

CPIC 2

Zacharek (2020) says that 2020 “is the story of a year you’ll never want to revisit” mainly due the ongoing main factor of the year: the pandemic, which has forced the world to shut down in order to stop the spread of the virus. However, as a result, lockdown has collectively changed our concept of time, and consequently our personalities, with Brackley (2020) stating that “extroverts were least likely to follow official guidance to stay at home” and Dr Gotz, a member of the Cambridge University psychology department and first author of the report (the name of this report is unknown), emphasises the fact that “extroverts are gregarious and sociable, and they found it especially hard to stay cooped up at home and not see other people” due to the fact that extroverts typically gain energy from being around other people, something that they haven’t been able to do because of lockdown, although they have been able to find a workaround by being able to catch up with friends and family over the internet, something that Natalie Bookchin’s *Mass Ornament* (2009) essentially focuses on, whereas Tehching Hsieh’s *Cage Piece* (1978-79) and *Time Clock Piece* (1980-81) focus on the idea of extreme isolation for long periods of time, with both pieces lasting for one year. In this essay, I will focus on how extroverts in particular have coped during lockdown, linking it with the contrasting work of Hsieh and Bookchin, and focusing on how the context of the works have changed because of lockdown, by essentially focusing on the idea of extreme isolation as well as connection during isolation.



Hsieh’s *Cage Piece* focuses on the idea of extreme isolation, something which most have had to deal with during lockdown, and according to The Guardian (Kalia, 2020) where lockdown has “increased the loneliness of many people” has essentially become a reality for everyone. Hsieh’s official website (n.d.) states that he “locked himself in an 11.5-by-9-by-8-foot wooden cage, furnished only with a wash basin, lights, a pail, and a single bed. During the year,

he did not allow himself to talk, to read, to write, or to listen to the radio and TV. ... His loftmate came daily to deliver food” and this is uncannily similar to staying in prison: one is locked up, only being allowed to do the very basics in order to survive and nothing else. Similarly, lockdown has felt like a prison to many, since they have been forced to stay put in one place (usually inside their homes), and not being able to physically meet up with anyone else, usually having to resort to socialising online, which has a “dissociating effect” (according to Brian Turner, a psychotherapist at the Counselling Directory, for The Guardian) on everyone since socialising is no longer spontaneous, but rather something that’s forced due to the fact that it’s online, and whilst one can visually see others on the other side, they’re not physically seeing them which essentially confuses the mind by “the lack of physical connection” caused by social distancing and isolation. Unlike the compromise to still be able to socialise with others in a non-physical place, Hsieh chooses to stay silent for the year by



barring all forms of communication, essentially becoming under stimulated and being forced to face boredom as a result, almost becoming a zoo animal by allowing visitors to come and have a look at not an animal in captive, but a human voluntarily in captive.



Whilst Hsieh chose to keep himself captive for a year (and consequently forgetting about the concept of time), he becomes hyper aware of the concept of time in his *Time Clock Piece* by punching a time clock “every hour on the hour”, according to his official website (n.d.), taking “a single picture of himself with a 16mm movie camera, which together yield a

6-minute film animation” in order to document the process, shaving his head before the piece so that “his growing hair reflects the passage of time”, resulting in the film essentially becoming a time lapse animation of the artist growing out his hair for a full year above anything else. According to Cummings (2017), these are “physically and mentally gruelling works” as well as it being a thing that requires a ridiculous amount of commitment in order to make the piece work, something that no

one seems to have the time for due to them actually having a life and things to do. In relation to lockdown, the concept of time goes out of the window since it becomes relative and it feels extremely long and short at the same time through the use of constantly watching the clock, waiting for the time to pass, reminiscent of a bored office worker waiting for 5pm to roll around so that they can get up and eagerly run out of the building, as though it’s burning down around them. However, Hsieh keeps track of time *all* the time, not allowing himself to sleep at all, let alone do anything that’s longer than one hour since he has no choice but to punch the clock every hour, to acknowledge the fact that an hour has passed and his hair has grown a bit. Additionally, the idea of punching the clock every hour eventually becomes repetitive and futile due to the fact that it’s a task that doesn’t add importance other than the fact that an insignificant fleeting moment has been recorded, and becomes overly predictable, almost like groundhog day where one goes and does the exact same things that they did yesterday, and something that they’ll

most likely do tomorrow as well, which in turn, essentially links to lockdown as the days blur into one and become a boring déjà vu that has happened countless times before and will essentially happen forever, with the concept of days, weeks, and months vanish into thin air, as the now so-called days simply become light and dark, something that Hsieh doesn’t have access to during his

