



# Exploring in-person

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*During COVID-19 related isolation the words “synchronous” and “asynchronous,” “in person” and “virtual” have become commonplace terms to describe our connections with each other in professional settings. In this reflection, we wish to explore and challenge the binary nature of both of these sets of terms, because we see these terms as being unhelpful descriptors of relationality and embodied presence, leading to unnecessary and unhelpful limits to what we understand as “in-person.”*

In this season of COVID-19 related isolation and physical distancing, the words “synchronous” and “asynchronous” have become commonplace terms for how we describe our connections with each other: they are either “at the same time” (synchronous) or “not at the same time” (asynchronous) (for example, “online” classes are often described as synchronous or asynchronous). Similarly, we label our interactions with each other as “in person,” where we share the same physical space, or as “virtual,” where we do not (for example, “today is a virtual instruction day” or “next month we will return to in person learning”). Under COVID-19, these two sets of terms have also regularly been used to describe professional meetings and academic conferences (such as this one!), as well as work and social engagements more broadly.

**Invitation:** What words or phrases are used in your context or in your language for these distinctions? Are there similar challenges?

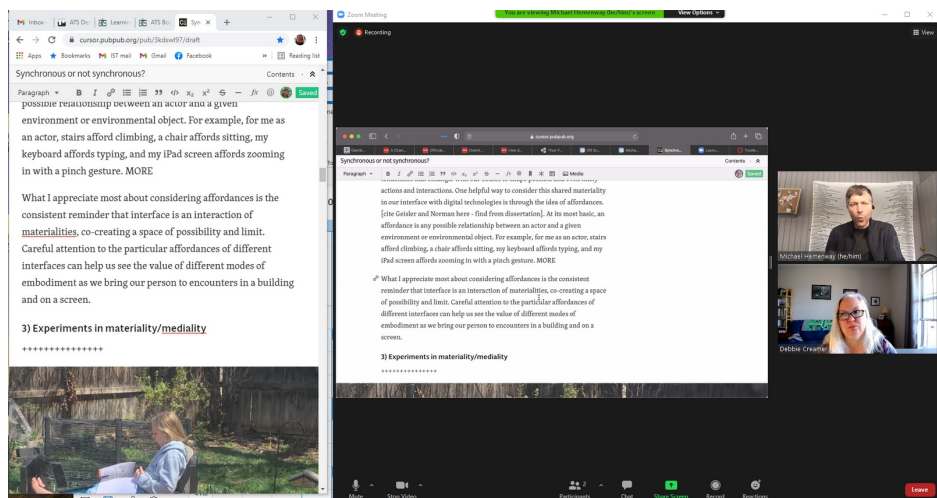
ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR EXPLORATIVE THEOLOGY  
CZETH\_4 (2024) S. 63–78

DOI: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.17885/HEIUP.CZETH.2023.4.24705](https://doi.org/10.17885/HEIUP.CZETH.2023.4.24705)

ZUVOR VERÖFFENTLICHT AUF PUBPUB: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.21428/fb61f6aa.a577e5ce](https://doi.org/10.21428/fb61f6aa.a577e5ce)  
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In this reflection, we wish to explore and challenge the binary nature of both of these sets of terms, not only because we experience the world as being far more complex than this—and so, a nuanced consideration of these terms may lead us to new insights and exciting possibilities—but also because we see these terms as being unhelpful (and, oftentimes problematic) descriptors of relationality and embodied presence, leading to unnecessary and unhelpful limits to what we understand as “in-person.” In the sections that follow, we invite you to explore these two sets of terms with us as a jumping off point for looking anew at time, embodiment, and materiality, particularly as these might then help stimulate our curiosity around the nature of the human person, of our relationships with one another, and of our relationships with the technologies that constitute us.

