LETTERS FROM A WINDOW

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STRUCTURE

1. Introduction to the Project

2.Artistic Outcome: Process of a Film

2. Project Research

3. Conclusion

1.Introduction to the Project

Letters from a Window is an *epistolary film project* which bases on the researches of communication and surveillance studies while investigating the practice of personal letter writing.

The project examines the use of letters in an *epistolary film* which is a subgenre of narrative cinema where a letter is an object of cinematic spectacle and reflection. An epistolary form is mainly a constitution of letters, although diary entries can become epistolary elements as well.

To explore today's communication systems and the phenomenons which occurred within the current COVID-19 Crisis such as: social distancing, increasing use of digital mediums and technology, new control and surveillance structures, are the main motivations on the formation of the project.

The aftermath of the research process and project actions is a short film which is a collaborative composition of Still Photography, Sound and Poetry.

With the use of a half fictional/half documentary approach, the film aims to mirror the societal changes and conditions created within the crisis through the fragments of personal letters written and collected during the project process.

Further, the film aims to open up discussions on changing aspects of human behavior and psychology under pressures of contemporary restructuring of society and environment, on both local and global scales.

The project focuses on alternative models of self-expression in the digital age and tries to maintain the analogue substitute while analyzing the Letter as a mode of communication. The aim is to make an emphasis on the importance of sustaining a body-based culture to be able to resist the fast disappearance of physical and haptic qualities. But why?

Within the rising phenomenon of digitalisation, almost everything has become consumable on the internet. Whether it is streaming films and music, buying clothes, ordering food or reading a book, having a lecture, communicating with a relative, it has become highly dependent on the online services.

Long-Distance Society

As an opinion, the constant calls "Do not touch!" mean nothing less than that all social forms are affected by the Coronavirus. The constant call "Do not come closer!" adorns the entrance to the long-distance society in a prognostic way. All online services, from ordering goods to health checks, have already shown ways of avoiding physical contact. The flow of traffic becomes the flow of signs and massive amounts of information. We drive, drive, drive not only on the highway, but send signals on the electronic highway. Do those changing elements of societal structures leading culture to become an online paradise? Due to its virality, does the virus force culture to migrate faster than yesterday into a virtual world? It's an important step for increasing the power of abstraction and symbolization of humans in a digital language.

In our opinion, we have the opportunity for fundamental reforms of our economic, social and cultural systems in this time of outbreak. Our world can be formed differently and with the re-emphasise which will put on the lost and obsolescent art of writing letters, we can question our common present as well as the images of future.

We can always tell that a cultural form is dying when people start making a point of celebrating it, like it used to be with the technological objects such as: books, typewriters, vinyl records, polaroids etc. as it always survived because a lot of people still appreciate the qualities of the analogue medium.

So *why* take the time to write a heartfelt letter when you can put your thoughts into a few brief sentences, often incomplete and send it off into the atmosphere of the internet?

1.1. Project Participants and Motivations

The members of the project *Letters from a Window* come from different cultural and academic backgrounds and participate in the project in a way that they can put their own interest areas. The project has two main interrelated phases which are: research and practice, and the making of the artistic film.

The conceptualisation of the project, the schematisation, management and narration of the artistic practice belongs to Ilkin Beste Cirak, who is an urban planner, researcher and an artist. In scope of her Project "Letters from a Window", she researches the qualities of Letters, and critiques the communication models configuring the analogue and digital mediums without making a comparison. She has passion for the practice of writing and receiving letters as well as poetic expression in literary forms. The conceptualisation and realisation of the artistic output (Film) which bases on the researches of Surveillance,

Digital and Analogue Culture, Literature and Language, are initiated, written and performed by herself.

The conceptual research and initial practices started and evolved with project participants, who are Yue Hu and Neslihan Kiran. Followingly, the artistic output, the film: **Letters from a Window,** which is a collaborative work of Nigel Gavus and Ilkin Beste Cirak, is based on the main project practice, on their personal letters and correspondences.

The participants who had different interest areas and topics to search for, put different amounts of effort on different phases of the project process related to their sub-subjects and study fields.

Interests and Areas

Yue Hu is an artist, landscape designer, and urban researcher based in Vienna. In the project "Letters from a Window", she researches the language as a "Signifié" in the context of the project. Language as a medium of communication getting more sensitive in COVID-19 situation. The practice of the project leads her to rethink the significance of language in the current society of transformation.

Neslihan Kiran is a native speaking Austrian with Turkish roots. Her first language is german, and her mother-tongue is Turkish. Raising up as a bilingual allows her to form an expression in her writings through different languages. Her work areas are Sociology, Architecture and Art and at the points where they intersect. Her main interest is in the study of surveillance and the effect of surveillance on human behavior. In the project, she studied the transformations of surveillance in the light of history, media and digitalization. Her research interest was the communication and interaction of people under the effect of digital surveillance. She wrote letters in the following three languages: German, English and Turkish.

Nigel Gavus, born in Graz, 1992. He studied at the Friedl Kubelka School for Independent Film and currently studies at Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He works as a filmmaker and photographer, in which he primarily dedicates himself to analog film. His main interests in the film-collaboration „Letters from a Window" are the relationship between poetry and cinema as well as the reflection and discovery through one's own memory. Working with a practitioner/performer who has a different artistic background is essentially interesting for his working process on the film.

1.2.Research Process and Actions

The artistic research and practice process is based on the occasion of writing letters to vitalize a "wireless" and surveillance-free communication model between the project members. Through the method that was experienced in the project, it was possible to re-create a model of communication which is relatively independent of highly developed technological devices, applications, control and censorship mechanisms.

The content of epistolary sharing, what can be communicated through letters, differ from the digitally shared ones in various aspects: the degree of intimacy, privacy and authenticity of the message. The message can be personal and emotional, and can appear in the form of a diary excerpt.

