

hyperdesign¹ identities

from the bedroom

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An Article by Camille Thai

An Illustrated Narrative

hyperdesign¹ identities

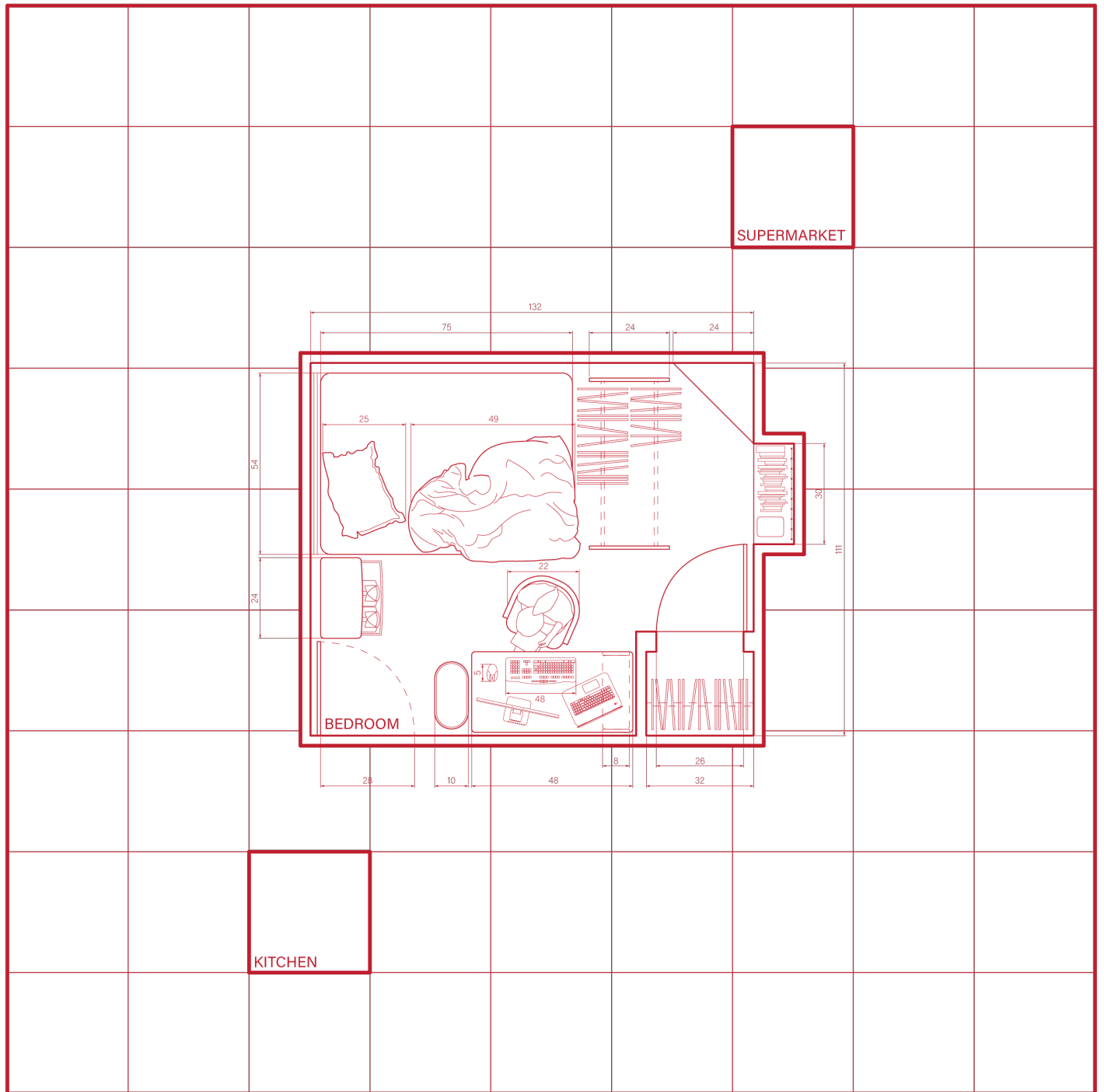
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00_ABSTRACT