*As we go along, we invite you to consider your own presence and personness in the midst of this conversation and with awareness of the materiality by which you are engaging us here. For example, the screenshot below captures one moment of participation for one of us: we are talking over Zoom, looking together at a shared screen of this page, and simultaneously editing this page in another tab:*



Might the moment captured by this screenshot be considered an “in-person” experience? Is it a virtual one? Is a moment like this best understood as synchronous or asynchronous? Is it embodied? Where are the various spots that presence shows up here? Is the answer different depending on whether we are asking these questions of Debbie (the one who took the screenshot and who had this “view,” including a view

of herself via her webcam), or Michael (the collaborator and conversation partner captured by the image on the top right), or Amy (from the iPhone photo in the lower left corner)? What is it like for you, right now?

**Invitation:** As you engage this collaborative site (PubPub), we invite you to be attentive to your own presence, your own embodiment, your own sense of time, and your own experience with materiality. Does it shift (how does it shift) as you go through this paper? Is it different when you comment or read the comments of other participants? Does it change when we ask you questions, as in this “invitation” space?

## Warm-up Experiments

To begin, we invite you to join us in a few small warm-up experiments. For the first, we would ask you to simply take a moment to think about the various communication technologies you use, and whether you would tend to categorize those as synchronous or asynchronous (and, perhaps then, what criteria you use for such differentiation). Once you have done that, we would invite you to spend an extra moment to think about texting: is texting a synchronous activity or an asynchronous one? For those of us with iPhones or similar devices, the blinking three dots (indicating that the other person is typing) perhaps makes this even more complicated:

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Can you feel the anticipation? Are you now sitting waiting for the response? Does this waiting disrupt the moment and space you are sitting or standing in? Are you “present,” “in the present”? And where? Is “present” spatial, temporal, both or neither? Is this synchronous, or not synchronous? Does it matter? Notice even this image, an animated screen capture of a moment in a SMS chat holds the movement of the 3 dots. What is our relationship to time and space in these media? The layers of media we are constantly negotiating challenge our ability to locate ourselves in a clear relationship with the time of another. And this is really what we are exploring, not our own isolated relationship to time, but our relationship to the time and embodiment of another/others.

For the second, we invite you to sit for a moment with the adjective “virtual.” (And, we mean that literally — sit with it!) Right now, you are reading this text and viewing these images on a screen. Is this a virtual experience? What is your body doing,

feeling, needing? What are the materialities involved in this experience? Does it *matter* whether you are engaging this text via a large screen, a mobile device, in your living room, with a cup of coffee in your hands? Does it change (how does it change?) if you are using an audio screen reader, or have music on in the background, or have other people in the room with you, or can smell something baking? If “virtual” is meant to be the antonym of “in-person,” in what ways is your person-ness present or absent in this encounter (and, does it matter)?

Finally, let’s put the two together. It is easy to think of what we typically call “in-person” and “synchronous” engagements as being more real, rich, and/or personal. It is also easy—especially in these days of COVID isolation—to think of real, rich, and/or personal experiences where we shared space, time, touch, and air with someone we love (i.e., “in-person” and “synchronous”). There is no doubt that these moments can be, and sometimes are, deeply personal (person-ish?) and meaningful; they make us who we are. But, when we pause and reflect, and take an attitude of curiosity rather than familiarity, we can just as easily think of occasions (literally, “times”) when we had what we typically call “in-person” and “synchronous” occasions that were *not* meaning-full or person-full. We’d invite you to pause here and think of a few of these: perhaps an onsite lecture with little interaction between speakers and listeners, a grocery line where other humans were simply objects of annoyance and barriers to task-completion, a conversation with a loved one where presence was lacking and our minds were on other things, a moment when we were “absent-minded.” As we add layers here, perhaps this can also open us to suspicion and curiosity about the ways we think about (and, even, experience with our bodies) “asynchronous” and “virtual” engagements, and especially the ways in which our bodies and selves show up to and are constituted by these spaces.