In the form of correspondence, letters contain many personal and unique elements which create space for self-expression and allow the receiver to acknowledge the writer with her ultimate characteristics. The profile of an individual created within a personal letter is an identical, emotionally loaded and a direct one. The handwriting, the choice of paper and pen, the style and form, the language, the (invisible) sound of the text were all unique elements both for the writer to think and form and the receiver to obtain and investigate.

The aim of the research process was to explore the qualities of Letters and the act of correspondence within the meta-layer of surveillance studies in the Digital Age which can be re-emphasized and enhanced. Through the practice it was achieved to overcome the obstacle „social distancing" to a certain extent and cross the predetermined border between private and public, between different languages.

The research process of the project bases on the exploration and practice of personal letter writing to constitute surveillance-free communication. During the evaluation process of the experiments, we reached out various understandings and knowledge regarding the potentials of letters and their auratic characteristics. The configurations needed to be externalized with another medium, another tool that can demonstrate and indicate the glimpses of these multidimensional aspects, explorations and statements; comprehensively and appropriately, to get the audience in a voyage of an interior world narrated by a letter.

1.3. Project Practice and Experiment

The common initial practice between project members was started with writing letters to each other over the times of the COVID19 crisis, considering the medium -letter- as a

surveillance-free space for discussions. During the practice, the diaristic and artistic potential of *letters* occurred significantly to elaborate later.

The choice of portraying personal worlds and academic works through the art of correspondence was depending on the following argumentation: *letters give space for more intimate sharing within their physical qualities and provide a personal space for self-expression while emancipating the privacy aspect.*

The language of the letters appeared in various languages which are primary and secondary tongues of project members: English, Turkish, German, Chinese.

1.3.1. Window Actions

Practically, the initial project action was to write letters to each other and drop them off from the windows of a high rise apartment which we accommodate. Whether it is a three storey apartment or a highrise building we expected the letter to reach our friend who stands on the street, for that we needed to discover creative methods to make the paper-envelope reach the ground level. In that case, the force of gravity was our mean channel to communicate. The wind, for example, was one of the unpredictables and so a playful element for the act.

What was the reason behind the window acts?

The **social distancing** during the total lockdown experience was to prevent society to interact with each other, to control and to discipline the Coronavirus. All of a sudden, all social relations and all the physical contacts needed to be reduced to the minimum degree, in that case even to zero. The ideas and notions such as: anyone can be a spreader, or anyone could be infected by someone, others can be dangerous, possessed in daily-life with thoughts, and legitimized the disappearance of social contact. The fear of another being spread faster than the virus itself.

The citizens were exposed to experience a totally new urban scene during the quarantine process. The new restrictions and prohibitions reformed social, economical or institutional structures. The physical mobility of humans, goods, ideas, and commerce was limited and confined and they fastly transformed into a digital language, migrated into virtual spaces. The disembodiment of daily routines, from daily consumption to attending a lecture in university, adopted itself to online services to keep on being present. The new restructurings according to **public-health related precautions**, lead to the socially common fear of physical contact; individuals higher their degrees of isolation and safety regulations in their **private bubbles** which are rooms or apartments embedded in urban city blocks.

In such a condition, the question of what and how we can reach out to another person for the social need of communication emerged in the realm of dependency on smartphones or technological devices such as personal computers as main modes to communicate. Fear of being alone, fear of being infected, fear of isolation, urged the need for communication and increased the need of **being connected through signals and networks.** Thanks to the technology and high-resolution screen and internet qualities, it was seemingly very easy to invite our relatives to our private rooms and being invited to their private spaces. At one hand that opportunity decreased the fear of isolation, on the other hand deepened the dependency on online sources and services.

Our aim with the window actions was to decrease those dependencies on digital services on communicating with each other and lower the degrees of mediation of our messages. We did not use the postal service to send our letters but we became the post carriers ourselves for each other's letters. This body-based experimentation increased the haptic quality of the performance while putting the emphasis on a directly visible receiver. The actions encouraged each other by showing physical solidarity by being present on the street for a friends letter down below her window.

In the context of total lockdowns when no physical touch is almost agreeable, it is highly possible to consider *the window actions* as rebellious acts. Writing as an act of revolt is a historical and a rooted theoretical discussion which is not elaborated yet as a direct input for the project.

During the window actions, the basic arrangements like time and date settings were arranged by digital mediums, mainly by emails and text messages. To clarify it one more time it should be stated that the project is not narrating a complete refusal of any technological service or not ignoring the efficiency of digital devices but tries to understand the backstages of digital mediums and vary the channels through its research which can create alternative practices.

Reflecting on the Window Act
from Neslihan Kiran

*In the project **Letters from a window**, the communication through letters was two-sided: Due to the circumstances of the virus Covid19, "social distance" and new forms of regulations were implemented in interpersonal relationships, meetings and interactions in the society. Through these common and shared feelings of isolation and loneliness, we felt a deprivation of freedom and wanted to start writing about those feelings and observations to each other.*

On the one hand, it was a relief expressing our feelings on a piece of paper which is repressed through the digital mediums of communication. The form of communication we chose to use was something not new but almost forgotten as a daily practice; writing, sending and receiving letters.

On the other side, the exchange process of the letter was influenced by the "social distance"-regulations of physical presence and for the correspondence, we insisted upon physical presence because of the feelings of isolation and loneliness. We felt like criminals doing it, even though the actions were innocent in the light of the criminal law.

In the case of correspondence, the gaze during the exchange of the letter was a strong moment of the communication process. The gaze is two-way: From the window of a building and the street level, the "social distance" was maintained and the writer sent the letter from the window to the reader on the street. The interplay between the gaze of each other and the communication with letters created the process of correspondence.