ONE YEAR PERFORMANCE
by **SAM HSIEH**

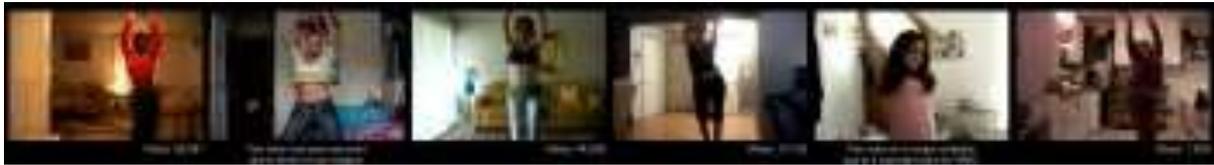
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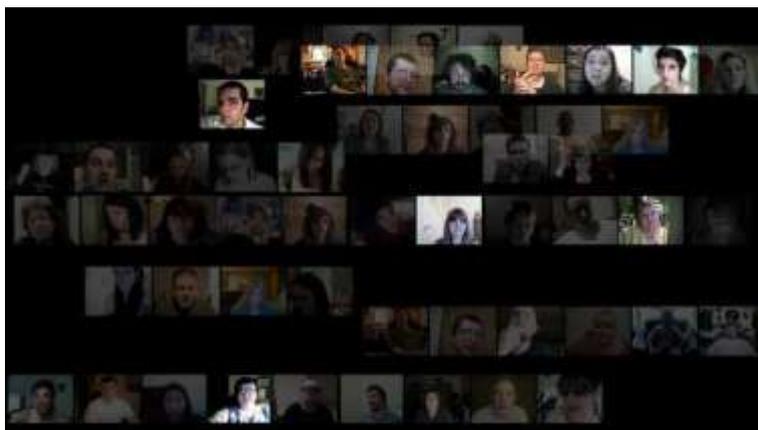
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performances due to the fact that he limits himself to a windowless room in order to deprive himself of any external stimuli as well as essential rest.



Whilst Hsieh focuses on extreme isolation, almost giving one the impression that he's a prisoner who's constantly serving time (which in turn, wastes his life away), Bookchin focuses on the polar opposite with *Mass Ornament*, which essentially focuses on connection during isolation, a thing which has been a staple of 2020, and has essentially changed the way that most live and work, with classes and happy hours, as well as general socialising, all happening online, in a non-physical place, with one being isolated but not alone as they can now catch up with anyone from anywhere in the world without the two physically being in the same place at the same time. "Place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity", according to Augé (2008), which essentially means that places exist through the use of words and passwords, which in turn means that these spaces exist within gated communities online, through the use of chatrooms, group chats, and different social networks, usually asking one to sign up before they can use it, with chat rooms and group chats offering one a

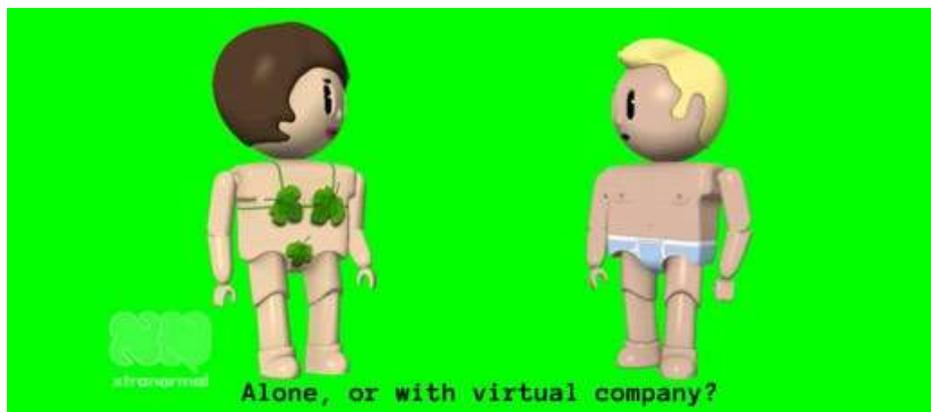


code in order to get in to them, almost like one giving their ID to a bouncer in order to get into a nightclub, or a child asking a friend to give a password in order to gain access to their makeshift blanket fort, which is essentially a basic form of gatekeeping, whether it happens in the real world or not. Bookchin's work is reminiscent to Virtual Happy Hours, with the happy hours happening over on the

