

Appendix A

Dissertation in the Time of Corona

A dissertation which primarily concerns itself with visual subtleties and historical imagery cannot be complete without some visual evidence of the current historical times. Here we are, alone together and together alone. Hiding in our dens and caverns. Covering our breathing holes and sanitizing our surfaces. Finding spaces to work and spaces to be in the nooks and crannies of our protective walls—in closets, in stairwells, in hallways, and garages.

I am writing this dissertation amid our domestic routine which governs our current lives like a desert storm. Two children. One and four naps, respectively, but never at the same time. Three meals and one snack (did we always eat so much? We can no longer seem to remember). One walk. Two baths. Laundry. Cooking. Cleaning. Sleep—for those of us who need not work at night. And within this routine joy resides and wonder flowers of growing bodies and brains.



Figure A.2: And the washing machine.



Figure A.1: Next to the car.

And once in a while, we emerge out of domesticity into our other spaces. Into these nooks and crannies of work, where there are screens, keyboards, cameras, and microphones. Where we need, for example, to don a suit jacket matched with pajama pants to defend our dissertation or give a job talk in front of no one, talking to ourselves while being watched by tens of disembodied people. And yet, here we are, next to the car (Figure A.1) and the washing machine (Figure A.2), behind all the boxes we failed to return before the lockdown, silent reminders of the time we used to have and the spaces we used to allow

ourselves to carelessly occupy, and all the mail, still waiting to be opened after its scheduled quarantine days (Figure A.3).

And yet, they do come, alone together and together alone. Committees meet, listen, and approve over remote video conferencing dotted with a chocolate truffle and a cup of Peet's (Figure A.4). Faraway family members enjoy, in the darkness of night, a unique opportunity to join in a ceremony that would have been inaccessible to them in any normal times. Others who have left before us and spread around this vast country (Figure A.5) can take advantage of the situation and come to a party—each with their time zone and glass of wine. Trying to overcome the awkwardness of disembodied Charades for a brief opportunity to feel together again. Thank you all so much for coming (Figure A.6), and so long.



Figure A.3: Behind the boxes.



Figure A.4: Myself, on a scholarly fake background, with my distinguished dissertation committee over zoom: Professors Alexei A. Efros, Alison Gopnik and Jitendra Malik.

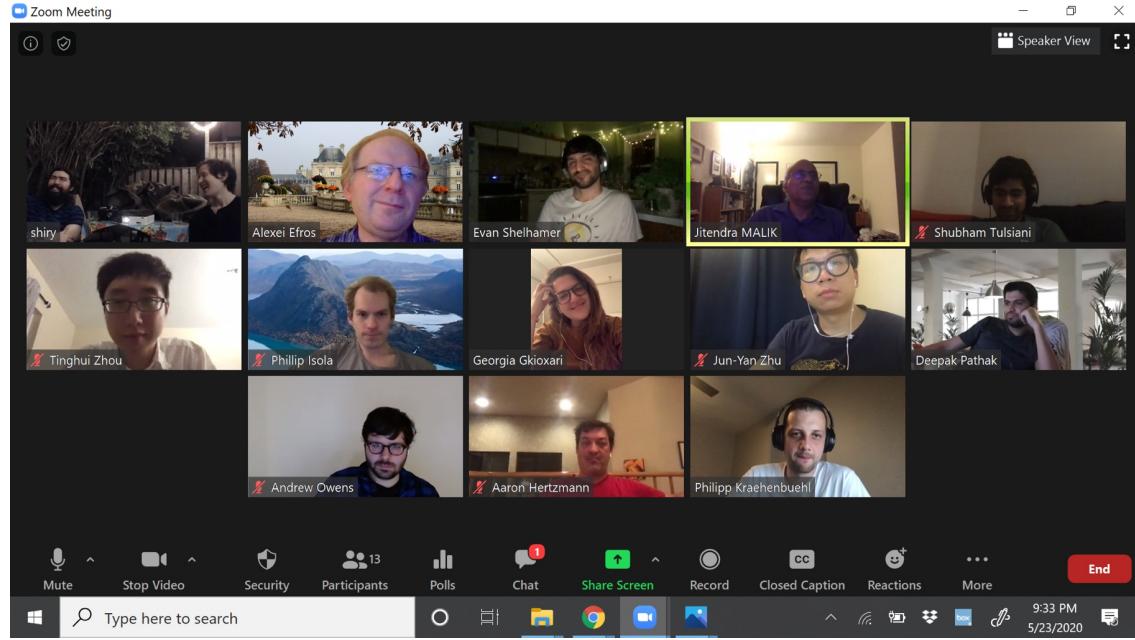


Figure A.5: Dissertation party.



Figure A.6: “*Thank you so much for coming.*”

Cartoon by David Sipress. The New Yorker. Published in the print edition of the June 8 & 15, 2020, issue.