1.3.2. Practice of the Diary Writing
a diaristic contribution from Yue Hu

Text is an important element in the process of writing a diary. Diary writing as a practice part in the project, which is delivered to team members as letters. We are eager to know and communicate to each other. The beginning of the diary is an email about a decision from the university. The university was officially closed due to COVID-19. From that moment on, We are three trapped in virtual communication and we want to escape from there.

On the top floor of the apartment in the third district of Vienna, I dropped the letter from the sixth floor. Beste looked up to me and caught it. I lay on the window, and the wind took part of the words away. I watched Beste leave, leaving with the letter.

„Signifié" in „I miss you"

12.4.2020
Vienna

Two days left ...

Nesi, ich vermisse dich,
Beste, Seni özledim,
Cosima, tu me manques,
S8D. I miss you,
Vienna, 我想你~.

When I write a diary, I can only express the image of my inner thighs in the words, whether in Chinese, English, German, French, or Turkish. "我想你", "I miss you", "Ich vermisse dich", "Tu me manques.", "Seni özledim". People express their individual psychological activities, not a specific behavior itself. The psychological image of this behavior comes from our past.

"我想你" originated from the memory of childhood. This kind of thing that is deeply engraved in my mind and cannot be taken away. It's like drawing the first point on a piece of white paper. This kind of mark cannot be washed away. After years of learning, it has become my mother tongue.

"Ich vermisse dich" is a new language learned in adulthood. It contains the original memory like any new thing, like cheese, like Christmas wine.

"I miss you" is a kind of language in memory between the mother tongue and German. It is a kind of difference between the introverted Chinese culture and the extroverted American culture. It reminds people of Chinese how hard it is to say "I miss you" to each other. It is a bridge between two different personalities and two different cultures.

I received a letter from a Turkish friend. The Turkish is a wonderful image for me, which does not come from the text itself, but from the combination of strokes, small phonetic

symbols, and arrangement of words. An unknown language, a kind of cultural and poetic transmission across the text itself creates an extremely romantic process without translation.

However, when "seni ozledim" turned into "Tu me manques", French chanson suddenly rise in my mind. It was an intimate emotion, an expectation of the desired place. It does not mean the country and language, it is the fragrance of French lime blossom, the cool breeze by the canal of Saint Martin in early summer. I can not deal with the romance of La Tour Eiffel, or of L'Arc de Triomphe. But I am totally falling in love with the analysis of photography by Roland Barthes or Marc Augé in Paris metro or "objet petit a theory by Jacques Lacan. Oh! and my favorite Paul Cézanne! Pierre Bonnard and Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin! The romance of French is never shown in the architectures, they are always shown in the brain of philosophers, artists, psychologists, etc. Brainy is romance!

„I miss you" in the process of translation, what is lost is not only the poetry as Forster said but also a part of ourselves. Fortunately, we also get another „Signifié" in this process. This refers to the psychological layer. "I miss you" has become a symbol in different translation languages. A symbol representing different psychological periods of our life, a symbol implied a period of our past experience. We look for identification and comfort in our past experience. It is so different from everyone, but it is so same. The same thing is that the meaning of the reference is not only the meaning of the text itself but also the „past image" of each of us.

1.4. Artistic Outcome: Creation Process of the Film

Personal letters which are addressed by project participants and written in various languages have been collected during the project process. Those letters were unique and formed with the reciprocal rules of trust. The project experiment formed a specific type of correspondence due to the societal conditions of their time in which they had written.

What could be the artistic re-interpretation of a personal letter?

The film as an artistic extension of the research phase, exports the potential of letters and tries to add another layer on the research within the visualization of a personal letter. What does a letter consist of and what could it transfer to a certain recipient? Thanks to the collaboration of literature and photography, the audience can become recipients of a personal letter, which translated into the language of film.

What personal letters can transfer and what could be made out of them?

The film should be observed as a continuous method of the research on letters, beside the fact that it is an artistic outcome. The exploration of letters continues with the film medium which can give a contextual setting and freedom to play in between layers which were juxtaposed. Conceptual images, sound, voice, comprehension of time and history, lead the audience to a subjective memory of the writer. The exploration of a certain letter through the camera, gives us the chance to visualize and document the artistic discoveries of the project with multiple dimensions and expend the research set on the topic in another field of study and practice.

The textual material which is presented in the outcome (film) bases on actual subjects and content of the letters which are shared in between the project participants during the times of total lock-down. The fragments selected to narrate the film are based on the excerpts of letters written by Ilkin Beste Cirak. For the filmic structure, the excerpts were re-conceptualized to form a harmonic narrative. The poetic intention, sound and rhythm were tried to be kept.

The base narrative of the film is written and performed in Turkish, which is a subjective poem of a woman who experiences forms of isolation and the realm of alienation in the COVID19 Crisis.

The still images that were used in the body of the film were started to be captured by Nigel Gavus in the context of the city of Vienna aiming to portray the urban ground. His approach on the collection of images was documentaristic and he used a diaristic methodology. At the same time, he was writing and receiving letters within the project and printed photos were his personal language in his letters.

In other words, the film is created to tell the story of today, observed and experienced by an individual; and contemplate the genre of letter to form the base narrative in specific languages: Poetry and Film. Through the usage of these languages, the aim is to document the "zeitgeist" and transmit the information of the present to the future.

Can we transmit the knowledge and experience of today, which will become a part of history with the collaboration of Letters and Film?

1.4.1. Film Structure

The film consists of two overlapping layers: the inside world, a woman who reflects on her feelings and emotions in the form of a personal letter and the outside world in which the filmmaker portrays the city from the beginning of the current crisis.

The letter will be followed by a montage of Still-Images, while the voice of its writer narrates us subjectively to her inner space in her primary language. The vivid voice invites

us to a room where she was isolated in the times of the lockdown, to unbutton a psychology in that certain space.