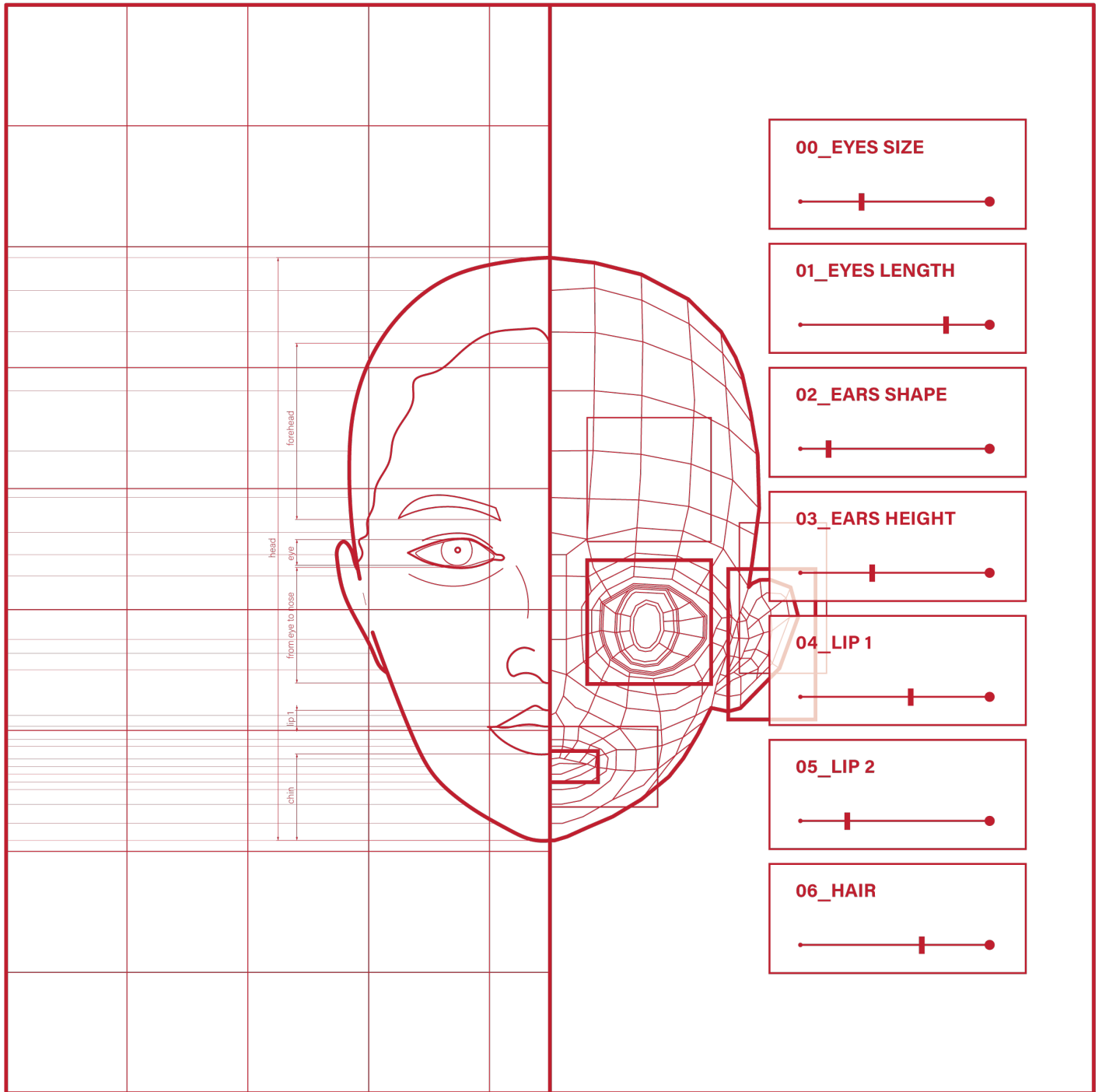
Archaeological notes on an experience of a 23-year-old in COVID-19 through a short documentation of spatial conditions, identity states, and cultural readjustment. The collections of drawings are represented fragments of thoughts that use consistent or inconsistent graphical language as a phenomenological reflection of the transition itself as reluctant and disruptive. In order to understand the permanence of the series of events that began in early 2020, the project approaches the pandemic anecdotally to personalize the implications of change from the scale of a single individual as a representation of the mass. Through these instances, ideas of quarantine architecture, private/public/virtual space, and cultural invasion of the internet are expressed in detail. The analysis is formatted into three different layers: the drawings, the narrative, and the analysis. Published here are the first two, leaving out the analysis for open interpretation. Included is a rediscovery of quarantine space within the scope of the spreading cyberculture that takes place in the bedroom.



