

Zooming In: The Intimate Panopticon and Pandemic Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Early in the pandemic, intimacy specialists began acknowledging that Zoom does not work for everyone's boundaries in all circumstances. In workshops, classes, meetings, and conferences, I encountered the invitation to participate in a way that works for me: to turn off the camera; to move around if needed while participating via headphones; to refuse the creeping pressure to apologize if my family or pets wandered into the frame. But these professional settings were not the only encounters being had via web conference platforms during the pandemic. There were also performances. Some of these included moments of intimacy. This article utilizes PaR—Performance as Research—methodology in analyzing both the author's own experiences performing through Zoom in daily life and their role in crafting performances in the University of Colorado Boulder's production of *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms*. This article explores the ways in which Zoom-based performance creates an intimately panoptic structure for interaction. Furthermore, this article presents the author's approach as a director and intimacy choreographer communicating stories of intimacy in *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* through this distanced and digital medium.

Although performances created throughout the pandemic have used a variety of platforms—ranging from the gaming-dominant Twitch to Zoom and even Gather—a platform in which participants' cartoon avatars can navigate a digital world and in which participants interact through a Zoom-style Gallery setup at the top of the screen (Villarreal et al. 157)—this article borrows from W.B. Worthen's analysis of digital performance created during the pandemic, using the terms "Zoom" and "Zoom

Theatre” when referencing performances created on any web conferencing platforms. Worthen names this style as “the defining genre of theatre during the pandemic... actors in different places all perform live, but remotely, typically from their homes, gathered on a screen: Zoom theatre” (183). This article focuses on the emotional impacts of participating in Zoom theatre and the need for consent-based performance practices when creating digital performances within the Zoom theatre genre.

Like many other performance-makers, I found my production abruptly cancelled in March of 2020. As a queer femme nerd who found strength in myself and my bisexuality through my teenage experimentation with creating queer utopic experiences (Munoz) playing *Dungeons and Dragons*—an experience echoed within *She Kills Monsters*—I was heartbroken when the University of Colorado Boulder announced cancellation of its entire season. When I happened upon Qui Nguyen’s tweet announcing his adaptation of the play specifically for digital production, then, I was thrilled (A. R. Villarreal "Announcing Virtual Realms"). I sought and received the Department of Theatre and Dance’s approval to move forward with directing Nguyen’s adaptation as Zoom theatre during the fall semester of 2020.

Upon receiving this approval, I began considering the ways in which relocating performance to Zoom may require adapted directing and performing practices. Considering Bertie Ferdman’s insistence that “the outdated theatrical engagement with the term [site specific] will no longer suffice for its many contemporary variations” (9), I began considering the emerging variations of site-specificity initiated by the pandemic. Encouraged by Ferdman’s writing, I approached the upcoming production of *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* as an “off-site” performance, pondering the potential mental and emotional impacts of this “off-site,”

but simultaneously *website-specific* performance on the student-performers whom I would be directing. Furthermore, I considered the fresh relevance of Diana Taylor’s “Save As...” in which Taylor writes that “although the digital will not replace print culture any more than print replaced embodied practice, the ways in which it alters, expands, challenges, and otherwise affects our current ways of knowing and being have not completely come into focus” (3). In the face of the pandemic, when modes of togetherness began rapidly adapting towards the digital—which will likely not permanently replace other modalities of togetherness—the change imposed upon those who had not previously lived in the digital sphere is similarly affecting our ways of knowing and being, as well as ways of performing and witnessing performance. As we live through and adapt to pandemic-mandated relocation and interacting through digital and mediatized modalities, the impacts of this alteration are not yet clear or fully in focus. Informed by Taylor and Ferdman, then, I began observing the ways in which the re-siting or off-sitedness of interactions via Zoom was altering, expanding, and challenging communication in daily practice and performance, so that I could effectively adjust my directing practice to better serve the site-specificity of this new venue.

ZOOM BURNOUT

In news stories and social media, this phrasing—*Zoom burnout*—quickly became prominent in discussions. Upon first encountering the phrase, I knew its meaning immediately; embodied cognition (Taylor 2) had processed this experience prior to my learning its name. Despite my loneliness and lifelong extroversion I felt avoidance, rather than anticipation, at the thought of Zoom-based social events. I struggled with remaining focused at Zoom meetings, instead meandering through my

physical space or my browser tabs. Perhaps you have felt Zoom burnout weighing upon you in some way; many of us have been drained by the relocation of life interactions to the format of small squares on computer screens.