What happened in those rooms of high rise city blocks, what lingered in the unique rooms of our minds under the effects of isolation? How does the psyche and body absorb and reflect on the conditions of lockdown when our environments are kept on being restructured outside?
How does the projection of the outside world apply to an interior?

Through the art of correspondence it is possible to give certain answers to those questions. The letters collected and analyzed during the project process were including stories, daily struggles and real-life excerpts from their writers. Letters can lead us to a relatively indirect stage to observe an individual's inner life and everyday dilemmas, as well as choices, her general attitudes and thoughts, her ideology, preferences, habits, routines etc.

In the filmic structure, the aim is not to put any vulnerability but to reflect the experiences and psychology of an individual who is far away from her home. In certain circumstances the borders, for instance, can gain new meanings and definitions. Thanks to the art of correspondence, we have the ability to trace a personal letter and to translate it into another language; especially, when it is believed that a letter can create a common value for society, can take place in the common memory of mankind, considering the historical and archival potential that it contains.

1.4.2. Subject and Content of the Film

The changing understanding and practices of the environment, city structures, modes of production, consumption and ways of communication are leading us to think about their reformations. How are those phenomenons being reshaped and by whom? What are the effects and what kind of circumstances are waiting for us in the future?

The current crisis appears as a health-threatening factor which proceeds through fear and spreads vastly in atmospheres of apprehension. Are we confronted with a social-virus, which affects the dynamics of everyday life to prepare us for a new dimension? The situation can be seen as the peak of something rising for quite a long time: an inevitable result of neoliberal and capitalistic ideologies and their influences on both local and global levels.

In the times of total lockdown, the declarations of power figures such as: „Do not touch", "Do not come closer!", „Stay at Home", „Do not meet anyone" refers to a long-distance sterilized screen society from a prognostic perspective. Power has the ability to shape the way how society thinks and behaves, with tools used as control mechanisms, restrictions

and regulations. Digitalisation, in this case, can be one of the strongest instruments to manipulate and to implant ideas or to change.

All services, from daily consumption of goods, to health checks, have already shown ways of avoiding physical contact. In this environment, how and where do we get the knowledge needed when we are not allowed to get in touch with other beings or the outside world? The online mediums provided on technological devices are here to overcome our problems occurring in distanced life, but where exactly our personal information goes and there turns into data? Doesn't it refer to an alienated life?

We extract these arguments from a space of networks in the age of information, where societal relations and society itself are turning into algorithms. This space emancipates the glory of the machine, automatization and digitalization; not freedom of body, ideas or movements which belong more to humans.

The network space here is considered as an integrated communication system run by devices such as computers, smartphones, GPSs, surveillance cameras, etc. Those technologies were made identifiable often in order to obtain the data of users.

Are the lockdowns enhancing our dependency on digital instruments when reducing and flattening books, goods, emotions, relations on screen surfaces?

Is the usage of digital services increasing the capacity of surveillance?

Can letters be possible escapes from surveilled spaces?

1.4.3. Artistic Choices and Aesthetics of the Film

The film focuses on creating a dialogical aesthetics with the main textual material based on the aspects of correspondences. While consisting the aura of its time and space within the physicality, it still continues to carry the paradox. The dialogue expected in correspondence can be an imagined one, it is not always a fact that a letter is written regarding a need for an answer. A letter can emerge as a spectacle that the sender in fact can never know if the message has reached the addressed or not. In that case, the film plays with that mystery, it can be an invitation to a specific person for correspondence, or it is just a self-expressive material for externalisation. Although, regarding a letter which is represented in a film and sent through that filmic window, the receiver can be any spectator who will encounter with the work.

The visual track consists of many different overlapping layers, mainly focusing on still photographs in black-and-white, connected by straight cuts and a montage of sounds, that

are not always appearing to be synchronized with the footage. The editing rhythms and variations of camera positions are unconventional, playful and not primarily following the „cinematic rules" of filmmaking. With the use of still images, it has also been easier to set a certain setting, as it is needed, to create this certain feeling throughout the whole visualization of the letter.

The lack of color helps to go to another time, as it takes a level of information away from the audience. It extracts the viewer from reality. In this case, it is the story of a woman, who is explaining how the world is getting less and less familiar throughout this letter. The black-and-white images help us to alienate the audience from the landscapes and city structures. Also, those images are being used for the fragmentation of memory or rather the thoughts of the woman.

The main motivation is the desire to make a film in that we can explore the nature of film and poetry, which consists not only of a specific rhyme, color or rhythm, but also has the approach to experience emotional qualities of a letter. A poetic film creates a visible or auditory form for something that is invisible, which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of a situation. It is concerned with its qualities and its depth, in a sense, not what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means.

The notion and the style of the film relates to the fears of the protagonist. The environment of the woman in the film is shaping her way of thinking, beside her thoughts are shaping the world she is living in. Something has separated her from life and she needs to get it back by all means possible, with the hope of putting her emotions in a sensual form of a letter. Nothing can stop her, as the feeling of alienation from life results in a call from nature. She feels a desire to observe and document her life, as the film moves somewhere in the space between past and present. She is the face of time and appears like a shadow in the world where she struggles to fit in.

It is a film between generations and it becomes visible only to disappear again. The visual time moves differently throughout the film while the commentary of the letter remains a constant speed. The multiple sound-layers are designed to melt into each other. The combination of photographs and commentary create a poetic and cinematic experience which is something other than only an autobiographical or documentaristic film project.

What remains unexplained, is how a fiction of the past can go into something that can represent the past. The woman character of the film is trapped in the drama of memory, whose whole experience is to overcome the situation that occurred with Covid-19. For her, the only solution is the memory of love, which makes her a innocent character of the film.