## Our Hypotheses

In the spirit of a laboratory, we come to this work with hypotheses to be tested. We propose (and wish to test with you) that:

- The terms “synchronous” and “asynchronous” are messier than they seem, and suggest a sometimes-unhelpful binary.
- The terms “in-person” and “virtual” are messier than they seem, and suggest an *incredibly* unhelpful binary.

- What we call asynchronous and virtual spaces are *differently* embodied spaces, not *disembodied* spaces, and attention to these embodiments enhance our understandings of what it means to be human and what it means to be relational; our sense of what it means to be “in person” can and should be expanded in light of these various observations.
- Reflection on time, materialities, and embodiment brings us again to questions about media and mediality, including how we form and are formed by our entanglements with non-human companions.

## Testing the Hypotheses

### 1. Experiments in time

By their very nature—or, at least, their linguistic construction—the words “synchronous” and “asynchronous” are established as binaries and opposites. We see this, for example, in as ordinary a setting as the Merriam Webster dictionary, which defines synchronous as “happening, existing, or arising at precisely the same time” and defines asynchronous as “not simultaneous or concurrent in time : not synchronous.” And, in the world of education, and perhaps other contexts, the two terms are used—again as binaries and opposites—to describe modes of (online) engagement and interaction. Here, though, we see that the terms are used not only to describe relationships with/in time, but also to describe qualitative differences (where “synchronous” is seen as more real and more present than “asynchronous”) as well as to evoke specific materialities and modalities (where “synchronous” is the label given to video technology such as Zoom and “asynchronous” to learning management systems such as Canvas or Blackboard, or even to a site such as this PubPub).

When we bring our sense of curiosity to this framing, though, it begins to unravel quickly. Most simply, we might note that Zoom includes “asynchronous” components (the meeting request, the recording after the event) and a learning management system includes “synchronous” ones (live chat, collaborative writing tools). And, if we look again at the initial definitions I shared above, the idea of “at precisely the same time” challenges even our sense of streaming video as synchronous, when we know it includes both perceptible and imperceptible lags between sender and receiver. In fact, it might make more sense to talk about “imperceptibly asynchronous” rather than evoking synchronicity at all (or, as I have suggested elsewhere, perhaps “semi-synchronous” is a more useful term). Beyond these two “corrections,” looking closely allows us to begin to see that the categories themselves are perhaps not doing the work

we might hope they would do—a theme that we will return to a bit later in this piece. And so, rather than setting up binary categories (so that something is either *X* or not-*X*) or even using the language of continuum (so that something exhibits varying degrees of *X*), perhaps we would do better to bring a kaleidoscopic lens to this work, allowing us to talk about different kinds of a/synchronicity in a shifting and ever-changing network of relationships.

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Curiosity also leads us to explore why we use terms like synchronous and asynchronous to talk about online experiences but not ones where we are onsite together. There are, for example, numerous synchronous and asynchronous experiences—or, varying degrees or kinds of a/synchronicity—in a “traditional” onsite classroom. Small group discussions might be described as a synchronous experience, with lectures a bit closer to a semi-synchronous experience (where one person speaks and time passes before others can engage the speaker). Homework assignments or pre-course readings might be asynchronous components, as might quizzes or research papers. It is interesting to me that we do not use those terms in onsite contexts, even though most instructors and students would identify the whole range of time-experiences as being part of the learning environment. It seems that whatever work the terms are doing as they relate to online learning (or, online conferences and meetings), one would think they could do the same work in onsite ones—unless they are also doing other work to which we aren’t currently attending.

**Invitation:** Have you seen terms like synchronous and asynchronous (or related terms from your context and language) applied to onsite experiences? If so, where, and what work do you see those terms doing in those settings?

