Techniques of the Face

The Art and Politics of Video Conferencing (Inter)Faces

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Due to the COVID pandemic, the 2021 edition of Electronic Literature Organization's 2021 conference and festival was held online, and most interaction between participants took place via the platform Zoom. At the final day of the event, the performance artist duo SALYER + SCHAAG (Katie Schaag and Andrew Salyer) posed as Kristin S. Wiley and Alfred S. Fox, CCOs ("Chief Corporeal Officials") of "Good Movement, Inc.," presenting *Perfect Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Zooming*. In short, the performance was a live instruction tailored to help the conference participants optimize their bodily behavior in front of the camera. The performance was a continuation of a former piece, *Perfect Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Living* from 2014, which they, in an alleged patent application, have described as a "gesture and movement-based system" that can "capture a user's motion and display a model that maps the user's motion, including gestures that are applicable for control." Based on the observation and capture of these gestures (such as holding a wine glass at an artist opening) they suggest a systematic analysis of the participants' gestures in order to "determine those cases where assistance to the user on performing the gesture is appropriate" (Fox and Wiley 2014).

With their performance SALYER + SCHAAG draw attention to how gestures and movements are intrinsically tied to social settings, including academic conferences, and by bringing their performance into Zoom, they explicitly highlight how Zoom, as a corporate software interface for conferencing, makes its users execute certain meeting-like gestures. Zoom is an interface design not only *for* use, but also *of* its users; or, one might say that Zoom (and similar software) does the same thing to our meetings, as Power Point has previously done to our presentations (even down to the fact that software, which is now used for all sorts of social interaction, is labeled "conferencing"—just as presentations have become "slide shows" that externalize some sort of truth, as pointed out by Kalani Michell in this book). One example is "the attentive nod," which they break down into specific facial mechanic features: the correct movement and tempo of the head ("continuously, and even," "not too much," "not too fast"), the position of the eyebrows ("not too much, you don't want to seem surprised"), the leaning forward toward the camera (again, "not too much"), etc.—all

of which convey subtle differences (and failures) of the nod. As Kristin S. Wiley reminds the audience, "be careful to manage the micromovements of the face, your eyebrows and your cheekbones. People will notice what is happening across your entire face" (SALYER+SCHAAG 2021, [28:00-]).

As the performance demonstrates, any social context brings about a corporeal management, and with the wider proliferation of video conferencing interfaces, the micromanagement of *the face* becomes increasingly important—the faces we must learn to read and manage on camera, the faces that we "pin," the faces that leer at us and our homes, the faces that can be detected by the software and decorated with filters, the faces of colleagues that are there at our table top, and so on. The management of the video conferencing face has, in other words, become a familiar phenomenon. With this, and as pointed out by several authors in this book, the face has become a site for struggles over power and control: the subtle changes in our facial gestures and in our facial performances reflect a much larger politics of the face, rooted in the interface. This will be the subject of this article.

Within philosophy, the face has been debated by thinkers such as Emanuel Levinas (as a question of hospitality, identity, and the other) (Levinas 1969), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (as a question of the "faciality," or the social production of the face) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), Frantz Fanon (as a question of black skin and race) (Fanon 1986 [1952]), and many more. Evidently, the aesthetics and politics of the face get further complicated by the proliferation of video conferencing, and also many other interfaces, such as Facebook, Tinder, Snapchat, and so on, which suggests that contemporary platforms are built on a reorganization of what one might call facial practices, and hence also of what a face is, means, and does. Our intention here, in this article, is by no means to provide a comprehensive overview of these philosophies of the face or the many and diverse facial practices of an interface culture, but to argue that the increased proliferation of interfaces for video conferencing makes the aesthetics and politics of the face ever-more present aspects of our everyday lives; and furthermore, to ask what are the conditions of this facial production? What does a face become in a video conferencing interface?