2. Research

The production of the artistic output film **Letters from a Window** grounds on the researches of Communication, Telecommunication and Elements, Letters in History, Genres and Aspects of Letters, Surveillance History and Digital Surveillance Studies. Those researches were aimed to draw a pathway to understand the importance of Letters as an analogue communication medium and beyond to put emphasis on the potentials of Letters as tools which can be used today for communion and sharings. The aim is not to create a direct influence on the audience to write and demand to receive letters; but to encourage them on that certain mode of communication, on its qualities, which are unique to the genre.

The Letter experiment experienced within the scheme of the project has opened its windows to create a controversial impact on today's fast, virtualized and controlled digital communication atmospheres. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be stated that the project critique is not on the developing technology or on technological achievements. The changes which follow the technological revolutions are merely foreseeable. However, it is always good and will be good to look back to the past, learn from it and if necessary to unlearn certain practices or to question them.

2.1. Brief Overview of Telecommunication

The Shift in Technology

From smoke signals to carrier pigeons, newspapers etched in stone to the rise. The way we communicate with each other has changed significantly over time thanks to advancements in technology. People have been communicating with each other long-distance for a long time.

Smoke signals are the oldest form of visual communication. Simplistic in design and execution, they were first used in 200 BC to send messages along the Great Wall of China. In 150 BC, Greek Historian Polybius devised a system of smoke signals that were visual representations of the alphabet. This meant that messages could easily be sent by holding sets of torchers in pairs.

Pigeon Carries were first used in the 12th century, when AD Sultan Nur-ed-din built pigeon lofts and dovecotes in Cairo and Damascus, where pigeons were used to carry messages from Egypt to Iraq. This extensive communication system, which used pigeons to link cities hundreds of kilometers apart, is recognized as the first organized pigeon messaging service of its kind. Pigeons also played a pivotal part in both WWI and WWII, unerringly delivering vital messages that helped to save the lives of thousands of civilians and combatants alike.

With the telegraph, there was now an outdated communication system created, that transmitted electric signals over wires from location to location that translated into a message. In 1844, Samuel Morse sent his first telegraph message, from Washington D.C. to Baltimore Maryland. While the 21st Century saw the death of the telegraph, there's no doubt it laid the groundwork for the communications revolution: speed and complexity of signals led to the occurrence of telephone, fax machine and internet.

Before the cellular phone, there existed these things called landlines. Most households had one from the 1950s onwards, and only one person could make a call at a time. A time when your privacy was dependent on how long your home-phone cord was, and when the cost of calling a mobile phone was not affordable.

Finally, in 1981, the first mobile phone was invented and with that, a new system was built years later, called SMS (Short Message Service). Texting or SMS is a method of communication that sends text between cellphones - or from a PC or handheld to a cell phone. The "short" part comes from the maximum size of the text messages: 160 characters (letters, numbers or symbols in the Latin alphabet). Like any new technology, initial growth for SMS was slow. The average American user sent 0.4 texts per month in 1995. Gradually, phones and networks adapted to better accommodate SMS. In 1999, texts could finally be exchanged between different networks, which increased its usefulness.

By 2000, the average number of text messages sent increased to 35 a month per person. Till today SMS are being used daily, but slowly start to disappear because of the use of internet communication.

Smartphones advanced, and in 2007, Apple introduced the iPhone, notable for its multi-touch interface and virtual keyboard. Virtual keyboards had an automatic spell check and correction, predictive text technology, and the ability to learn new words. The keys were larger and the keyboard adapts to the phone's width based on landscape or vertical orientation.

Today, virtual keyboards have become a standard feature for smartphones. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter adopted the short character format, which has likely helped the text message phenomenon. We have learned to be more concise and character-conscious.

Social media, Chat, E-Mail, Skype and other forms of online communication have broadened options outside of just text messaging. But most of these options require data. Text messaging became a universal feature for phones. (cf. Erickson, 2012)

2.2. An Overview of Theory of Telecommunication

For the post-industrial media-based revolution, which is crucial for the 21st century, the separation of messenger and message applies. Until the invention of telegraphy, fax and telephone, a message could only be brought and transmitted with the help of a messenger, more precisely with the body of a messenger except the fire signals.

Be it a pigeon, a horse, a rider, a carriage, an airplane, a railway, it always took a messenger to deliver a message. With the telegram and the Morse code, strings and messages could be transmitted disembodied for the first time.

The body of the transmitter remained in place, the message was transmitted by cable, and the receiver in the other location was able to process the information. This cable-like telecommunications (telegraphy, telephony, fax) was, after the discovery of electromagnetic waves, converted into wireless communication (radio, television) in the 20th century, into an infosphere that enveloped the globe.

The moment that information could travel alone, a body-based local society turned into a long-distance society. Every technology, whether car or telephone, serves to overcome distance (Greek word *tele*). We have been living in a long-distance telecommunications society for more than a hundred years, but the world has not yet made this change. Body-based rituals of the local society should still exist parallel to the virtual long-distance society to maintain the quality of the physical or so-called "analogue mediums".

2.3. Elements

Communication between people as dissemination and expression of ideas, information, views, facts, circumstances and knowledge; has always been an ever-changing phenomenon within time and the establishments of new modes of technologies, shifts in political and economic systems and power mechanisms. However, the main question was always the same and simple: What is being communicated over space and time and how is it being communicated?

Regarding the elements of communication, the first question refers to **the message** which can be a concept, information, or statement that is sent in a verbal, written, recorded, or visual form to a certain recipient. Followingly the second question indicates the understanding of **the channel**. (cf. Shannon,1948: P. 2) For Shannon, the channel is *"merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to a receiver."* (Shannon,1948: P. 2)

In that sense, a message appears as a necessity to be communicated through a channel from one person to another. Meanwhile, a channel drags us to think of a tool which is needed for any kind of dissemination or transfer.