Here, I think, we start to wander more fully into the ways in which the label of synchronicity is tied in with value-based interpretations. In my context, I see this most vividly as it relates to meetings and events...and even this conference. The “real” part of the event is understood to be the synchronous space, and everything else (the “asynchronous”) is easily called the pre-meeting work or post-meeting wrap-up. And, all of this “pre-meeting” work is understood to fall in the same category of asynchronous, even as it takes different forms (me thinking on my own, me talking with friends, us writing collaboratively, you making comments on our work, and so on). And, in most

cases, the synchronous is seen as the engaged/meaningful/interesting space (even described as “real time”) and the asynchronous as work we do at our own time and on our own (as if any learning or scholarship—or, life—can be done by the individual alone). Again, curiosity lets us challenge this division, even if just by remembering how many boring Zoom lectures or diatribes we’ve sat through this year, when the chat screens or text messages or emails or discussion boards are where we’ve found life and energy and relationality. Curiosity and the twist of the kaleidoscope also allows us to notice that time is a complicated value, that we co-create each other even across distances of modality *and* time, and that attending to a diversity of engagements with modality *and* time might be our best way to support a diversity of learners (and relationships).

I linger on this not because I’m overly intrigued by wordplay or invested in clear definitions, but rather because I am both curious and concerned by the cumulative ways in which these terms are used, including the ways our language use tricks us into thinking that these distinctions are neutral, common-sense, and obvious. Our experiments show us that they are none of these things; not only are these terms messier than they seem (our experiences in time with each other flow in multiple directions, not as an yes/no switch or a simple continuum) but setting them up as binary opposites seems to elevate some experiences (the “real” or the “real-time”) while minimizing the others, leaving us with unhelpfully limited (and, I might even suggest, damaging or demeaning) senses of how and where the person resides.

## 2. Experiments in materiality/embodiment

One of our core assumptions in these experiments is that online and digital spaces are material in at least two ways. First of all, every bit of what we engage on screens and this keyboard on which I type and the servers that provide access to PubPub and the compute power that drives Alexa telling me the weather in the morning is made out of material objects. We won’t take time here to explore the vast environmental impact of this digital materiality, but the magnitude of this impact is at least a reminder that our relationship with technologies is fundamentally material. There are most certainly differences between biological bodies and machinic bodies, but all day, these two materialities are constantly in relationship and they undoubtedly shape one another in material ways. For more context on the materiality of the digital, see Johanna Drucker’s work on Performative Materiality, which builds on Matthew Kirschenbaum’s earlier work on the materiality of new media and digital literature.

More importantly for our considerations of personness in online spaces, these digital objects we engage, such as screens and websites and keyboards and videos and headsets, have structures with limits and tendencies that entangle with our bodies to shape possible and even likely actions and interactions (watch Bernard Stiegler outline his idea of tertiary retention as he discusses Gilbert Simondon's notion of information). One helpful way to consider this shared materiality in our interface with digital technologies is through the idea of affordances. At its most basic, an affordance is any possible relationship between an actor and a given environment or environmental object. For example, for me as an actor, stairs afford climbing, a chair affords sitting, my keyboard affords typing, and my iPad screen affords zooming in with a reverse pinch gesture. What I appreciate most about considering affordances is the consistent reminder that *interface* is an interaction of materialities, co-creating a space of possibility and limit through encounter. Careful attention to the particular affordances of different interfaces can help us see the value of different modes of embodiment as we bring our person to encounters in a building and on a screen.

## Math Class





I love this image as an experiment in different embodiments. This is a photo I took with my iPhone in my backyard, while my daughter, Amy, was in Math class “at” school just before Summer 2020. Covid had brought us into a stay at home order and closed the school buildings all over our city. So, Amy and I and the rest of our family were doing school and work all from a shared location, our home. This particular day, the weather was nice and Amy was a bit fed up with her desk space in her room. So, in her pajama pants and bare feet, she ventured out to the back porch with our dog Winston and his trusty stuffed animal pillow to join in on her Math course. Their school district was using a combination of Google Meet and Schoology (along with a proliferation of other tools) to create different kinds of learning opportunities for students. None of this learning was called or considered “in person.” Instead, these learning moments, whether occurring in a shared digital interface at the same time or not, are called online, remote, and virtual.