Studying video conferencing as an intrinsic part of interface culture inclines us to think of how the technology affects the way we see a face and how it presents itself. The face arguably plays a significant role in human communication, representing feelings or emotions, but also social significance (such as the color of the skin, the shape of a beard, the use of lipstick, and so on). Similarly, one might argue, as the art historian Hans Belting has, that the role of media is to "capture" the face in an image, and that this inevitably results in "masks" that do not represent the person as much as they point to a (more general) "depiction" (which has a long and rich cultural history, including portraiture as well as ritual masks) (Belting 2017). What is particular for our current situation (the interface) is that we find ourselves in what he calls a "digital masquerade" that not only includes faces that do not depict any person

(such as faces produced by generative adversarial networks [GAN]), but also, as mentioned, an overwhelming number of faces on Facebook, Twitter, Tinder, Snapchat, and numerous other platforms that we swipe through every day. As noted by Tomáš Jirsa and Rebecca Rosenberg, Belting suggests a somewhat dystopian era where the face "rejects any traditional claim of 'true' resemblance and likeness of a real human being, marking a shift to a condition in which the relation between the face and the subject is more than ever before grounded in a radical disembodiment," a situation where the face has become an "(inter)face." Like Jirsa and Rosenberg, speculate about the possibilities for "less somber" perspectives on this (inter)face (2019, 3).

Our underlying argument is that a number of artistic video conferencing performances offers this, and that they do so, not by mourning the loss of bodily representational identity, but by exploring the body (and especially the face) as a technical object; that is, they explore the face from within the interface—from within the production of the face as a technical object.

The (Video) Art of Faces

Many of the contributions to this book highlight the relevance of artistic exploration of video conferencing (including Donatella Della Ratta's, Tilman Baumgärtel's, Martina Leeker's, and also Kim Albrecht's own interventions). In our search for possible answers, and also ways to even understand facial production and its contemporary conditions, we too will turn to a number of artistic experimentations with video conferencing interfaces. Within the arts, and predominantly video art, there is a long tradition of experimentation with video conferencing systems. Most famously, perhaps, is Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway's 1980 work *Hole in Space*, a three-day performance where they connected the public space of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City, and a department store in Century City, Los Angeles, with two life-size, live television projections. Rabinowitz and Galloway defined themselves as "avantpreneurs": artists who are "alert to emerging trends in science and technology," and who "articulate the intrinsic qualities and dangers of unclaimed territory not yet targeted for total exploitation by the entrepreneurs" (1989). One might claim that *Hole in Space* is now superseded by video conferencing platforms instigating a huge variety of social encounters, and many more than Rabinowitz and Galloway probably imagined at the time. In light of this, we therefore stipulate that there is a societal need for artistic practices that explore this as a tendency.

According to Walter Benjamin, for art to explore a "tendency" it needs to explore its own conditions of production; hence, tendency is not to be understood merely as a general "trend" of an epoque (Andersen and Pold 2018, 24). Media technologies generally bring about new techniques of production—of making images, text, sound,

and as suggested in this article, also faces. According to Benjamin, the artistic technique itself is a way to relate to this production—not necessarily how it is good or bad, right or wrong, but to position oneself *within* the production and in doing so investigate its wider conditions: "The technical revolutions are the fracture points of artistic development; it is there that the different political tendencies may be said to come to the surface" (1999, 2:17). In other words, we stipulate that the art works will reveal the fracture-points in the platformed production of faces, the making of faces, thus helping us better understand the video conferencing platform as a production apparatus of the face, including how it produces bodies, subjects, territories, and more.

In our analysis of this tendency of video conferencing we focus specifically on the production of the face; or, facial production. The art historian Rosalind Krauss has, in 1976, done an elaborate analysis of video art that in one way or the other features the body of the performer, and often also the face: "Unlike the other visual arts, video is capable of recording and transmitting at the same time—producing instant feedback. The body is therefore as it were centered between the two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis. The first of these is the camera; the second is the monitor, which re-projects the performer's image with the immediacy of a mirror" (Krauss 1976, 52). Although depending on physical mechanisms, as an apparatus, video cannot, according to Krauss, be defined on technical terms. Krauss therefore turns to psychology, claiming that there is a certain narcissism drawing artists to the medium; or, as she also suggests, that video enacts narcissism. Video presents a mirror reflection of absolute feedback, which inclines us to "bracket out" the electronic equipment as a simple appurtenance: "video's real medium is a psychological situation" (Krauss 1976, 57).