Besides the message and the channel, the communication theory composed around other basic elements. Those are source, sender, receiver and destination. Shannon defines the *"information source"* with these words: *"it produces a message or sequence of messages to be communicated to the receiving terminal."* (Shannon,1948: P. 2)

Also according to her, the *sender* is the element which points out the *"transmitter"*, *"operates on the message in some way to produce a signal suitable for transmission over the channel."* (Shannon,1948: P. 2)

The receiver for her, *"performs the inverse operation of that done by the transmitter, reconstructing the message from the signal."*, as well as *the destination* is *"the person (or thing) for whom the message is intended".*(Shannon,1948: P. 2)

Even though the theory of Shannon is explained and developed in the language of mathematics, it is applicable both for the understanding of how human communication evolves and how information/data transfer applies in machines.

How could it be possible to read these elements in our action?

The Channel: Letter

The Message: a poem, a diary excerpt, a sketch, a passage from an academic essay, a candy package, a handmade face mask, photographs, leaves, film materials, sounds...

The Receiver: Beste, Neslihan, Yue, Nigel

The Sender: Nigel, Neslihan, Yue, Beste

2.4. A Brief Overview to Letter Writing

Historically, letters have existed from the time of ancient India, ancient Egypt, and Sumer, through Rome, Greece, and China, up to the present day. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, letters were used to self-educate. Letters were a way to practice critical reading, self-expressive writing, polemical writing and also exchange ideas with like-minded others. For some people, letters were seen as a written performance. For others, it was not only seen as a performance but also as a way of communication and a method of gaining feedback. Archives of correspondence, whether for personal or business reasons, serve as primary sources for historians. At certain times, the writing of letters has risen to be an art form and a genre of literature.

Each invention, development or revolutionary step taken in the field of communication technologies, lead to increasing changes in time and space, as well as their perception,

understanding and requirements by society. Within a constant restructuring of time and space, societies always need to and tend to adopt more practical and convenient means of communication in terms of catching up with the speed of time.

Letters have been written to bridge spatial distances, to build networks and to strengthen relationships. Historians have always appreciated letters as valuable sources, literary historians have investigated their literary qualities. Meantime scholars consider letter writing as an important socio-cultural praxis, exploring letters as an important means of communication regarding their historical and cultural values. (cf. Schulte; Tippelskirch, 2004: P. 5)

2.5. Aspects of Letters

Why actually people did write letters, what were their motives for writing to each other?

According to Schulte, letters are always written because of an absence and are destined to create a presence. (Schulte; Tippelskirch, 2004: P. 6)

Letter writing creates interrelations, bridges spatial distances, and can even become a goal in itself. However, the letter can become a requested object itself and no longer serve just as a vehicle that brings about the presence of the sender. Letters document the manifold modes and stages of the interrelations between the sender. They matter because they are personal in an increasingly disconnected world, and because they take time and effort to produce.

The themes and contents of letters from the very beginning of the letter writing history gave references to certain socio-cultural happenings. They always reveal information about the time in which they were written. (cf. Schulte; Tippelskirch, 2004: P. 6) This quality leads us to think about the archival value of letters and how they contain a big potential of being evidence in the making of history. However, beside their historical, contextual and cultural layers; letters contain specific characteristics which can determine it as a genre of writing.

First of all, letter writing has a functional value for communication, it can create interrelations. Even though the realm of today's technologies makes the fact almost irrelevant, back in the days until the invention of the telegraph, letter writing was the only means of long-distance communication and it paved the way to develop and sustain thoughts in between addresses. When the content of a message is travelling over space and time, letters give readers access to intimate spheres, spaces. They create channels for travelling in between eras, social events, countries, continents, minds. They include personal emotions and perceptions; reflect representations and give references to ideologies, beliefs. It is true that, from antiquity onwards, the writing of letters has been

regulated by norms, but could always allow spontaneous expression of one's feelings and thoughts.

For decades, people used to write letters to transmit information from one space-time to another, in forms of different letter subgenres. Scholars considered how letters may establish a relation to another (superior, equal or subordinate). (Schulte; Tippelskirch, 2004: P. 6) From love letters to administrative ones, letters always included certain physical appearances such as: the form, the material presentation, the style, the handwriting, the signature. An attentive look makes it possible to realize that all those elements brings us to a unique authenticity and the composition of that specific element creates the general aura of letters.

So, what is an aura that appears as a matter of authenticity?

Walter Benjamin, discusses the *authenticity* of the *art work* as a crucial phenomenon in his book ***The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction***. *"The authenticity of a thing"* he says *"is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."* (Benjamin, 2010: P. 16)

For him what describes the authenticity is the uniqueness of the art that values the work and bases in ritual, the location of its original use value. In the light of Benjamin's thought, can we consider letters as artistic objects, and letter writing as an artistic practice?

Westlake states that: *"A letter should be regarded not merely as a medium for the communication of intelligence, but also as a work of art."* in his book **How to Write Letters**, and continues *" [...] as beauty of words, tone, and manner adds a charm to speech, so elegance of materials, writing, and general appearance, enhances the pleasure bestowed by a letter."* (Westlake, 1876: P. 44) Westlake's piece presents a guide not only to the craft of writing letters, but also to the conceptual elements of composition and the role of letters as social currency.

More than half a century later, and another half-century before the dawn of email as we know it today, one of the greatest letter writers of all time turns a concerned eye toward the death of Letter Writing as a singular art form. In 1940, Virginia Woolf was tasked with reviewing a new biography of 18th-century English art historian Horace Walpole (a prolific writer of sixteen published volumes of letters). Woolf's essay, titled **The Humane Art** and was less about Walpole or his biography but more about the art of letter writing itself, where she elaborated letter writing as a private function, with its cultural evolution and its uncertain future in the face of emerging forms of media.

2.6. Surveillance in Digital Age
by Neslihan Kiran

In the scope of the Project **Letters from a window,** the research bases upon the assumption that letters are an escape or protection from surveillance of modern communication systems. The research on surveillance examines the evolution of surveillance in the background of historical and contemporary transformations of social, political and economic reforms and communication technologies.