01_A SPATIAL RECOLLECTION OF COVID-19: COMPLETELY RETRACTION TO THE INTERIOR (March 13 2020)

In retrospect: On March 12, 2020, Temple University issued a school-wide lockdown "indefinitely until further notice" as students anxiously ushered out of the architecture building. The spread of COVID-19 resulted in a drastic spatial shift as public spaces abruptly dissipated, leaving the only the private afloat. As humanity scrambles to find its space online, hoping that it would only be temporary, time stopped. Momentarily, we all lived in waiting with our surroundings laced with fear. The sudden compression of the body that is stuck inside a single room for the sake of our physical safety instead threatens our mental state.

The anxiety I felt on the streets of Philadelphia was more psychological and cultural than physical. For the rest of the semester I willingly lived on an island, only stepping outside of this 8 by 9 rectangle that was my bedroom with the attachment that is my kitchen. Outside of the bedroom, things blurred as they churned red. Places became attachments, a parasitic typology that I reluctantly engaged like the bathroom and the kitchen, and the most fearful of all: the supermarket. Outside of the bedroom lives the oppressive 6 by 6 grid that guides, alarms, and manipulates.



02_AVATAR: THE NEW HUMAN

I became defined by my Zoom background. *What kind of chair am I sitting on? What are the posters behind me? Wait, is she in bed right now? Oh my god, turn your camera off.* My browser tabs are scrutinized; I feel more self-conscious about my Rhino layers than my weight. *I have to have the perfect avatar this digital pin-up; preferably that of Iron Man, I think that matches the colors of my boards.*

You would think I spend less money now that I'm trapped inside; well actually, my identity costs around \$200 a week in subscriptions and character customization value. Don't judge me, a new costume came out with last week's update, and I have to maintain multiple characters, too. Of course, I am happy with my purchases, but let's not talk about it anymore. It's great, honestly, my identity is hyperdesigned and unsupervised; I think I am gradually turning into someone else, I love it!

may 2020	justified cost equivalent
discord inc (for emoticons) \$9.99	chat services are free...
blackdesertonline \$109.99	clothes ~\$200
costumesx2 gear potions rgnesus among us phasmophobia \$5.99 \$15.99	make up
	entertainment ~\$100

YOU ARE MUTED NOW. PRESS SHIFT+COMMAND+A TO UNMUTE YOUR MICROPHONE, OR PRESS AND HOLD THE SPACE KEY TO TEMPORARILY UNMUTE

03_A CULTURAL CONSUMPTION TRANSCRIPT

Is it okay if we start the recording?

Open the reactions interface and click thumb up if you got it

I'll put this in chat in case someone missed it

You're muted

Does anyone have a question, if not, can you mute yourself?

Let's meet now, here is the zoom link

Let's have a date in minecraft tonight

Social etiquette is changing to knowing to mute in group settings when you are not longer addressed. Attention is reduced to a button - an emote of a raised hand, a notification of a text, unmute. There is an invisible yet visible threshold to interaction; similar to what has existed in the subculture of streaming within the silent agreement of the streamer and viewer. The way the two could interact is defined by twitch interface.

