

April 28, 2016

Dear Jenny,

I am writing this underneath tree #1438 in the Berlin-Dahlem Botanical Garden. It is a Giant Sequoia, a species of tree that is among the oldest and largest living things in the world. Their only natural habitat is the Sierra Nevada Mountains in central California. When you walk through a redwood grove, you lose all sense of the scale of human time.

I thought it fitting to write this here because we are using your phone to display the app in the exhibition, which is still connected to my old phone. I left my old phone at home, so your phone points to where I traveled from, California, and states the distance between those two places; some 9000 km. When someone stands in the gallery, what is actually exhibited is a distance and orientation in space. Maybe it is also a notion of *place*.

The interface of the app is an arrow with only the distance between you and the other person. It is a simple gesture, to point where someone else is. The arrow is like a compass needle, but you become each other's North. I like to think about how the arrow points off and away from the screen. Whereas most apps on your phone generate value by focusing and accumulating attention onto the screen, this is intended to divert and direct it into a distance. I also like to consider the app as an anti-social media. You do not have "friends," which Facebook has made meaningless. It is just for you and someone else, since you can only connect to one person at a time. And the initial connection can only be made when you are together in the same place (like when we connected last time I was in Berlin).

I have been rephrasing what I have already written in a text for Simone and Thomas' exhibition in Bielefeld and Nürnberg, where this app was first exhibited. About this intimacy at a distance. And about how we perceive space and distance. The difference between imagining someone as a dot on a map in a screen and imagining them in physical space, in the direction of their body. Here is a direct copy and paste from the text I had written:

*Whether across a town, a mountain range, a forest, or a sea, one can literally shift one's neck or move one's feet to orient the body and gaze towards the other person. But this is a gaze that moves into and across distances. A gaze that follows the curved surface of the Earth, going beyond the visible and into the imagination.*

Imagination is important here. It is an exercise in one's capacity to imagine. To see what isn't there. Like looking at water and imagining when it was once a cloud. And when it will be once again.

- David

p.s. I have been sitting so still writing this. A fox has just walked by me. It was only a few feet away. I made a photo with my laptop's camera.