Why has this been so hard, I wondered, and what could be done to support actors creating upon this new stage? Perhaps Zoom burnout emerges because Zoom selects which microphone's audio to project, limiting our crosstalk capabilities, or because the scope of our vision is limited to the framing of our computer cameras, similarly limiting our ability to infer linguistic use of bodily gestures—and, therefore, our capacity to communicate using the standards for communication that we have been taught throughout our lives. Perhaps the difficulty stems from the subconscious confusion that arises from attempting to see those to whom we are speaking, leading us to look at our screens rather than our cameras, rendering eye contact relatively impossible.

The sudden increase in video conferencing drove psychologists' investigations of Zoom's health impacts. Burnout specialist Jennifer Moss asserts that burnout was exacerbated during the pandemic because Zoom is more physically and mentally taxing than interactions in shared space, writing that "our brains find it more challenging to process nonverbal cues like facial expressions and body language...making it tough to relax during conversations...[and] slight delays in verbal responses subconsciously make us dislike people" (8). Therapist Sweta Bothra posits that durational Zoom use can cause decreased interest in daily activities, increased cynicism and pessimism, difficulty focusing and retaining information, and increased—even "constant"—negative thoughts about oneself (4). Bothra argues that video conferencing causes these symptoms due to dissonance, writing that "when your mind sees and hears other people, but realizes they are not physically present there, it can cause a sense of dissonance or

disconnection” (2). Adding to this, Annabel Ngien and Bernie Hogan’s Oxford study determined that the increase in exhaustion and anxiety is specifically linked to using Zoom with one’s camera on (Ngien).

I had felt the increased taxation that Moss names, as my department meetings and classes that I was taking and teaching relocated all of my interpersonal interactions to Zoom; the negative emotions and decreased focus indicated by Bothra; and the fatigue analyzed by Ngien. When I attended Nicole Brewer’s Anti-Racist Theatre workshop in the autumn of 2020, then, and she instructed us to turn our self-view off (a feature previously unknown to me), I recognized the burden of what Ngien later called “self-monitoring.” Part of the difficulty of creating and communicating via Zoom stemmed from the forced intimacy and the panoptic setup of the software. To better counteract Zoom burnout while creating Zoom theatre, a director needs to understand the ways in which *Zoom is an intimate panopticon*.

THE INTIMATE PANOPTICON

English philosopher Jeremy Bentham introduced the concept of the panoptic prison. Realized as a large, circular prison in which a round guard tower is surrounded by a full circle of prison cells, Bentham believed that the ever-present and visible, yet unverifiable, surveillant gaze would act as a mechanism of social and emotional control. Bentham theorized that prisoners—who cannot see into the tower—would begin to self-monitor without any possibility of verifying which way guards were looking, for fear of constant surveillance (*Ethics Explainer*). The mere threat of being watched, it was thought, could cause prisoners to increasingly self-monitor, diminishing the needs for prison personnel and funding.

French philosopher Michel Foucault criticized this concept, claiming that it was not only a model for physical prison buildings, but a form of

social control which humans experience throughout many arenas of their lives. Foucault wrote: “the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building...it is polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work...Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used” (Foucault 9). Foucault implies that the mentality of fear in the face of unverified surveillance affects the behaviors of humans when we feel that we may be being watched. Thus, the panopticon affects our interior realities and the ways in which we engage with one another in space.

Whether teaching, performing, crossing campus, or riding the train, I can typically tell when I’m being watched. Heads and eyes turn my direction if attention is on me. I can sense when I’m being observed, and I can relax when I know that attention is elsewhere. But in the tiled panoptic experience of Zoom, it’s difficult to tell whether the people whose faces populate the checkerboard arrangement on my computer screen are monitoring me, or whether they are reading emails, doomscrolling, or working. I find it difficult to shake the sense that they are staring at each imperfection of my skin; my messy curls; my asymmetrical eyebrows. I subconsciously feel as though the digital crowd is watching, knowing that I’m attempting to multitask, or passing judgement because I have allowed my default facial expression to approach the unfocused and relaxed, unsmiling position which our patriarchal society shames, naming this neutrality *resting bitch face*. The panoptic pressure, the dubious surveillant gaze, seep into my awareness. I find myself incapable of escaping the fear that I am being monitored, and I adjust my performance of attentiveness, just in case.