Arguably, both artists and users engaging with video conferencing interfaces may recognize an "ego-libido" (in the words of Freud), but in pursuit of what Krauss later, inspired by Benjamin, coined as "The Optical Unconscious," it is our stipulation that one cannot exclude the technical object in this. In fact, we claim that the body, caught in the video feedback, is itself a technical object. In other words, we are particularly interested in art that, in the words of Krauss, "represent[s] a physical assault on the video mechanism in order to break out of its psychological hold" (1976, 59).

To frame a non-psychological understanding of the body (and the face of the video conferencing interface), we begin with the French sociologist Marcel Mauss who in 1934 gave a lecture entitled "Techniques of the Body." In the following, it is our ambition to, through a selection of artworks, provide an understanding of how video conferencing interfaces capture the body and the face as part of its apparatus; of the various techniques of the face in video conferencing systems—from the individual and collective techniques of users performing in front of each other (listening, acknowledging, etc.), to the techniques of users performing in front of the interface

(navigating, adjusting camera angles, turning the camera on/off etc.), not to mention the bodily techniques performed by users with varying dis/abilities (as outlined by Bieling et al in this book). In this, we also want to argue that the aesthetics of the video conferencing interface is not so much about the construction of a (narcissist) self, as it is an example of how contemporary platform interfaces exercise power and control by way of subjectivation—a process through which one becomes the face of a producing subject in a platform economy. Video conferencing art may help us see this.

The Techniques of the Face

Figure 1: Kristin S. Wiley and Alfred S. Fox performing variations of "the attentive nod"

Source: Screen shot from *Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Zooming*.

To enter the discussion of the aesthetics and politics of the face, one may begin by considering, as SALYER + SCHAAG have, the micromovements of the face. The "attentive nod," along with other micromovements of the face, practiced in *Perfect Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Zooming*, belongs to what Marcel Mauss has labeled "techniques of the body." Mauss notes how different cultures, genders, and generations "move" in different ways. As an example, he explains how swimming techniques undergo changes in a generation's life-time. Once, children were taught how to dive closing their eyes and opening them under water. Later (in 1934), it is the other way around: children are taught to control their ocular reflexes as a way to familiarize with the water (Mauss 1973, 71). Likewise, Maori women, he claims, quoting the ethnographer Elsdon Best, acquired a "loose-jointed swinging of the hips that

looks ungainly to us, but was admired by the Maori. Mothers drilled their daughters in this accomplishment, termed onioni" (Mauss 1973, 73). In Mauss' thinking lies the assumption that the technical cannot be entirely separated from the human bodily. In fact, "The body is man's (sic) first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body" (Mauss 1973, 75).

Walking, swimming, and add to that also the micromovements of the face, are, as "techniques of the body," also habits. The habitual in the techniques of the body is here to be understood as a habitus (in Latin), rather than a habitude (in French): they are to be understood as an "acquired ability" or a "faculty," and not a "mysterious 'memory'" (Mauss 1973, 73). To Mauss, habits are first and foremost acquired through socio-cultural education. For instance, one can recognize a person raised in a convent if they walk with their fists closed: "I can still remember my third-form teacher shouting at me: 'Idiot! why do you walk around the whole time with your hands flapping wide open?'" (1973, 72). And yet, he claims, they cannot entirely be taught. Underneath the educational lies a game of imitation that some people, despite having the same education, master better than others (also bound to an element of social prestige): "The individual borrows the series of movements which constitute it from the action executed in front of him or with him by others" (Mauss 1973, 72). Evidently, the education and imitation of a habitus also compares well to *Perfect Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Zooming* and the staged game of mimicry that it engages the participants in, with sarcastic promises of increased social prestige.

