relief concerning the make-up issue described by Wallace. But the initially exciting shift in perception of this artifact was wearing off soon. Similar to the case of Lauren McCarthy's attempt to become a real-human digital assistant ( see article #2, FROM VIDEO HOME TO UBIQUITY ZONE), users first treated the teapot with the cautiousness one would grant another human, but quickly this awareness began to fade and the teapot became one of many mundane things.

In that sense it was not more abiding than the weird cylinder shaped device you might have noticed occupying dusty shelves of second-hand stores these days, next to rummage table with barely touched attentive teapots. People in the 2020s used to refer to this cylinder as "Alexa", put it on their living-room table and commanded it do perform some simple tricks like: "Alexa, play some vapor-wave!" or "Alexa, flip a coin!".

[1]

[l]

[l]
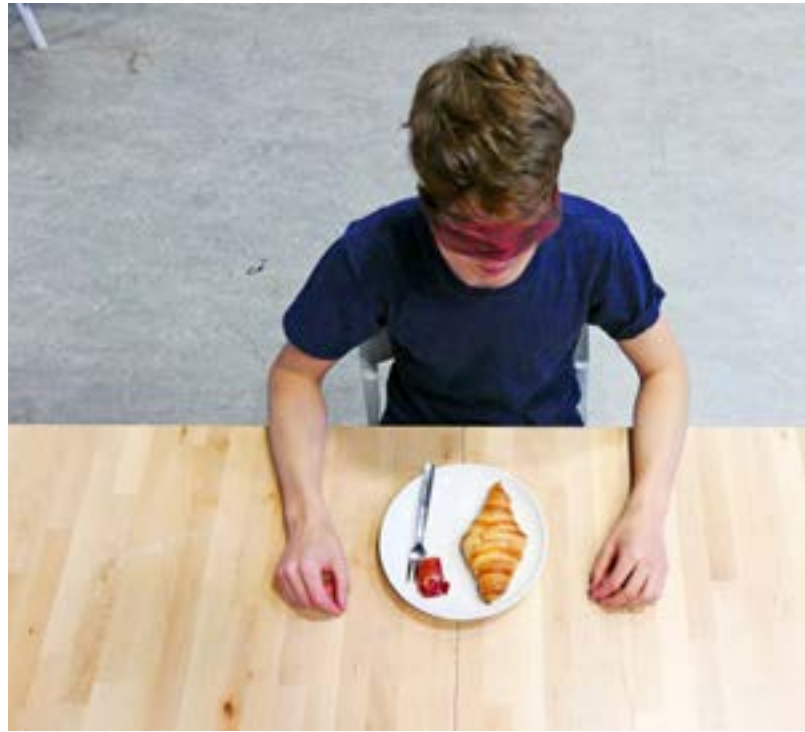
**The Attentive Teapot**

Part of my trimester project.
Teapot eqipped with camera and
microphone.

This device allows one to join a
remote breakfast and experinece
to be involved in this daily
ritual from the perspective of a
mundane object.

[m]
Concerned Curtain

Textile and memory wire,
part of my trimester project.

The known movement of a
curtain is altered slightly
so that its expression appears
more human/creature like.



[m]

Was the reason why people lost interest in her after a short while a result of the uninspiring command-based interaction? Or rather due to the fact that people's expectations to be encountering a somewhat human intelligence where greatly disenchanted? It leaps out on us these days that both teapot and Alexa lacked unique ways of expression that would make them appreciable as beings rather than as services.

There where other, more mature design-examples to follow. Perhaps the installation IN CLOSE DISTANCE, a design school graduation work by Jonas Althaus was one of the first examples that got things rolling. This is a description I was able to find in our infinite data bank:

> "Several curtains, hovering through a space that they help to define at the same time react and engage with visitors each in their specific ways. Other than Tele-Walls that Luther Blissett described in his dystopian future vision, these spatial elements do not video-capture and broadcast every move of the inhabitants, but rather seem to deliver an echo of another person, sensually approachable but with a hint of remoteness descending from its faceless mimics. These textile screens have their own aura – no need to borrow it from a recorded voice or a functional object:  they appear truly autonomous in the way that they both nurse and terrify visitors of IN CLOSE DISTANCE"

In the light of these past events, how do we read Wallace's idea about returning to voice-only calls? I'm pretty sure you would agree that they could have never worked because they did not consider peoples desire to enjoy the fruits of both realms: public and private – in hybrid condition or not. Wallace's vision was eventually quite cynical because he never considered the possibility that people could find ways to deal with the confusion that resulted from a realignment of both realms, initiated by technological invention. Well, they did, and there were quite pleasant ones – but who am I telling this!

And today? I am actually writing this, as I am in bed. In a few minutes my table lamp will knock on my door to give me some light during the dim morning hours. It is not only my table lamp but actually my brother who lives in Munich. He knows about my nature of being most sharp in the earliest hours of the day, and will kindly keep me some company as I finish this essay – silent but supportive.

I had to be very strict with my aunt who happens to be my hoover these days. And I can tell you: she loves me so much that she would clean around until my floors were gone if I had not scheduled exact meeting hours with her. And now she keeps some confidentiality and stays out of the bedroom too, god thanks! This is what we call "responsible agent-effect": an impulsive reaction towards incoming and outgoing streams as they are manifested as physical objects in our world.

