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Reading Response #7

One of the most jarring culture shocks I've experienced moving back to the US is the systemic social isolation. Being here at Stanford and CCRMA is an exception, there is a small, tight-knit community and many opportunities for social interaction within this friendly bubble. But in the outside world, the US is so compartmentalized, literally, by cars and the ultra spread-out design they have inculcated into our civil planning. Hypercharged by Covid-era innovations such as curbside pick-up, same-day delivery, remote-work, there is scant necessity to leave home at all. The correlation between all of this and Americans' mental health is someone else's research; more relevant to this chapter what role can music technology play to digitally bring us together?

This chapter touches on a few interesting examples, such the Zephyr (pg 364), Magic Piano (pg 366), and Kunwoo showed a great, more recent example in class with his Final Fantasy concert. And we can see that since the mid-late 2000's when many of these Smule apps were released to today, we see a tremendous amount of growth in digital interactivity. We've progressed from sort of shouting, and viewing the shouts of others, in a digital void (Facebook walls, Zephyr chain grams, Ocarina melodies) to real time, HD audio and video, VR/AR, and dynamic, immersive video games are the standard. Yet I wonder, are there not still some reactions on a physiological level to encountering and interacting with fellow human beings that remain missing, for example some chemicals that your brain releases when you smell another human being. How important are things like this? How well does our technology trick the brain? What is the end result of this 'hybrid' mode?

I think back to the original Sims game from my childhood

Your Sim's happiness is managed by these 8 bars. I wonder how much the Social bar can be filled through our current means of digital collaborative music making.

This is not to say that I don't find many of these current collaborative interactions intriguing, but I think we must be mindful when these sorts of inventions are presented as direct substitutes for real-world collaborative music making experience. An important research question (and one I am very interested in pursuing with biofeedback hyperscanning for example) is what exactly is missing, between real-life music collaboration and various digital substitutes available to us

today. For example, how do EEG signals during musical collaboration differ when someone is sitting in a room with a fellow musician, versus together in VR, versus together in VR but in avatar form, versus together in a traditional video game (a la Final Fantasy), versus audio only. Knowing precisely what is missing, we can then endeavor to build artistic, technological tools to fill in these gaps, or if not, we will at least be cognizant of the limitations and can be mindful of the drawbacks as we develop further.