Assuming that the micromovements of the face are an acquired ability also means—contrary to conventional assumptions—that the face is not simply a mirror of the soul or one's inner identity, feelings, or emotions. Rather, it is a mirror of a shared habitus. As expressed by Mauss: "'habits' do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties" (1973, 73). One could also say that they are not just personal habits, but that we are inhabited by them, that they point to a culturally specific logic of sensemaking that also defines us, as human beings. As Wendy Chun has argued, media seem to matter the most not when they are new, but when they structure our lives (2016). Or, as Slavoj Žižek phrases it: "Belonging to a society involves a paradoxical point at which each of us is ordered to embrace freely, as the result of our choice, what is anyway imposed on us" (2008, 676). Habits are ideology and politics in action, embraced and yet also enforced.

In other words, Mauss proposes that in a face one might recognize a person and a person's mechanical aims (such as a yawn), chemical aims (such as sweating and feeling hot), or psychological aims (such as feeling sad), but one also recognizes a more generalized face, a more habitual face of a collective, expressing a mode of be-

ing, and of reasoning and acting in the world. If thinking of the facial implications of video conferencing interfaces begins by first considering the body and face itself as a "natural technical object" and how it acquires a habitus, then what is the role of the technical instrument, such as the interface itself? What are the relations between the techniques of the face (the user's habitus) and the techniques of the video conferencing interface?

The Face as a Mass Ornament

Mauss himself does not explicitly explain the role of media and technologies, but he interestingly notes that cinema seems to play a significant role on the bodily habitus: "A kind of revelation came to me in hospital. I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realised that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema" (Mauss 1973, 71).

To generalize a little from this observation, one might stipulate that the mediated gaze on the techniques of the body plays a significant role in the social acquisition and prestige of bodily techniques, such as those of walking, and also those of the face for everyday zooming. One answer to the above question (of the relation between the techniques of the user's face and the techniques of the interface) is hence that the video conferencing interface provides a particular gaze on the habitus and common techniques of the face. For instance, the "gallery view" of faces all performing the "attentive nod" or other acquired facial techniques for video conferencing meetings provides the user with a particular gaze on the habitus of a collective face.

But Mauss also points to other potential relations and speculates that corporeal movements more generally may relate to larger systems of industrial production. In his immaculate elaboration of the techniques of swimming, he notes: "In my day swimmers thought of themselves as a kind of steam-boat. It was stupid, but in fact I still do this: I cannot get rid of my technique" (1973, 71). In this small note, and also in his note on the role of cinema and elaboration of the body as a technical object, Mauss resembles his contemporary, Siegfried Kracauer. As an interesting historical fact, the new swimming and diving technique that Mauss describes as replacing his own "steam-boat" technique is in fact perfected in the contemporary invention of synchronized swimming (a term coined by Olympic Gold medalist Norman Ross the very same year, 1934) and the cultural proliferation of aquatic musicals and ballets (Sydnor 1998, 255). The aqua musicals easily compare to the proliferation of both gymnast stadium shows and dance shows, also discussed by Kracauer (1995).

To Kracauer, these spectacles are examples of "mass ornaments" and function as an aesthetic reflection of capitalism's production processes. The proliferation of capitalist production had produced a new organization of the masses in which one took part by performing the same movements (such as the synchronized movements of the assembly line), but without seeing the larger picture of the mass. The mass can therefore only be recognized by the individual as an indirect experience; or, staged aesthetically as a spectacular mass ornament—such as the stadium gymnast shows, the dance shows, and also the aquatic shows.

In mediating the techniques of the body, the aquatic show, the dance show, or the gymnast stadium show are modern cultural phenomena that provide a new gaze on the techniques of the body, and a new way of appropriating a bodily habitus in a growing mass society. Evidently, the *Perfect Movement Engineering for Better Everyday Zooming*, in a Maussian interpretation, also leaves an impression of the participants taking part in a contemporary ornamentation of faces, leaving its spectators (and participants) with a perspective of how one by "everyday Zooming" takes part in a new mass organization, where all our faces (together and apart) perform the production of the platform, and where what is otherwise supposed to work under the radar of human perception comes to the fore, as pointed out by Jan Distelmeyer in this book.