When I'm on Zoom, I find myself staring at that second square; the box in which my own face can be seen. Why? I suspect that it's not simply vanity (Villarreal "Unscripted Intimacies" 198-200); it's self-curation. Ngien's Oxford study calls this self-monitoring. I watch that second square to judge myself and make any necessary adjustments before you judge me, too. I try to ensure that I *look* like I'm listening, even—and especially—when I really am. I smile and nod. I check my RBF. I dial it back when I seem too eager, especially when I *am* earnestly excited, for the fear that my appearance might too closely mirror the "overly attached girlfriend" meme. Because I don't know if someone is watching my little panoptic prison box, I consistently perform attentiveness. Then, of course, everyone could be focused on their own performance.

But just in case, I self-curate. I tilt my head *just so*, to minimize the glare in my glasses. I find myself stuck in an ongoing cycle of constant self-curation.

Others have noted the panoptic sensation of uncertain surveillance in the embodied experience of interacting via Zoom. Writing for the *New York Times*, Patrick Lyons—a Senior News Editor at that same publication—proclaimed that "Zoom is the panopticon of the pandemic" (Lyons). Adrienne Keene—a Native American writer and scholar who teaches cultural studies at Brown University—mused on Twitter that "Zoom is basically a panopticon with the added bonus of seeing your own face" (Keene), requesting that someone in the Twitter community create "a web comic of fictional Foucault discussing Zoom" (Keene 2020). Former presidential speech writer John Lovett similarly explored the parallels between panoptic surveillance and video conferencing platforms on social media, writing a Twitter thread that explicitly ties Zoom burnout to the panoptic experience of always suspecting, but never knowing, one is being watched.

Adding to the already panoptic pressure noted by these individuals and my own embodied experience is the intimacy of Zoom's framing. On Zoom, I am seen from roughly the sternum to the crown of my head. I am seen from a vantage—my camera's—that is distanced by only a few feet from my face. This places a viewer—someone on the other end of the Zoom connection—in a position of gazing upon me from a viewpoint within arm's distance. Often, my computer is only so far from my face as it can be, while still allowing for me to comfortably type with my elbows by my side. This means that the camera is intimately close to me. It may be closer than the distance I stand with others when having conversations in shared space. This creates a close visual interaction with my face and the upper half of my body. The framing echoes the vantage point of a date or a partner, sitting across a restaurant table from me—except, even then, my computer's placement would likely divide that distance. Thus, the combination of this framing and distance may feel intimate, especially in work-related situations or encounters with strangers. Within this intimate framing, I curate my own appearance in attempt to counteract an overwhelming sense of vulnerability. I focus on my own onscreen appearance and ensure that everything is just so, because I always feel that I **could be** being watched—that is the nature of the intimate panopticon.

Within this panoptic video conference platform is an inherent intimacy. W.B. Worthen, scholar and professor of theatre and performance, comments upon the intimacy imposed by the close-up framing of Zoom theatre, writing that “the most distinctive format of most productions (actors working directly into their cameras, notionally speaking to one another in character while facing out to the equally virtualized audience) lends even the recorded performances the feeling of intimacy, the immediacy of, say, a recorded monologue” (185).

Acknowledging the panoptic nature of Zoom and the intimately framed gaze imposed by the platform, I wondered about the impact of Zoom theatre on undergraduate actors. Theatre makers Richardson, Cutting, and Gilron published guidelines for theatre creators producing work during the pandemic, calling for “an increased awareness of the physical and mental stressors associated with COVID-19 and related issues” (15), including awareness that “the lived experience of being in a pandemic can imprint within a person’s body as trauma” (16). Richardson, Cutting, and Gilron claim that Zoom burnout-related mental and emotional strain, combined with the “lack of separation between home and work,” causes actors to be “less resilient in general” (20) and especially vulnerable when performing stories of intimacy (19).