Hiko67 donated \$5
Have a nice day

Analysis Notes

The Idea of Design

In Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley's *Are We Human*, design is prolific: "Design is what you are standing on. It is what holds you up. And every layer of design rests on another and another and another." (10) Assuming the idea to a certain degree, the investigation takes on a level of confidence regarding what design is and what design could be, given how proliferated the definition is. Under context of the pandemic, there is an implication for design in the ways things are changed temporarily and permanently. The article takes a stance on perhaps a greater amount of optimism when it comes to design with the title of hyperdesign, created by attaching the prefix of hyper- which means surreal or exists beyond the cartesian world, to this prolific idea of design. It is a reevaluation of identities of humans in the current time with social media and higher-than-ever desire to be someone else. In a way, the horrific trend of thought fits into Post-anthropocentric narrative as the human becomes decentralized for the actual human that is designed.

"Design always presents itself as serving the human but its real ambition is to redesign the human... We live in a time when everything is designed, from our carefully crafted individual looks and online identities to the surrounding galaxies of personal devices, new materials, interfaces, networks, systems, infrastructures, data, chemicals, organisms, and genetic codes." (Colomina & Wigley, 9)

Post-pandemic Implication

The bed is probably the most prominent spatial typology that has been reevaluated in quarantine. In her own narrative of the pandemic published on *e-flux*, Beatriz Colomina called it out to reveal her own implication of what to come after COVID-19.

"The new architecture of the pervasive bed is not a side effect of the pandemic but has been exposed by it. Once exposed, it might mutate again. New architectures might appear. To think about what might happen next there is an urgent need to look back and understand the intimate bonds between architecture and disease. So much of what is shocking in the current situation is what was already there but buried, overlooked or forgotten."

It is a borrowed and most accessible typology when it comes to the quarantine experience for our society at large. What the pandemic did was pause us from looking out and forward and instead, look inward to our interior spaces. Or, another way to see it could be that it compresses our physical world from a world out there that might distract us to what immediately surrounds us. The discussion around such an intimate space made public, as Colomina puts it using the term "expose", allows a paradigm shift in what we normally consider private. As the bed is put on display in the illustrated page, the bed is put on display through zoom backgrounds, through photo backgrounds, etc. We begin to accept or tolerate a level of exposure into our private space at this time. These small resignations compel design and architectural design to rethink what is considered public and private, how much emphasis does one embrace or refuse the significance of their bed, and more. Time is the greatest and most crucial designer of all. Here, it presents us the continuation of human activities amidst physical isolated adversity. For a lot of us, we will begin to realize that home is the best and most suitable workplace for a healthy, balanced lifestyle; of course, some others might not. It is the chance that presents itself in this stagnant time that allows us to attempt to cope, but mostly also to live out these scenarios that no other times might.

In another article titled *Deep Timescales Of Our Most Urgent Crises* on the pandemic by Cristina Parreño Alonso, it is presented as a complete opportunity to see what else can be accomplished on such a large scale. She breaks down the successes of social isolation into individualistic drives of self-isolation for a collective optimism of its ending, recognizing that safety is an adequate incentive to change collective behavior. If we were to apply the same formulaic approach to different worldly problems, perhaps they, too, can be changed? It's extreme optimism, and too early to tell now as quarantine is still in effect; however, it is an

interesting take on the implication of the pandemic when we are still in the middle of questioning what comes next.

Human as Design : the Avatar

In *Cyberpunk 2077*, there is another pandemic. People are growing an addiction to brain dances - a sort of entertainment that taps onto our full senses and allows us a full body experience of someone else. In the cyberpunk narrative with the contrast of low life / high tech, it is almost typical that people are sick of themselves. The idea of living another life, especially when it is cherry picked for entertainment purposes, seems extremely attractive. This is fictional, of course, but it is not far from reality. Society today with our Instagrammable culture operates on low self-esteem. From mindless devoted fans to loyal viewers and customers and even haters, we consume others' identities for entertainment thanks to the shareability of the internet.

There is an interesting flipside to this depressing narrative that could be explored within the realm of the Vtuber boom that is currently taking place in the streaming community right now. After the pandemic, an independent virtual streamer named Projekt Melody gained a massive amount of following from Twitch, Youtube, and Chaturbate. Her real identity is completely unknown, meanwhile her internet identity as a three-dimensional anime character is completely exposed, literally and figuratively. Her public reception makes the relationship between what is virtual and what is real interestingly complicated, especially more so when her 3-d modeler sued her for copyright and an article on body ownership in this virtual realm pops up. (Kastrenakes) Ultimately, it got settled, and she carries on with her best life of internet fame and anonymity. Every part of this entity is potentially designed, from her body, her background, and perhaps even her personality, and her true fans never demand anything more than that.