The Navigating Face

Although most faces appearing in a gallery view of a video conferencing interface have not undergone the kind of official training offered by Wiley and Fox, one usually recognizes a video conferencing face, not by its attentive nodding, but by its impartial look directed slightly off the camera lens. Winfried Gerling's article in this book demonstrates a much larger cultural history of staring at screens, and one might see this navigating face as a continuation of this history and also how it compares to, e.g., the synchronized movement of the conveyor belt in the platform production system. In the work *People Staring at Computers* from 2011, artist Kyle McDonald installed a custom application in a series of computers located in Apple's hardware stores in New York. Every minute, the application takes a picture with the computer's inbuilt camera, uploads it to a server (the blogging site Tumblr), and projects the collection of portraits back to the viewer; that is, the application takes a picture and slowly fades in that photo, and then begins to cycle through older photos of previous users. As it is stated in the project's presentation video: "maybe if we could see what our computers see we would stare back at them differently? […] But most people just hit escape" (McDonald 2011).

Figure 2: People Staring at Computers by Kyle McDonald

Source: Screen shot from video.

As often as the video conferencing face is an attentive nodding listener, it is a seemingly impartial and motionless face (perhaps only the eyes are moving). Its habitus is not just a social quality, trained and caring for social appearance, perception, and prestige; its technique (the one we recognize across all users) is also that of the interface itself. Even when faced with its own mirror, it will inevitably assume a navigating attitude (and hit escape). In other words, we all, as users, look alike because we are navigating or watching the interface. It is probably safe to assume that many users are (whilst conferencing) occupied with checking emails, looking at documents, turning on or off a filter, configuring or navigating some other interface, and so on (and sometimes even playing games). Unless we share our screen, this is never quite visible to the other users; our face remains the same: mostly impartial and motionless.

The navigating face is a mediated face, but it is trained in a different manner than, say, the women of Paris in 1934 were trained to walk by Hollywood cinema (as Mauss claims). If the girls of Paris walk the same way as the women of New York, it may not only be that they imitate the walk, but also that the moving camera itself instigates a way of walking; and similarly, if all users carry the same face, it is not simply because we imitate each other, but because of the interface itself.

To explain a little further. The graphical user interface (GUI), including that of the video conferencing system, originates in a design ideology of user empowerment, with the potential of revolutionizing life in all its aspects. For instance, the

marketing video for the first Macintosh computer and graphical operating system in 1984 (directed by Ridley Scott) shows an Orwellian society where Big Brother speaks through a screen to a community of users (or slaves of the machine) and ends with a young athlete smashing her sledgehammer through the screen. With voiceover and text, the advertisement reads: "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984'" (Scott 1984). As noted by hypertext and literary scholar Gregory Ulmer, this vision compares to former cultural industries (such as Hollywood cinema), in that it expresses "the 'twin peaks' of American ideology"—realism (or media transparency) and individualism, now built into the computer as an apparatus of production (1991).

User empowerment comes about by making the medium disappear, not in the sense that it becomes invisible, but in the sense that it becomes a habitus (i.e., the acquired ability or a faculty of using an interface). Firstly, as highlighted by early scholars of "new media" (as it was once labeled around the turn of the Millennium), the GUI was built on recognizable procedures of former media and instruments (a page, a menu, a button) (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Manovich 2001). Secondly, as highlighted in the field of human-computer interaction, user behavior is not only directed by the objective of tasks (editing a page, selecting from a menu, etc.), but also by what, more broadly, makes sense to the user. One might seek to obtain a goal or task, but the actual activity follows a process of sense-making in which the relation between people and artifacts is highly situated: the meaning of actions originates in neither human nor artifact, but is distributed and dependent on the situation, where people in the everyday tend to use the opportunistic structures of the GUI (Rogers and Marshall 2017, 13, 17).