In smart cities, such as London, CCTV is the main tool for surveillance and the collection of data is used for optimization and efficiency in urban planning. In digital communication platforms, private companies violate our basic rights - they are collecting our data, selling our data, manipulating our data.
What we define as data is in the broader sense the personal and intimate information about us, our individual behavior captured on the internet - our locations, our preferences in literature, film and music or our social interactions. During the Covid19-crisis, the voices of politicians arose on bringing a new app to the market, to enhance the control of the spread of the virus, and thus, to intensify the surveillance of people.

2.6.1 An Overview of Surveillance

The collection of data about people, population, property; from the beginning of recorded history evidence that surveillance is not a new phenomenon. Going back to history shows us almost from the beginning on, that data has been collected about us. Tribes from the land of Canaan in the Bible were asked to collect information about their current state of the land as an evaluation of people and their surroundings. In India (third century BCE) the collection of population, economic and agricultural statistics were the basis for taxation as a principle of government called Arthashastra. In Roman Times surveillance of men determined by their ability for military service.

Generations saw the data collection about people and property as a public good and valuable for the decision-making about productive agriculture or building up defensive structures. The types and the nature of surveillance changed during history. The Arabs developed the principles of crypt-analysis and during the Renaissance, it was reinvented by the western countries to surveil foreign ambassadors in their capitals. The new nation-states used to read the letters and messages the people were sending to their home countries. (cf. Pfleeger, 2014: P. 1f)

The phenomenon of "a more direct" surveillance evolved in the 18th century and Jeremy Bentham described his idea for a model of a prison in 1785. The Panopticon is designed in such a way that a guard can monitor several inmates at once. The guards are hidden in the central tower of the ring-shaped prison and observe the inmates housed in the cells facing the center. In the cells on the outer ring, you are completely seen and monitored without seeing. In the central tower you monitor everything without being seen. The presence of the guards is not essential for the surveillance of the inmates and the "eye of the

panopticon" allows them to observe every situation. Even when surveillance isn't happening the inmates must always act as they are under surveillance and thus, good behavior is encouraged.

2.6.2 Modern Surveillance

2.6.2.1 The Age of Administrative Writing

Through the rise of the nation-state and capitalism, new forms of administrative strategies to identify, track and classify large populations of individuals evolved. The rise of surveillance in modern societies is examined through the shift from pre-modern societies in the forces of urbanisation, industrialisation and liberal democracy to modern societies during the nineteenth century.

The origins of modern surveillance lays on the one hand in the rise of bureaucracy, the paper-pushing systems of institutions in the light of the administrative logic of mass surveillance of Weber. (1978, as cited in: Lauer, 2011: P. 569)
On the other hand, we get insights through the study on the disciplinary power of Foucault (1977, as cited in: Lauer, 2011: P. 569), presenting surveillance as the rationalization of institutional power for social control through the analysis of Bentham's panopticon, which illustrates the efficiency and ideological effects on individuals of total visibility. (cf. Lauer, 2011: P. 568f)

The root of social control lies in the embodied surveillance, *"by which we informally and unsystematically identify, classify, and monitor each other [...]. The history of surveillance, then is as long as human history."* (Lauer, 2011: P. 571)

We 'give' and 'give off' information, as Goffmann (1959, as cited in: Lauer, 2011: P. 570) noted, about our personality, our social position or our intentions in interpersonal encounters. All social interactions are always complex and information-rich events. We walk down the street and convey information about us to anyone. (cf. Lauer, 2011: P. 570)

2.6.2.2 The Age of New Media

The rise of new technologies, roughly between 1850 and 1950, introduced new possibilities for communication including mass communication. New communication technologies, from telegraph to television, not only expanded the possibilities for communication, but they reshaped the information environment in which people lived and individuals interacted with institutions as well as one another. The change of the information environment introduced new possibilities for conveying and organizing information and for seeing, hearing and recording distant and disembodied others. (cf. Lauer, 2011: P. 567)

One of the elements of the new surveillance was photography and the use of photography for criminal identification and policing shows the coexistence of the new and old media:
To identify and study suspect individuals and populations, the criminal photograph was equally important as the administrative recordkeeping. The combination of text and image, the pairing of the mugshot with the information of the suspect or criminal was the tool for identification. The detective camera, as the new media, did not displace the bureaucratic

archive of the suspect individual. Moreover, it was supplemented by the old media -the handwriting and fingerprint of the individual. (cf. Lauer, 2011: P. 573)

"Where once one worried of divulging private information only in writing or co-present speech, media such as photography, the phonograph, and telephone introduced new possibilities for witnessing and recording. " (Lauer, 2011: P. 578)

From the age of administrative writing to the age of computing, from writing to webcams, each new technological extension of human perception shows the history of media is embedded in the history of surveillance.

2.6.2.3 The Age of Computing

The shift from administrative writing to twentieth-century computing, telecommunication and digitalisation come with new possibilities for witnessing and recording and that contributes to the intensification of surveillance. This intensification began by the nineteenth-century bureaucratic recordkeeping and the new media - text, images, sounds, data - is equated with new forms of surveillance by which individuals were identified and their information inferred. (cf. Lauer, 2011: P. 579

The late-twentieth-century new media - from smartphones to personal computers, the internet and databases - is social media, where we give more information about ourselves than perhaps at any previous time and it comes along with digital forms of surveillance. (cf. Broeders: P. 300) There is a wealth of information and communication offered on the Internet, where the user contributes to the collection of data and social media is used *"as a source of self-expression and pleasure in constructing identities, histories, and webs of affiliation."* (Lauer, 2011: P. 579)

There is more information than ever before and not only through the state's own data collection, also through the wealth of information gathered by internet companies, the possibilities for surveillance are growing. Our social, cultural and economic lives recorded on the internet are designed in the technological environment as data. (cf. Broeders, 2016: P. 298f) Contemporary surveillance methods surpassed the capacity of earlier techniques. Surveillance of communications and activities of people is business as usual for companies and governments. *Does the usage of digital communication increase the capacity of surveillance?* Also the concern about who is watching us and why arises the question of what is happening to the information being collected.