By the way, this is exactly what Alan027 meant when he said that "people could to learn how to arbitrate between their intimacy and their exposure". Today we can – and we also feel the strong necessity to do so: it would be impossible to survive one day if I let all the social bots[40] pass through the front door!

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40 A social bot (also: socialbot or socbot) is a particular type of chatbot that is employed in social media networks to automatically generate messages (e.g. tweets) or in general advocate certain ideas, support campaigns, and public relations either by acting as a "follower" or even as a fake account that gathers followers itself. In this respect, social bots can be said to have passed the Turing test. Wikipedia

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preparations for IN A CLOSE DISTANCE

Part of my graduation project.

Visitors pull strings attached
to the curtains and thereby
move them, interfere with
other visitors or change their
environments composition.

[o]

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preparations for IN A CLOSE DISTANCE

Part of my graduation project.

A room's walls move and thereby
reconfigure the space. They
circulate around the visitor, offer
certain perspectives or spacial
qualities, or lead her to a
distinc position.

06.
epilogue
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Science Fiction has always been in fruitful interplay with science – fruitful for both sides. And what was once  considered a niche[41] soon proved to do more than fueling technological progress: it allowed to explore inventions just appearing on the horizon, offered a perspective, a foundation to estimate and discuss changes before they actually took place. This writing too, was build in a fictional style, in order to develop perspectives from a different angle than the present one:

The magazine took a look at our current ways of interacting across electronic media like telephones and computers with the eyes of a narrator living 50 years from this time. Using Wallace's INFINITE-JEST as a pillar,  two updated versions of the original excerpt dive into a speculative future of communication - one in which interfaces have become progressively ungraspable and turned into invisible background processes, putting users as well as the domestic space into a crisis.

41 Exhibition Catalogue of: Into the Unknown, A Jouney though Science Fiction. Barbican Centre, London 2017

Despite it's speculative tone, the text has been rooted in existing works of artist like Lauren McCarthy (struggling to perform as a virtual assistant), or in snapshots of current internet culture like the case of Lirikk (a streamer who got worn out from being watched). By thinking further the vision of ubiquitous computing and the Quantified Self movement, the second chapter arrived at an extreme: a neuro-totalitarianism[42] in which users are no longer in conscious control of their interactions.

The writing methodology allowed to discuss and compare recent phenomena with those of a possible futures – which could hardly be achieved in a scholarly paper. The perspective of the OBSCUREADER is free to think beyond overly cited and arguably temporary conditions like the dominance of Facebook or Instagram, to draw a more holistic image of our communication culture and to point at problems that may result from long-term trends. For example: in the light of our current struggle to deal with an overload of digital information, the idea of ubiquitously casual computing,  of technology  "blended into the smart background of all the things around us "[43], appears compelling. But only if one is willing to reduce communication to its content-fixated 21$^{st}$ century definition: data. Concerning this, the lens of a future journalist helped to imagine a change in paradigms by rethinking the hidden, im-mediate approach. Two inserted texts (GREAT BAMBOO WALL and MR FRIDGE) explored the plentiful facets of communication apart from context-stripped information: physical presence and spatial relations, appearances and masks, tacit and implicit messages that engage people in the creation of meaning instead of overwhelming them with push-notifications.

42 Franco Berardi: Neuro Totalitarianism. 2014 by Semiotext(e)

43 "The biggest thing that we are going to see the next 20-30 years is that the technology will become invisible. No longer we will rely on screens to be able to interact with the internet." - John Barrett, Head of Academic Studies at CIT, TEDxBergen

Such ideas eventually refer back to the underlying
starting point of this magazine: the soothing
qualities that Wallace had unveiled in his reflection
on phone-calls.

Sketching out this renaissance of the medium also
provided a ground to introduce my design work:
bringing virtual guest into appearance within
the social landscape of the home. Exploring the
perspective of a tea pot as a humble listener, or
the many gestures and different characters a curtain
can embody. Referring to an object as a partner of
communication put many things into question: the
control over a medium, the balance within a dialogue,
the need for distance and proximity etc., but most of
all it opened new doors to consider how and to which
degree people will want to interlace their habitat
with technology in the future.

So, will we want to live with autonomous sensitive
curtains? This is not the most urgent question
deriving from my work – although it is definitely worth
a thought. My graduation project is an abstraction
of a life with smart home systems and digital
guests, both materialized as animate curtains. This
faint experience of a possible future may provoke
renunciatory, sceptical, or euphoric reactions in
visitors. The truly pressing issue behind this setup
however is directed at designers: Screens as well as
ubiquitous interfaces will not suffice in the long run
- we need to find more meaningful ways of navigating
the bridges between physical and digital spheres. My
proposal here is to anchor immaterial influences in
objects that allow for emotional involvement. This
involvement could empower users to consciously reject
or embrace certain streams, question the use of
others, and to negotiate personal needs for openness
and discretion.

As well as my writing is fictional, also my design
project remains in a rather hypothetical stage for
now. My interactive installation will be a first step
for these idea to leap into reality. Many questions
remain – but they can only be explored in testing
the potential of such interventions. Instead of
mocking the whole idea of an interconnected home with
dystopian creations, I embarked into implying a novel
domestic landscape which provides actual encounters,
inspiring interactions and challenging cohabitation
with distant others. Accordingly, my writing and
my design work share the same goal: to induce
perspectives for the design of boundaries across which
we will communicate in the future – boundaries that
appear in shape of approachable, emotive entities.

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