**Invitation:** In what ways is Amy less “in person” in this Math course than if she were in the school building at a desk?

I have a friend who gets very annoyed when I raise concerns about this “in person” language. Rightfully, he notes that everyone in the conversation knows what we mean by “it will be nice to go back to meeting in person” while we are all on a Zoom call talking to each other and looking at each other in the face. It is this, that we all seem to know what is meant by this “in person” distinction, which drives the heart of these experiments here. What work is this “in person” distinction doing for us? What dispositions are we developing by consistently suggesting that interaction online is NOT in person or even LESS in person? Is it any wonder that my daughter Amy feels less engaged in her Math class she is participating in from our backyard? If we are not asking her to bring her person to these online learning encounters, why would we expect anything more?

Let’s push this image another level in terms of embodiment. I have shared this snapshot of my life in this static webpage with you and other readers. In this interface here, we do not have the interaction in shared time and digital space that my daughter had with her Math class on Google Meet, a moment of which I captured with this photo. Yet, is it possible that I am “in person” on this page? Are the words I type here a material expression of my person? For me, sharing this picture of my family, my backyard, the routine of my life, which all deeply shape me as a person, is a form of asynchronous *embodiment* that brings my person into this interface. In fact, in some

ways, I feel more “in person” here in this space than I do in many conference rooms where I can smell the other people in the room.

If we agree that it is possible for me to be “in person” here on this page and for you, the reader, to bring your person to the engagement with this page, then I ask again, what work is this “in person” distinction doing for us and is it the work we want being done?

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I am sitting alone in my apartment as I read Michael’s reflections about Amy in their backyard. I was alone in my apartment when he texted to say he’d added a section to this PubPub. I’ve been alone in my apartment for most of the past year, doing “virtual” work, “virtual” dinner parties, and “virtual” conferences like this one. I totally get what Michael’s friend notes: of course we know what we mean when we say “it will be nice to go back to meeting in person.” My body knows it has been 154 days since my last hug or intentional touch from a person who cares for me, a year since my last day in the office or meal in a restaurant with a friend. My body knows that presenting at this conference will be different over Zoom than if we had traveled to be with each other; I deeply miss airplanes and exploring new places and going out to talk about our ideas after a day of presentations. It’s not the same. We know.

But, do we? The language of virtual and in-person—and, similarly, of synchronous and asynchronous—gives voice to part of my experience while also silencing so much of it; it works a bit like the sleight of hand of a magician, distracting us from paying attention to things that matter. Like Michael, I am more in-person on this screen than in many conference rooms —and not just as a snapshot of my person-ness (e.g., telling personal stories) but as a fully embodied being. *I am really here*. And, it’s not only that my body *creates* or *reacts to* this “virtual” environment, but that my body/self is just as constituted by these experiences and relationships as by any others. As such, the language of “virtual” is, at best, a distraction, and at worst, a negation of the fullness of the encounter (and, even, my person-ness) itself.

When Michael texts me, for example, it is not a virtual experience. I hear a sound (the chime of the text) and feel a vibration on my wrist (my apple watch notifications). My gaze shifts, my heart rate and breathing change, and even though just a moment ago I was caught up in my own world, he now is present to/with me. When I open this screen and look at what he’s written here—which I guess should be called an “asynchronous” experience—I smile at the way he uses words, and at the questions he asks, and at the picture of his backyard, and I instinctively wiggle my toes when I see Amy’s bare feet and can almost feel the sunshine from the picture. My body is responding

and my mood is changing, now, even though he is not “here” and we are not “together” or interacting “at the same time.” For me, none of this is virtual, and my experience with time (when he writes, when I read) does not define the quality of interaction; it is not absent of meaning or less meaningful just because I’m not currently in his backyard or near the desk where he stands to write his reflections in this space.