2.6.3 The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

*"Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to product or service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary **behavioral surplus**, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as "machine intelligence," and fabricated into **prediction products** that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace for behavioral predictions that I call **behavioral futures markets**."* (Zuboff, 2018: P. 21)

A new logic of the accumulation of capitalism evolved in the age of Big Data, which Shoshana Zuboff calls "surveillance capitalism". We are experiencing this variation of capitalism as individuals and as citizens - it's enough to have an email address or a social media account. Billions of people are using it, behind the façade of a good usable system, companies provide free and voluntarily used platforms for communication. What seems for us as a platform for communication and the exchange of information, between friends and followers, is described in Zuboff's Book **The Age Of Surveillance Capitalism** as control and collection of data in order to predict future behavior.

In the Industrial Age, the exploitation of human work power and mass-production was characteristic of capitalism, labour capitalists manufacturing products, the shift happened due to the digital revolution. In the Digital Age "Surveillance Capitalists" are exploiting user-generated data and the product they sell is behavioral data. (cf. Zuboff, 2018: P. 21f)

"An analogy is the rapid spread of mass production and administration throughout the industrialized world in the early twentieth century, but with one major caveat. Mass production was interdependent with its populations who were its consumers and employees. In contrast, surveillance capitalism preys on dependent populations who are neither its consumers nor its employees and are largely ignorant of its procedures." (Zuboff, 2016)

Data is produced by the individual and behavioral data is the result of the engagement of the user with digital communication platforms, such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple. In the 2000s advertisements were displayed on Google and the search engine company gained immense success during two decades in "matching" the ad's to pages. (cf. Zuboff, 2016) The *behavioral surplus*, what Zuboff explains, is a *rediscovery* of the free raw material of users, translated into *behavioral data*, by the analytical capabilities of Google, in order to increase an ad's relevance to its user. And thus, make this data valuable for advertisers, but also governments. (cf. Zuboff, 2018: P. 21)

 "Users are the source of free raw material that feeds a new kind of manufacturing process." This new kind of manufacturing process is known as "machine intelligence", that *"converts **behavioral surplus** into **prediction products** designed to predict behavior now and soon."* (Zuboff, 2016)

Surveillance capitalist's actual product is not "your data", they analyse and manipulate data and offer "prediction products" in a new kind of marketplace Zuboff calls "behavioral futures markets". (Zuboff, 2018: P. 21) The more a company extracts behavioral surplus, the more it can profit from Surveillance Capitalism's actual customers, which are "*the enterprises that trade in its markets for future behavior.*" (Zuboff, 2018: P. 27)

In the Industrial Age power was identified with the ownership of "the means of production", in the digital age it is identified with ownership of "the means of behavioral modification". (Zuboff, 2018: P. 28)

For achieving modification and prediction of future behavior, not only the collection of data is crucial, but also machine learning: *"Surveillance capitalists' interests have shifted from using automated machine processes to know about your behavior to using machine*

*processes to shape your behavior according to their interests. In other words, this decade-and-a-half trajectory has taken us from **automating information flows about you to automating you**.*" (Zuboff, 2018: P. 649f)

"*Machine processes replace human relationships so that certainty can replace trust.*" (Zuboff, 2018: P. 668)

Surveillance Capitalism is the opposite of trust-based relationships. Facebook's vision for predictive models is for example the capability to tell users what bar to go to and at the time you arrive there, the bartender has already prepared your favorite drink. The vision goes much deeper in your social interactions: You are sitting at the bar and you are able to identify people around you who have common interests. In order to enable these "prediction products", Facebook would analyse every book, film and song you consumed on the internet. (cf. Zuboff, 2018: P. 766)

6.Conclusion

Letters as Escape from Surveillance

What happens to our individual privacy in a time where the technological environment is designed to pile our social and economic lives as data? (cf. Broeders,2016: P. 6) What happens to our authenticity in an atmosphere where human associated values, one by one, turn into digital algorithms to serve as input for digital surveillance systems? If digital mediums are used to survey our lives to build structures of control for the needs of advanced capitalist ideologies, how could it be possible to escape from that realm?

During the total lockdown experience the applications of **social distancing** was to prevent society from any kind of interaction. The regulations for control and discipline fastened the reduction of social relations and all physical contacts. The social fear and the disappearance of social contact were triggering subjects to elaborate and reflect on with our project and artistic tools.

Secondly, new restrictions and prohibitions and how they take their shapes in urban areas was a burning topic to work on both artistically and scientifically. The unusual and rapid formation of social, economical and institutional structures, were important to evidence with the outputs of the project.

Within the project "the artistic applications" were considered as tools to record the present, evident the society, and facilitate creative dialogues through emancipation of personal feelings and thoughts.

The fast transformation of things; relations, dialogues, practices into digital languages, opened up the question of virtual migration. Has culture been migrating into virtual spheres for a long time? Not only for culture but also on commerce, health and education systems, it is possible to observe similar shifts. Digitalization is highly embedded in urban systems, as much as the digital devices are being used as our body extensions.

Digitization and digital devices are lacking haptic qualities which compress and flatten the sensual and emotional layers of communication. The disembodiment of routines, rituals, cultural activities, work and leisure spaces are referring to the disappearance of body based cultures. The subjective observations recorded during the project process were tried to be supported by the theoretical researches on surveillance studies in the digital age.

Letters contain identical traces, memories, confessions, personal interests, decisions, names, addresses, phone numbers, smells, handwritings, jokes, new ideas which associate with freedom of speech.

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