SCRIPT - VIDEO ESSAY

What is the role of individualism in today's contemporary society? Where do we belong?

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, I've lived in different places—Prague, London, back to Prague, Mauritius, and London again. This should be a place I belong to now. But is it, really? I feel like an impostor, pretending to fit in. I've been asking myself "What am I doing here, is this where I really belong"?.. Well, This essay is not about me, not only at least. But this personal journey of mine inspired my enquiry and helped me to shape my interest in the question of identity and belonging in today's contemporary society.

I.
Identity, like a complex tapestry, weaves together the essence of our existence. Our personal history, memories, experiences are together shaping who we are in our unique existence. (Maslow, 1962).

Mirroring the contemporary age, each of us has built a pixelated version of our identities that we allow to be seen by others. Despite their differences, both forms of identities are part of our daily lives and shape how we are perceived, understood, and engaged both within' the physical and digital World. (Lupton, 2016)

In these Worlds, we find ourselves constantly reflecting on where we belong and what is our role. This personal exploration becomes even more complex in the context of surveillance society.

In the surveillance society, You, me, us.. we as ordinary citizens constantly and routinely navigate and interact with various forms of surveillance through technologies. From cameras on the street to online tracking and data collection. Surveillance and self-surveillance have integrated into our daily lives. According to David Lyon, that can lead one to suspicion, self-policing, affecting a sense of belonging, even security and safety. (Lyon, 2001)

II.
Inspired by Lewis' research on unexpected surveillance experiences, I started collecting photos from a camera instaled in my room to experience the surveillance in personal space myself. I was also taking photographs of the proofs of surveillance in spaces around me. Further reaction to the reference was a set of posters and a booklet. These experiments inspired me to conduct a set of real-life interviews with young creatives to further understand the personal emotional impact of self-policing and surveillance on identity and belonging.

The framing question of the interview was: How does the constant presence of technology and the digital space in our lives affect your sense of self, individuality, and belonging in society?

"I try to adapt to keep up but it isn't the real me".

"sometimes I feel excluded from my actual life and the digital space feels very much real"

"I feel like a small fish in a big tank."

"I feel the pressure to conform but it feels impossible."

"I am afraid that being connected with people online might make me think that I have a lot of friends even when being lonely"

"If I say something wrong it'd last forever and everybody's gonna judge. This art circle we live in is kinda toxic."

III.
In my earlier experiments, I was exploring layering on Risograph, then digital filters, and later on started experimenting with physical materials to bring tangibility and material to engage with in the project. Red foils were used in the final booklet allowing viewers to experience others' stories, reveal what's hidden, untold or unseen, and reflect on their own positions through visually experiencing narratives of others.

By employing intentional design, I aim to convey the social implications of living in a surveillance culture, challenging assumptions and encouraging critical reflection. (Drucker, 2014).

CLOSING LINE
At this moment, the project is still developing. I am interested in talking to people more, exploring the ways to use design to represent those precious, intimate conversations.

REFERENCES USED IN THE ESSAY

From my own library:

- *Lyon, D. (2001). Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life. Open University Press.*

- *Lewis, R. (2017). Under Surveillance: Being Watched in Modern America. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press*

- *Lupton, D. (2016). The Quantified Self: A Sociology of Self-Tracking. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press*

- *Drucker, J. (2014). Designing graphic interpretation, in Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production. Cambridge. MA: Harvard University*

- *McLuhan, M., & Fiore, Q. (2001). The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects. Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press*

Outside my library:

- *Maslow, A. H. (1962). Toward a Psychology of Being. Van Nostrand.*