"Social media appears to have been constructed for

this task. It is not simply that social media is a tool for self-design. Self-design has become media. This designing self is not an independent inventive subject or collective. It is always fragile work-in-progress, sacrificing all privacy to produce big data in return for a new illusion of independence." (Colomina, 273)

Is an illusion really a bad thing? Haven't we already indulged ourselves in someone else's life all the time? Actually, is it really an illusion? In Freud's *Civilization And Its Discontents*, we are always dissatisfied due to the inability to express ourselves fully. While the human physical self can adhere to orderliness of the physical world, the virtual being can indulge in the chaos that is the dataverse. With the extent of design in the virtual realm, wouldn't it mean that the avatar lets us truly become human?

Interface as Culture

A quote from e-flux goes as follows on the topic of Post-Internet Cities:

"The internet has, since its cultural inception, been conceived of as an emancipatory technology. If, according to Walter Benjamin, the invention of iron and glass predicated the nineteenth century paradigm of phantasmagoria through the "emancipation" of forms of construction from art—a historical trajectory that progressed onwards with the intervention of photography, montage, and the like—what, then, has the internet emancipated from what? Conversely, the "accidents" of the internet—surveillance, fake news, the propagation of ideological evil, doxing, etc.—forces us to critically call into question the value of this emancipation; for who, and at what cost?"

The internet and its impact on human lives has become too quickly invasive to fathom. In the current context, the question of "an emancipation" could be answered by all that is facilitated through the internet despite the pandemic outside. The internet becomes more than just a tool or an entertainment, it becomes the only space for social interaction. When it is resigned as an obvious part of life in order to carry on culture, it becomes culture itself. As illustrated in the last image,

our language has completely been integrated with a hybrid lifestyle that is currently primarily virtual. The choice to decapitalize internet interfaces reveals two things: one is the reality of conversational/informal language of text that deems no need for capitalization, and second, the transformation of brand names to verbs, vocabulary that indicates an action. This is reflective of Benjamin Bratton's idea of language in Terraforming:

"Agency seems here more like an illusion of how subjectivity imagines itself in verbs, nouns, causes, and effects than a fundamental executive in these distributed loops. The pervasiveness of automated machinery (both in reality and in projective planning) demonstrates not that animated machines are clearly separate from humans, but that the entanglements of mutual prostheticization between them operate in diverse and various ratios and asymmetrically distributed agencies and counter-agencies" (33)

The idea of a "mutual prostheticization" between human and machine as interfaces are illustrated in these lines where action verbs are replaced with a certain level of interactivity with the machine. The proliferation of such reality due to the pandemic is further accelerating the acceptance of machine language in normal culture out of necessity for continued production during this time. The interfaces that are designed based on human use and need suddenly have a heavier weight to them as they become the sole tool for our interconnectivity. If culture is defined by interfaces, the implication of redesigning the human that participates in such culture is enormous.

Conclusion

This research stems from an observation in the intersectionality of the pandemic and Liam Young's Planet City. The nihilistic view presented by the pandemic spatial condition that reduces anthropocentric space became an opportunity to question the accepted norm. The supposed speculative project of 10 billion humans and 1 metropolis seems closer to reality as humanity perhaps will come to the realization that they no longer need physical space as and all that satisfy them can be easily accessed through the web. With such an idea as an impression, the illustrative anecdotes choose to be grounded in the current context with the drawings depict more immediate effects of the pandemic as stepping stone to understand this hunch more fully. The analysis is a deeper look into the implications of choices made on the drawings, walking through the investigation between the readings on the pandemic itself and the authors that dedicate themselves to a similar narrative of quarantine and technology such as Beatriz Colomina and Benjamin Bratton and ultimately ties them into several social phenomena that take place within the pandemic.

