

# Social distancing - what is the audience doing now?

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We all talk about the audience today as an audience. Especially today, when museums and theatres are closed and exhibitions and performances take place at home on private computers. But somehow "the shop has to keep running" (Angela Merkel). What is and what does the audience actually do now? Are they possibly being reborn with new abilities?

## Social problems and technical solutions

What *Walter Benjamin* and *Bertolt Brecht* did in the early XX century has now come true: Everyone can potentially become an author and everyone is part of an audience, a self-confident recipient. Anyone who sits in front of a webcam and communicates today - especially in the context of culture and art - is both sender and receiver. The previously so clearly separated roles of author and audience no longer exist. But where is and what is the audience doing here and now?

This could be a current open question, which would certainly appeal to nerds and other insiders, but which might make outsiders in the cultural industry think: I don't want to have these problems now.

But back to the problem: everything that has suddenly become imaginable now, and how it is created and succeeds from nothing, arises from itself: a (social) problem that knows more (technical) solutions than the problem itself was previously aware of. In today's corona reality it is possible (and probably necessary) to link the real and the digital art world - but with what consequences for the recipients?

## **The emerging and disappearing audience**

Works of art that do not speak of and with an audience (act or otherwise challenge, provoke, etc.) do not exist, of course. But in times like today there are. Today, exhibitions are being opened that no longer have a real audience, but which create a new kind of audience online. The magic word is ZOOM and it is a meeting app that temporarily connects single persons in the cloud – thus creating an audience that emerges *and* disappears again after a short time.

But what is the appeal of imagining a situation today that cannot exist because there is a new situation in digital reality - and at the same time not? Art is created publicly, i.e. for an audience, in that it is not yet recognizable as art at first - but is only formed publicly from a certain social and historical distance. Only now and today do we understand what social distancing means - especially in and for the cultural sector. That we are missing something that we hardly noticed before.

## **Out of nowhere**

Art that does not have an audience does not exist - it is just being created today somewhere else: preferably in virtual space - where something is missing (proximity) and where at the same time something unrecognized is created: The intuitive feeling that - like right now - as if out of nothing - something new will certainly emerge but something future. Whether or not an exhibition that only exists online (and has so far tried to attract a real audience as a teaser) makes sense or not is a matter for debate. What is no longer arguable is a fact: the PUBLIC as we know it has recently become a different size. It exists in reality only insofar as it can exchange information in digital space. All those who cannot (or do not want to) use this option have become excluded. At the moment, there is nothing more to be heard of the freedom of art - rather of

the freedom of the public to defend freedom spaces in the crisis - even if it is zoomed in without further ado.

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