As an educator, director, and intimacy choreographer, I wanted to counteract the impacts of the intimate panopticon and support students’ resilience throughout our process. Preparing to direct *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* and its emotionally intimate stories of self-discovery, sisterhood, mourning, queer connection, and coming out, I considered the intersection of this story, Zoom as a stage, and the circumstances student actors faced while performing during the pandemic. I wanted to mitigate the Zoom burnout for students who were spending their entire days within the intimate panopticon; to minimize the emotionally exhausting constant subconscious self-monitoring as identified by Ngien; and to increase separation between home and work in alignment with Richardson, Cutting, and Gilron’s call to action for theatre practitioners. I realized that in order to support actors performing in the intimate panopticon, I would need to “adopt agentic framing and curatorial directing practices to aid in the development of well-rounded performers who are able to make bold character decisions” (Villarreal 2022, 26). I combined techniques from Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, Theatrical

Intimacy Education, Liz Lerman, and online larp practices, establishing an approach I call *curatorial direction*.

CURATORIAL DIRECTION AS CONSENT-BASED PRAXIS FOR THE INTIMATE PANOPTICON

She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms centers around Agnes's mourning process as she attempts to deal with the loss of her recently deceased sister Tilly; as she struggles to accept that her sister had been queer and closeted; as she embraces real connection over conformity. Throughout the narrative, Agnes plays the *Dungeons and Dragons* campaign Tilly designed in an attempt to attain posthumous connection. Although Tilly's *D&D* character and Agnes interact, the sisters are never quite together. Tilly is gone; her character is brought to life by Chuck, the dungeon master guiding Agnes through Tilly's campaign—a queer utopic fantasy *D&D* world (echoing José Esteban Muñoz) that Tilly had created to facilitate self-discovery and sexual exploration.

In directing a cast of sixteen student actors performing in the intimate panopticon, I focused on designing a language of vulnerability that mirrored the language of everyday performances in the intimate panopticon to shape the ways we crafted characters' connections and communication. We delved into dramaturgical exploration of the story, spending weeks of rehearsal time collaboratively building up characters' backstories: how and when these characters originally met, what their first impressions of each other were. We identified which relationships would be characterized by trust and openness to vulnerability, which would not. We engaged in collaborative and continuous dramaturgy; the production's dramaturg, Isabel Smith-Bernstein, attended rehearsals, maintaining open communication as questions arose. Isabel also facilitated—or DM'd—sessions of *Dungeons and Dragons* so that every member of our team

could understand the worlds of the play and the ways in which characters' lived experiences interact with their in-game experiences. This process engaged the pillars of rehearsal and performance practice established by the consent-focused organization Intimacy Directors and Coordinators—originally Intimacy Directors International (Sina et al.).

While focusing on the pillar of context, we discussed the visual language of Zoom and the tendency to self-curate in the intimate panopticon. Lucinda Lazo, an undergraduate student performing the role of Lilith, later wrote in her postmortem reflection that these conversations “helped me realize why I was struggling in classes and gave me ideas for coping with coronavirus” (Lazo). To mitigate the panoptic pressure of Zoom during rehearsal, we established a practice that echoed entering and exiting stage: when a character entered a scene, that actor would turn their camera on, and when they left the scene, the camera would be turned off. We also invited all members of the company to select the “hide non-video participants” option, so that we were all only watching what was happening onstage. I invited all participants to react to scenes via the chat, and when any member of the directing or stage management teams wanted to speak to the actors, we would turn our videos on, as well. This allowed everyone to have agency over when they were seen, decreasing the panoptic pressure of Zoom. One of our puppeteers—a graduate student named Sarah—wrote in her postmortem reflection that “I started using this setup in my classes... My students are already used to commenting on videos as a social practice... the change in format made all of them seem more comfortable giving feedback and participating in class” (Fahmy).

After establishing an understanding of the panoptic nature of Zoom in our lived experiences, we applied this knowledge to our worldbuilding throughout the production process. During tablework, we discussed when

characters would be engaged in self-curation, and when the connection established in a moment would be so important and palpable that a character would open themselves up to the vulnerability of halting their curation. When rehearsing and blocking the performance, we represented these moments through a direct-to-camera gaze, effectively connecting the character's gaze with the audience, which we hoped would invite the audience to feel the intimacy of a moment.