When I say it is not virtual, I don’t mean that being alone in my apartment is “just as good” or “the same” as being in the backyard together; it’s also not “almost as good” or “nearly the same.” In fact, the reason I know it’s *not* the same is because I’m embodied both places. If I were there at the moment of the photograph, I’d be drinking a good beverage, eavesdropping on Amy and Winston, sneezing from the pollen, feeling the altitude. Sitting here, I’m in my comfortable weekend clothes, with a photo I can look back at time and again, and as attentive to you all as potential readers (most of whom I have not yet met) as I am to him and to myself. The two experiences are different, and engage me (including my body and the fullness of my self) in different ways—but, the experiences are not categorical opposites, nor is one the lesser or shadow version of the other.

The example with Michael might be too easy; I imagine his voice when I read his words, and I’ve been in the backyard where Amy sits to do her classwork. But I similarly cringe whenever I hear about “virtual” work (and, I think back on the fights I’ve had with folks over email and zoom this past year, and how my frustration or anger responses have been completely embodied) or about “virtual” dinners (where I really do cook and eat food, involving all of my senses, for better or worse). My “person” (and, the “person” of others) is very much “in” these experiences. I’ve been struck by some of the recent research about “zoom fatigue” that suggests that it’s not so much that we have *fewer* person-cues (e.g., just seeing someone from the shoulders up and in two dimensions) but that we actually pay *more* attention to each other on a Zoom call (e.g., constant eye contact, leaning in to each other, and “nonverbal overload”). From this perspective, one could suggest that a Zoom meeting might actually be more “in person” than an on-site meeting. Or, at a minimum, it reminds us once again that these are *differently* embodied spaces, not *disembodied* spaces. And so, again: what work is this “in person” distinction doing for us, and is it the work we want being done?

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The way the pubpub space works encourages us to indicate where one designer’s words end and another’s begin. Notice the tildes above, which Debbie added before

and after her reflection on Amy's photo. What parts of the collaborative construction process encourage such a practice of differentiation? And can we find any parallels in the way we differentiate persons or embodiments?

~~ (Debbie again here)

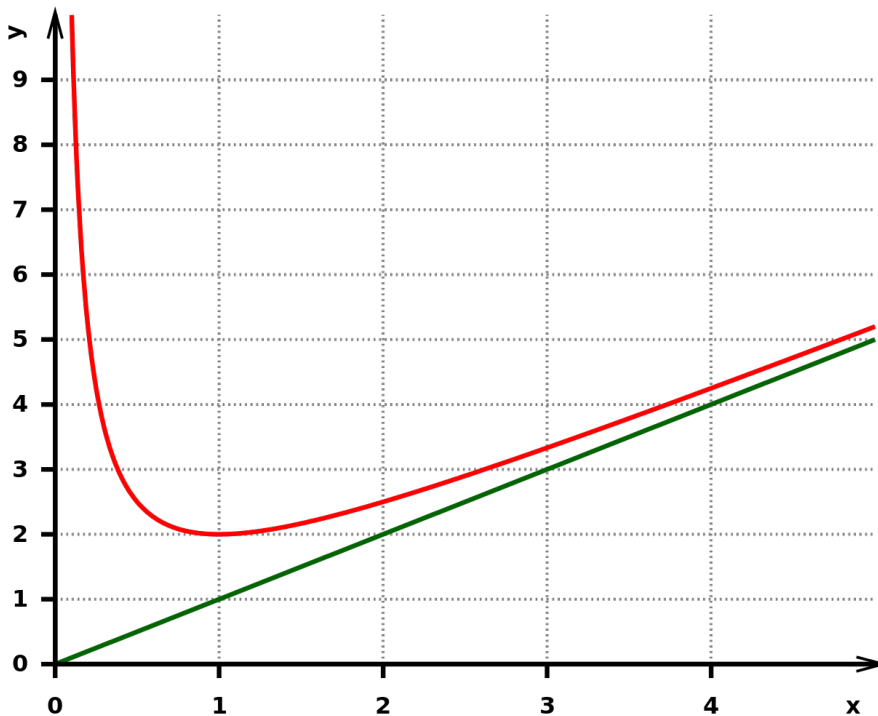
I thought about the tildes before I put them in; I wanted to distinguish the perspective of the person who took the photo of Amy from the reflections of one at a greater distance from it, and, since Michael had identified that he felt "in person" in this space, I didn't want to step on that personness by blurring it with my own. But, of course, this just raises the question of "in person" once again. Some would suggest, for example, that we are more "in person" when we are seen and heard as being our individual selves (whether onsite together or via synchronous interactive video)—so, I know it is Michael speaking because I hear his voice or see his body move; cues which are lost here. And yet, as studies of women and BIPOC folks in the academy and the workplace show, it is quite common for us to speak and not be seen or heard, and for someone else later to take credit for our idea. We can be "in person" but not be recognized as being there at all, or only in a way that is filtered by both the sender and the receiver of the message. Back to our example here, perhaps if you already know us well, you can "hear" our different "voices" in this text, or perhaps it helps you navigate this text if we identify our authorship as we go along. But, does it even matter which one lives with Amy and which one lives alone, or which ideas we came up with "on our own" (as if such a thing is possible) and which were collaboratively developed (or, stolen from elsewhere!)? How about if one of us goes back and edits what someone else wrote—even in a section where we are very "in person"? It is perhaps a question for the reader: are you more comfortable if you know which of us is speaking? Does it matter? Does it make us more or less present/in-person? Why? ~~