internet rather than in the pub, giving one an opportunity to socialise with others from the comfort of their own home, and without everyone scrambling to get to a physical place in time, which is essentially how introverts and extroverts alike have coped during lockdown, by not only defeating the boredom and loneliness of isolation (how Hsieh managed to do it for one year at a time and not go insane, I'm not entirely sure), but also having to do their jobs, or attend classes, online in order to adapt to the fact that everyone has no choice but to stay at home in order to stop the spread of COVID. Additionally, Rafman (2015) is interested in "technology's [creative] social application", seeing how people can come together and not only create, but to also socialise with each other, essentially creating events online to still have a sense of human connection and interaction during a time where physical isolation is essential in order to save lives. However, Gronlund (2017) implies that "leisure time on the internet merges into work time on the internet" meaning that work and leisure essentially blend into one, and overlap each other like waves, with one constantly crashing into the other and invading each other's space, allowing for no distinction between the two, where she also mentions that "both are governed by the same experience of the rectangular screen, and its endless cycle of things to look at", where working and leisure essentially become one, united by

their experiences of staring at a screen, albeit a medium sized one for working and either a pocket-sized one or big one for leisure, with no physical distinction since everything's conveniently put into one place in order to help one become more productive, something that has essentially become a reality due to the pandemic, with the lack of a commute to the workplace and back (the time that allows one to adjust to work mode and back to leisure mode, thus making the distinction between the two), this then allows work time to seep deeply into leisure time as one is expected to be available 24/7, always on call, and can never therefore truly enjoy their time off as work is constantly gnawing at the back of their minds. Additionally, this lack of distinction between work and leisure also plays with the idea of one's privacy being invaded through the use of video conferencing, with others being able to see where (and how) they live, something evident with *Mass Ornament*, where the participants have to give up the privacy of the room that they're in (usually one in their own home, with other members of the household sometimes coming into the shot, unaware that they're being seen by others) for the sake of providing a visual cue to others that they exist somewhere over the internet, across the world.

In addition to the blurring of the boundaries between work time and leisure time, the boundaries of privacy and publicity have been blurred, essentially merging into one, starting off with celebrities and high profile public figures who then inspire influencers (who are either naturally extroverted, or put on a façade in order to be accepted into that narrative and into those social circles), who in turn inspire their followers, who essentially inspire their friends and acquaintances, until that inspiration trickles down to the average office worker or student during a pandemic and an era where the world faces the introverts, encouraging everyone to adapt to their lifestyles by staying in and only going out when they absolutely have to; what once was private is no longer private, whether one has no choice but to work from home (essentially giving up the privacy and comfort of their own home for



the sake of doing their job), or if they simply want to show others what they've been up to by posting it online for all to see. Gronlund also discusses "the enormity of the shift of making our private lives public",

and it goes to show how many aren't prepared for this shift, especially with people who are typically reserved and tend to keep themselves to themselves, above everyone else, along with how this translates into this new reality of a potential post-covid hellscape where everything rolls into one big rigmarole and becomes indistinguishable from each other, essentially paving the way for a brand new era where everything is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, forcing others to slowly stay in one place since everything's there right in front of them, with no need to venture out into the open, and essentially sleeping in their workplaces, or rather their workplaces barging in to their bedrooms, demanding to be looked after 24/7. Additionally, in her animation *My Best Thing*, Stark (2011) poses the question, asking whether one is alone, or with virtual company, which makes one wonder whether they are truly alone in a hyper-connected world, something that the hypothetical character in the prologue of Augé's *Non-Places* would "for a few hours ... be alone at last" by actively cutting out all distractions due to being high up in the sky, something which can't really be avoided

anywhere now, even on a plane; the fact that one is constantly expected to be available at all times, potentially always being on call, also adds to this inquisitive wonderment of whether one is truly alone, or whether they're constantly surrounded with virtual company, most of which are practically just a stone's throw away, because although they aren't physically there, they still take up one's time and energy, albeit more energy as they also have to focus their attention on things that they usually don't take note of in the public sphere, such as body language, as well as having to (quiet often) deal with bad internet connections on either side of the conversation, again, something that they don't even have to deal with in the real world, which essentially distorts one's perspective of how a conversation should go now that it's no longer spontaneous, but rather, something that feels forced and has a certain aura about it that makes the conversation feel a bit more like a job interview than a casual conversation since both parties have to think of what to say to each other, knowing that the time is fairly limited, as well as feeling obliged to fill the silence with things to say in order to avoid wasting the other party's time for they could be doing something else.

So, I have looked at three works by two contrasting artists, all of them made way before 2020, with Hsieh's works taking place in the late 1970's and early 1980's, focusing on the idea of extreme isolation and loneliness, something that most people have had to deal with, and on the flipside, Bookchin's work taking place in 2009, focusing on the idea of connection during isolation, something that everyone has had no choice but to use in order adapt to these situations so that they can go about their daily lives as well as still having that sense of human interaction in order to stay sane and avoid loneliness, and as a result, these works have been recontextualised and reinterpreted to reflect the lockdown lifestyle (a universal experience that everyone has had to deal with) since these have reflected a potentially universal lockdown experience.

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