Yes, we choreographed eye contact into our production. To some, this may sound odd; however, the use of eye contact as one of Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE)'s "ingredients" of intimacy choreography is well-established in physical spaces. Eye contact is one of TIE's technical blocking tools that can be used with actors working spatially alone, connected to their fellow castmates only through Zoom. In *Staging Sex*, Chelsea Pace writes that "Eye Contact choices allow us into the mind of the character and help us understand relationships onstage" (51). Pace also notes that eye contact often does not require specific choreography, as the actors' instincts will often guide them in the use of eye contact. However, in the less-familiar setup of performing at home in front of a green screen, where an actor's scene partners are onscreen and their own internal pressure to self-curate may be overwhelming, eye contact became a constant part of our conversation with actors, as we discussed moments of openness to vulnerability that could be communicated through eye contact to invite the audience into the character's mind and communicate relationships onscreen. When a character does not feel close connection and trust in a conversation, there's no eye contact; the character is still engrossed in self-curation. But, when a character needs something from another so badly that they are willing to open themselves up to vulnerability... then, they directly address the camera, eyes probing the character they are speaking to, yearning and reaching for connection,

or perhaps so caught up in the emotion of that connection that the need for self-curation simply falls away.

Similarly to eye contact, an ingredient of intimacy choreography developed for use in physical, shared space, our production adapted the ingredient of “Opening and Closing Distance” (Pace 40). Rather than closing distances between actors onstage or between one body part and another, closing distance for this Zoom-based production always used the camera as destination. We used distance to communicate intimacy, despite actors not sharing space—an actor’s proximity to their camera could echo and communicate their character’s internal desire for closeness and connection. The proximity of their body—eyes, hand, top of head—to the camera increases the already-intimate framing of a camera in a Zoom-style setup, emphasizing an emotional moment. When an actor places their face in their hands, closing the distance between the top of their head and their camera, the audience—and other characters—are cut off from the capability to read their emotional reaction. Conversely, a character’s excitement can be palpably communicated by the actor closing distance, leaning towards the camera and maintaining eye contact.

But our use of eye contact, specifically, was designed in our attempt to pull the audience into the characters’ most emotionally vulnerable moments—the moments in which characters found themselves connecting, despite the virtual format of their communication. Eye contact and camera proximity, then, became expressions of characters’ openness to connection within this production. In making eye contact within the Zoom format, we pause our self-curation for a brief moment, allowing ourselves to be seen as we are. To engage with the narrative possibilities afforded by this new genre, creators can break free of the limitation of realistic intimacy choreography (kisses, etc) that communicate clearly on

physical stages, instead embracing the invitation to poeticize characters' emotions without simulating physical intimacy.

Throughout the rehearsal process, we worked towards crafting physicality that represented characters' internal emotional states by using *agentic framing*. Agentic framing was introduced (Villarreal "Unscripted Intimacies") in opposition to Laura Mulvey's concept of the *male gaze*—in which an actor/character/object has no control over the way their (originally, and typically, *her*) body is used/consumed onscreen by the camera and, therefore, the audience's gaze—and in addition to Stephanie Jennings' *feminine gaze*—a gameric praxis in which a player's actions assist in both the development of their avatar's character and their own understanding of themselves (240). Expanded in "*Valha11a: Agency and Genre in Emergent Virtual Larp*," the concept of the agentic gaze "creates an opportunity for dismantling social and gender power imbalances" during performances crafted in Zoom setups, while also supporting "accessibility, comfort, and personal preference" (Villarreal et al. 146), by allowing each actor to, in character, interact and connect with full autonomy over their performance. Agentic framing facilitates a consent-based performance by, in the words of the IDC pillars: "provid[ing] actors with the agency" to shape their performances and control what was happening with and to their own bodies throughout the performance (Sina, et al.). While agentic framing was developed as a conceptual framework for analyzing the ways in which larpers interact via Zoom, I adapted this conceptual framework into a directing praxis by combining the end result—the actor's agency over the ways they are seen onstage—with the Liz Lerman Critical Response Process as a directing methodology I call *curatorial direction*. This combination was realized as a process that resulted in the directing team working to remind actors of their agency in moving and interacting with one another through the zoom format; the

director, in this case, bears the burden of *curating* the actors' performances. Matara Hitchcock, who performed the role of Agnes, summarized this process:

we would do the scene a few times, and Amanda Rose would respond by naming details she noticed in our performance and what those details would communicate to the audience. Then they would remind us of what we were trying to communicate to the audience, and (this was great!) we would be able to decide how to adjust and we'd experiment, and then when we created a moment really worked, they would name back what we did, why it worked, and then we would set it. She was really creating a space where we could experiment and have control and understand the process. It was the most collaborative and respected I'd ever felt by a director. (Hitchcock)