Debbie's questions about the language of virtual and the privilege of the synchronous distancing us from our person and perhaps even from other persons reminds me of the rich and complicated notion of proximity in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. We typically think of proximity as simple nearness in space. Yet, what I hear in Levinas (through the interface of words and most often words in translation) is a proximity that involves an approach of/by the other that maintains an irreducible distance.

**Invitation:** Above, I said, "what I hear in Levinas..." Does this common practice of referencing the work of an author by simply invoking their name indicate something about how we image that author's person being available through

their works and words? Would it be better for me to say, “what I hear in Levinas’s writing...?”

Given my math background, proximity as approach with an irreducible distance has always conjured for me the image of an asymptote. Simply stated, an asymptote is a line that approaches a curve but never contacts it as the curve extends to infinity.



In this image, the green line is an asymptote of the red curve. They infinitely approach one another, yet there remains an infinitely irreducible distance between them. I have often wondered if this rich notion of proximity as asymptotic encounter might provide a way for us to consider how different embodiments and different mediated environments afford human encounter that retains this irreducible distance/difference. In some ways, asynchronous and digital spaces remind us of this necessary distance more readily than synchronous or “in building” gatherings do. As Debbie noted above, perhaps we can learn from these different digital embodiments that this distance is also at work in all of the other embodiments which give higher priority to affordances for see-

ing, knowing, understanding one another in ways that can become reductive or even consumptive.

For Levinas, proximity is enacted in the “face to face.” I have explored the relationship between the face to face in Levinas and digital interfaces in more detail elsewhere. It is not lost on me that “face to face” language is often used as a synonym for what is typically thought of as “in person.” Given the asymptotic notion of the face to face, could it be that this encounter is as possible or even more possible in asynchronous or digital spaces?

**Invitation:** In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas identifies this face to face as religion. Do religion and theology provide some unique contributions to these experiments with embodiment, materiality, and time?

### Voice and Sound

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What does sound afford that might provide different material encounters than the image above or this text you are reading now? I have to admit, I love sound, voice, and audio. Most of the “reading” I do these days is listening to audio books, or PDFs read by AI driven high definition voices in my favorite new reading app, Speechify. I am an avid NPR and podcast listener, from *This American Life* and *Wait Wait Don't Tell Me*, to *This Week in Machine Learning and AI* and *The Last Archive*.