The navigating face is thus quite different than the face as a stamp of the user's identity, and it also produces a different kind of spectacle than that of the mass ornament (the stadium show, for instance). What one sees in *People Staring at Computers* is neither just the faces of the individual people, nor is it just an ornament of mediated faces in which one can mirror one's own belonging to a collective. In fact, when video conferencing, the navigating faces of other users often remain hidden behind other interfaces—the text document, the email, the spread sheet, and so on, that the user is navigating. This seems to suggest that the faciality of the navigating face is the product of a process of subjectivation—of a software design, the design of not only use, but also of an opportunistic and navigating user. What one sees in Kyle McDonald's work is a mirror of the opportunistic user, making sense of the situation, such as clicking "escape" when the interface behaves unexpectedly or in other ways trying to navigate the graphical user interface. In this sense, there is a certain irony in the (revolutionary) face of user empowerment and opportunism being stationary and motionless, and only distinguishable in its micro mechanics (the movements of the eyes and subtle muscular contractions that are almost invisible to human perception).

The rhetorical question hence is: does faciality and the techniques of the face *necessarily* have to do with the construction of an ego? Without entering into deeper philosophical discussions of faciality, the navigating face can also be understood differently, as a *milieu* or sur-face, resulting from a process of subjectivation. As noted by Michael Hardt in his reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, "The face is … a field or a milieu on which signification or subjectification can take place […] It is constructed so as to make certain meanings and subjectivities appear" (n.d.). The interface, as a technological vision of a new cultural platform industry built on realism and individualism, conjures up signification with signal, meaning with sur-face. Subsequently, one might say that the navigating face as a technique (opportunistically navigating the interface) is the appearance of the revolution of the graphical interface and the promises of a tech industry.

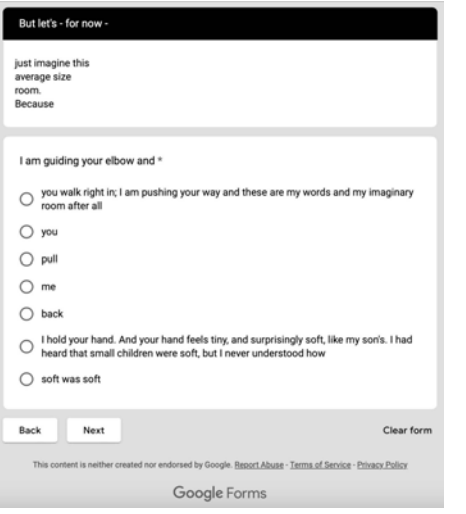
The Captured Face

The bodily (technical) process of facialization is also, as Hardt notes, close to Guy Debord's understanding of a spectacle (and perhaps Kracauer's, too): "like the spectacle, the face corresponds to or determines a form of rule" (Hardt n.d.). However, unlike the media spectacle, which in Debord's line of thinking mediates social relations by way of spectacular images and representations, the navigating face is itself a media spectacle. In other words, there is a correspondence between the corporate nature of video conferencing software and the bodily, corporeal, facial technique as the surface of this. This dimension of the techniques of the body is also the subject of Alexandra Saum-Pascual's *Corporate Poetry* from 2020. The work is, as expressed by Saum-Pascual, "an exploration into how corporate language related to that other corpora that is our body" (2020a).

The work consists of a number of rooms that repurposes corporate software such as Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, and also Zoom, "in order to domesticate the neoliberal intent of these data gathering technologies." In several ways, Saum-Pascual's work bears resemblance to that of early netart of the 1990s. In 1997 the pioneering netartist Alexei Shulgin launched the seminal "Form Art Competition" at the Austrian festival for electronic art, Ars Electronica. The competition submissions featured a number of works that used drop down menus, frames, text fields, radio buttons, and more to interrogate the (then) new formal language of the web (Andersen and Pold 2018, 46). By focusing on software for gathering user information, Saum-Pascual seeks to bring attention not only to the formal language itself, but to how it (since then) has become a language of an embodied reality. The formal language is the surface of a digital infrastructure "that is unintentionally brought into our homes whenever we participate in an online survey or take a video conferencing call" (Saum-Pascual). In the works, Saum-Pascual combines the utilitarian goals of

the software with the vulnerable situation of the user (especially during the Covid pandemic). For instance, "Room #1" is made using Google Forms. As a "room" it exemplifies an intimate space of motherhood, contrasted by a very formal language of software that seeks to inhabit the room. The work thereby draws our attention to how software and digital infrastructure's capture of personal data occupies "the domestic and personal space that poetry tends to inhabit."