This led to the development of scenes in which an actor may speak from off camera, may be distanced from the camera, or may be exceedingly close to the camera: these decisions were rooted in the actor's agency in portraying their character, and the character's emotional circumstances. Caleb, who played a character seen by other characters as exceptionally nerdy and a little *extra*, entered each scene at odd angles, sometimes spending time during a scene adjusting his camera or spinning to reveal himself in an excessively dramatic manner, creating framing that supported the awkward overenthusiasm of his character. He wrote in his postmortem response:

I had so much fun trying things... Amanda Rose would... describe what it looked like onscreen and how my decisions effected [sic] the story and ask me questions that really helped me think and be more specific. I got to experience what all of my directors are thinking instead of her telling me what to do for blocking, she'd say

something like ‘we want this scene to feel more like *this* for the audience,’ and I could figure out how to make that happen... And I could tell when it was working because everyone else would freak out in the chat, like suddenly there would just be YES!!!! 30x in the chat and I knew it was working. (Caleb)

Here, Caleb asserts that the combination of agentic framing and the critical response process used in curatorial direction provided actors with context and consent in developing this performance. Caleb’s comments also indicate that the functionality of the Zoom platform supported communication throughout our rehearsal process, providing actors with a textual echo of the experience of an experiment being met with audible gasps during an in-the-room rehearsal—a text-based reflection of embodied audience engagement that fuels an actor’s process. Lucinda, another actor in the production, summarizes the ways in which curatorial direction impacted her as a student performer working during the pandemic:

Amanda Rose’s feedback helped me learn a lot... and the way she worked and talked to us made it less draining. With coronavirus we’re so overwhelmed but she gave me feedback that made me excited to keep working instead of making me just feel depressed about being online. (Lazo)

Emphasizing actors’ agency to counteract the pressures of performing within the intimate panopticon, according to Lucinda, alleviated some elements of Zoom burnout. Combining agentic framing and the critical response process elevated students’ agency throughout the process while I, as the director, curated their choices towards a coherent performance. Directing through a curational model returns agency to the performer; grounding feedback in dramaturgical context informs actors’ decisions while allowing them to maintain control over the ways in which they are

seen through the camera's lens, counteracting the pressures often established by existing within the intimate panopticon and performing via Zoom.

CONCLUSION

By adapting TIE's ingredients of intimacy choreography for Zoom-based, socially distanced onscreen performance in combination with agentic framing of the actors' performances, we created an approach to consent-based performance practice for use in digital productions in and beyond the pandemic. This approach—*curatorial direction*—purposefully melded agentic framing (A. R. H. Villarreal) with the Pillars of Safe Intimacy (Sina et al.), the Ingredients of Intimacy Choreography (Pace), and Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process* in order to craft performances through an approach that was cognizant of the social context and the digital platform, rather than removed from or ignoring these important elements of the production process. Artists have developed innovative digital performance practices in the past few years, and actors engaging in these production processes are no less in deserving of consent-based performance processes than actors whose interactions occur in shared physical space. Intimacy director Zev Steinrock, interviewed by Sydney Wood, defines consent-based performance practices "as being trauma-informed and crucial" for staging scenes of intimacy. Given the collective trauma caused and ongoingly experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused many to feel increased anxiety and fear, as well as a lack of control over our own lives (Masiero; Watson et al; Stanley et al.), I believe Steinrock's assertion that trauma-informed, consent-based practices are crucial when staging intimacy extends into the entirety of performance within the intimate panopticon.

Zoom has been the locus of much of our sharing of traumatic experiences throughout the past two-plus years, and the nature of the platform's intimate framing lends each performance created on Zoom to feel, in its entirety, intimate. Zoom theatre, which occurs in—but not only in—my room, your room, the camera, and the unclear connections occurring in the in-between, emerges through a digitally connected embodiment that is deeply rooted in, and inseparable from, the social trauma of the pandemic. While so much incredibly artistic innovation has emerged through Zoom theatre, creators need to ensure that, while working in these virtual realms, we do so with care for one another and with consent-based performance practices. Intimacy specialists specifically need to note that the lack of physical contact and shared space does not diminish the need for a consent advocate and honoring of personal boundaries as we work to tell stories together within the intimate panopticon.

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