I used a SoundCloud embed here instead of ingesting the audio file into PubPub for a few explicit material reasons:

1. The built in voice memo recorder on my iPad Pro records files in a format called .m4a, which is not a supported format on PubPub. This reminds us that even digital audio files can have different material encodings that afford different possibilities and limits.
2. I love that SoundCloud shows the waveforms of the audio as it plays, reminding us again that sound is fundamentally material. Sound waves have different amplitudes and strike the bones and tissues of our ears to pass along the vibrations to our brains, where sense is made of the sound. This visual translation of the auditory phenomenon also reminds us that we are constantly translating our person across different materialities.

3. Without intention on my part, SoundCloud chose a background image for the audio embed that happened to include just my mouth and not my eyes (this may not be true on all display sizes). I can choose any background image to help add some context to this audio piece, but this felt rather fitting as it is. One of the things I love about sound is its ability to challenge the dominance of sight as a mode of perception and encounter (it is not lost on me that my enjoyment of the audio waveforms above reinforces this deference to sight).
4. SoundCloud affords high surface area engagement with the audio, by allowing listeners to comment and have conversation at any point in the audio and locates this conversation at the moment the listener engages. Before I realized that the embed would still allow for this commenting, I considered including a written transcript of the audio here so that people could comment on specific bits of the audio. Now, I do not need to do that because the audio itself can host a conversation.

**Invitation:** Which asynchronous material embodiment (text, image, audio, or video) feels most vulnerable to you and why?

Audio has a very close relationship with time. Much more explicitly than our encounters with text tend to have. Notice that the SoundCloud embed indicates how long the recording is and the time is displayed as the audio is played. Even though some text based platforms, e.g. Medium, are now beginning provide approximate “time to read” indicators, rarely do we have a clock ticking while we read. Here duration and speed have an impact on my encounter with this audio presence. When I am listening to audio books, I often adjust the speed of playback depending on the kind of material I am listening to. When I am listening to more dense and complicated philosophical works like Yuk Hui’s *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, I slow the speed way down, listening even more slowly than my eyes would pass over the words on a page. Whereas, I might listen to fiction at 1.4X speed. Changing these speeds shifts the tonality and the cadence of a piece, which has significant impact on how I engage it. Recently, I was listening to Toni Morrison read her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and I realized that the poetry of her cadence was not as compelling for me at faster speeds, so I slowed it down and it sang again. Does this ability to adjust the time and speed of my encounter with an another’s work diminish or reduce the in personness of the author in these encounters? Does the degree of our ability to manipulate the materialities of encounter offer a way to differentiate kinds of embodiments?

Debbie Creamer and Michael Hemenway

How is this encounter with audio different if it is a digitally produced voice reading something that I wrote? How does this material digital audio artifact relate to my person as it encounters your person?

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I used Amazon Polly with a Neural Net based voice to read this text and downloaded to mp3 for upload here into PubPub.

**Invitation:** What does this difference feel like to you? Does it matter whether you already were familiar with “Michael’s voice” before you heard the two samples?

Proliferation of Presence

*In the original version of this article, a media file is included at this point.  
It can be found in the Pubpub version of this article.*

Video continues to expand the layers of materiality we can encounter in these online spaces. We thought it would be fun to run an experiment where Debbie and I would “simultaneously” be working in the PubPub space while sharing screen on a Zoom meeting.

**Invitation:** What do you see, hear, or notice from this video? Where does presence and the “in-person” show up? You might also look back at the screen capture (Image 1, in the second paragraph of this essay). Where do you observe presence there—and is it different in a screen capture than in the video clip?

Learnings

**Invitation:** What do you see as the key learnings (and/or, remaining questions and experiments to run) at this point in our reflections? We intend to fill this section out after we’ve had opportunities for engagement and conversation with you.