Figure 3: Corporate Poetry, Room#1 by Alexandra Saum-Pascual, using Google Forms for poetry



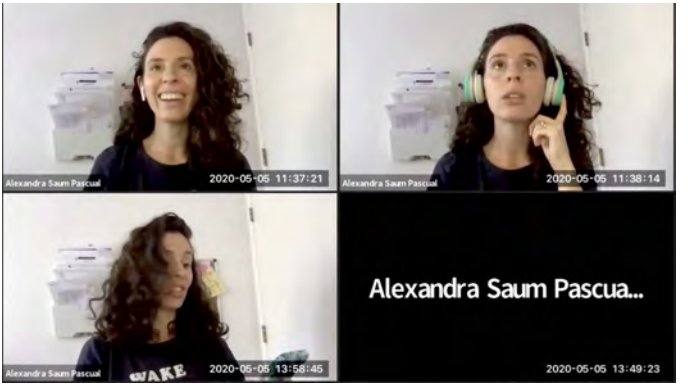
Source: Screen shot from poem.

The responsive text promises a sort of adaptation to one's intimate room (letting the reader's poetic choices create a poem about the intimacies of motherhood). By this, Saum-Pascual seems to disrupt how contemporary interfaces often build on the capture of intimate data, and how data feeds into a corporate network of interfaces. In this network, the textual inscription of the user, the corporeal and intimate, often implies an incomprehensible and invisible system where a dissolute calculation makes the interface appear smart and customized to the user's inner needs and desires. In this way, the formal structures and infrastructures of software interface come to inhabit the intimate and corporeal, but Saum-Pascual reverses this, and lets the corporeal inhabit the software interface.

In "Room #3," created in 2020 during the Covid pandemic, Saum-Pascual turns to how Zoom instigates a similar juxtaposition of the corporate (formal software infrastructures) and the corporeal (intimate space of the "room"). The work is an offline

website where "webness is stripped from the global network to be rooted, deeply, at home" (Saum-Pascual 2020b). In other words, to actually witness the work means that one has to visit Saum-Pascual (in itself a paradox, as the pandemic prevents most people from doing this). The offline website presents a series of recordings from Zoom where Saum-Pascual appears in different versions of herself. In the first window she enacts the routine of forgetting to turn on the sound; in the second, the routine of asking the host of the meeting to unmute herself; in the third, the routine of notifying the other that her camera is off (pointing at her ears); and in the fourth, as the one appearing only by name, forgetting to turn on the camera. The final gallery view then runs continuously in a loop.

Figure 4: Corporate Poetry, Room#3 where Alexandra Saum-Pascual performs different techniques of capture



Source: Screen shot from video.

The Zoom interface can be seen as emblematic for a contemporary condition built on the formal capture of the user. Again, referring back to the turn in HCI in the mid/late 1990s toward the users' activities as processes of sense-making, the technique of capture may itself be seen as meaningful to the user. As discussed by Philip E. Agre, the capture of data is part of "a tradition of applied representational work that has informed organizational practice the world over" (2003, 745). And "as human activities become intertwined with the mechanisms of computerized tracking, the notion of human interactions with a 'computer'— understood as a discrete, physically localized entity—begins to lose its force; in its place we encounter activity-systems that are thoroughly integrated with distributed computational processes" (Agre 2003, 743). As exemplified in Saum-Pascual's work, the formal graphical user interface of the survey (as well as other corporate software) provides the user with a

scheme for interaction, which is considered a meaningful activity—an extension of human activity through the interface.

As noted by Till A. Heilman, capture ("the systematic recording of activities and their 'grammarization' in data sets"), is today "the economic mechanism that drives the Internet in its current form" (2015, 40). Heilman compares this to a new kind of labor ("data labor"), built not on the exchange of labor for wage, but labor for "a 'space' of options for action opened up by media technology (which those affected consider useful, entertaining, or similar)" (2015, 43). It is the actions of this space, and increasingly more intimate actions, that are captured systematically in data sets, and which feeds into a corporate network of interfaces, providing the grounds for new intimate services. If "Room #1" stresses the capture of corporeal and intimate data, and urges us to consider the networked nature of this, and how corporeal data is used to generate customized and intelligent interfaces, "Room #3" further directs our attention toward the user herself. The four routines represent different common techniques of the Zoom face. As bodily techniques they are a mirror of how users act in front of a camera (smiling, gestures of "no sound" [pointing toward the headphones], surprised eyes, etc.), but they also expose the techniques of capture, vis-à-vis how software increasingly surfaces and *becomes* us, how it inhabits our bodies. The opportunism of the navigating user, trying to make sense, drives her not only toward the task of communicating with the other (which in the works seems reduced to nonsense), but toward an activity of capture, of being captured by the corporate interface, of making the face visible and audible as a bodily habitus. And, although this might seem as a mere process of capture by a camera and a microphone, it also involves a grammatization in data sets, used for, e.g., gaze-correction (as outlined by Rapoport and Tollman in this book) and more commonly filtering out backgrounds and adding facial filters (see also Andersen 2022).

In other words, the capture of the face is not only an extension of human activity through technology, but rather a structural condition for the use of the video conferencing interface, which again reflects a larger condition of corporate software that feeds on the inhabitation of the intimate and corporeal. As bodily habitus, the techniques of the face can, expressed in the line of Agre's thinking, be conceived as a surfacing grammar of action of the video conferencing system and a corporate business model of capture; and in itself, the technique embodies its own means of production.

Conclusion

"The face is politics," as put by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 181), and we have proposed that the proliferation of video conferencing software exemplifies how software not only enables new functionalities in our lives, but also intersects with the construc-

tion of subjects. Or, put differently, we have proposed that subjectivation is a process of faciality, deeply entangled with the proliferation of the interface. First and foremost, it is the interface that sets the face at the fore; not just in a traditional sense, as a face of someone appearing on a screen, a stamp of an identity, but as a technical object which has become an intrinsic part of interface culture. Following Marcel Mauss, considering the body and the face as a technical instrument and object allows us to understand how the video conferencing face takes part in a contemporary spectacle. On the one hand, this is a mediated spectacle where our face, and all the other faces appearing at our screens, can be considered a mass ornament, or an aesthetic reflection of platform capitalism's production processes: all the faces, acting in similar and even synchronous ways (nodding attentively, glaring into the screen while navigating, pointing to the headphones, or in other ways drawing attention to the interface's capture of the user), display a new organization of the masses, and how we all, as users, perform the production of the platform. On the other hand, the faces of this spectacle are not just mediated images on a screen (a radical disembodiment), they *are* us; it is how we (the users) surface as software and perform the platform as producing subjects.

We have also, as did Mauss with the body, suggested that there are different techniques of the face, or different ways of (sur)facing. These can be read in a number of artworks attempting to deconstruct the platformed production of the face and in how contemporary video conferencing software as facial software takes part in a process of subjectivation. Put differently, if a face as a technical object corresponds to or determines a form of rule that becomes and inhabits us, then as Deleuze and Guattari also point out, there is no choice but to begin with our faces: "If the face is a politics, dismantling the face is also a politics involving real becomings … know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight" (1987, 188). We believe that the artists presented in this article demonstrate this, by pointing out the production apparatus of the face—from how the corporate style conferencing interface moderates facial techniques in social interaction, to how its own techniques come to inhabit us, as techniques of navigation and capture.

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