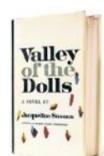




**Work Buddies**  
Desk toys to make WFH a little more meditative **D9**

# OFF DUTY

**Take In the Trash**  
A classically cheesy read that's soothing right now **D5**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Saturday/Sunday, April 18 - 19, 2020 | **D1**

## The Year of Living Digitally

After Covid-19 put the outside world on pause, we soon adapted to socializing solely through screens. Will this novel way of life become our 'new normal' even after the danger has passed?



BY MATTHEW KITCHEN

**A** LONE, CONFINED to a limited space, eating the contents of foil packages, interacting with loved ones through jittery, pixelating screens, “signing off” to say goodbye. Like countless other people under quarantine globally, I’m restrained within the same walls I’ve taken for granted all these years—I probably should have spent more time decorating.

The Covid-19 crisis has forced us to fundamentally shift how we operate and interact as humans in just a short window. But what first seemed like a lonely dystopia has, for many, become a period of discovery. We’ve adapted nimbly, finding connection, interaction and emotional fulfillment in shared virtual space on platforms like Zoom, a live video-chat service—call it Skype on steroids—that few had heard of before early March, but that now seems to be helping stitch the torn remnants of our social fabric back together. The question is:

Will we ever truly revert to our former status quo?

You’d be hard-pressed to name another technology that’s been so quickly and blindly adopted as Zoom. Television took years. Social media grew in fits and starts (some of you will remember Friendster). But in the past few weeks, I’ve been invited to Zoom work meetings, happy hours, poker games and Easter brunches. I have weekly Saturday-morning coffees with my buddy Joe who’s isolating a few blocks from me in Brooklyn. Friends have attended Zoom weddings and seders, court proceedings and dance parties. “SNL” even recorded its latest episode on the now-ubiquitous platform, with host Tom Hanks performing the monologue from his (surprisingly unglamorous) kitchen.

Many others have taken to FaceTime for first dates (and breakups). Some have joined yoga and spin classes on Instagram Live, played trivia on the Houseparty phone app and board games over BlueJeans, a Zoom competitor. “Video chat has become the Swiss Army Knife for every social experience we’re having right now,” said Shawn DuBravac,

futurist and the bestselling author of “Digital Destiny: How the New Age of Data Will Transform the Way We Work, Live, and Communicate.”

Thanks to advancing technologies, humans have persisted for millennia. And it seems that, though more physically disconnected than ever, we “will not be contained,” as Dr. Ian Malcolm portends in “Jurassic Park,” the 1993 blockbuster. “Life breaks free, it expands to new territories and it crashes through barriers—painfully maybe even dangerously,” he says. “But...life finds a way.”

This pandemic too shall pass, but the professionally prescient are already debating what parts of this novel lifestyle will continue when it does. “We’re developing new habits and new comfort and new solace in these behaviors,” said Matt Klein, director of strategy for Sparks & Honey, a consultancy that studies trends. “But when we’re increasing the repetition of these things, over time, they’re going to become more normalized.”

Daniella Kohavy, a senior product manager

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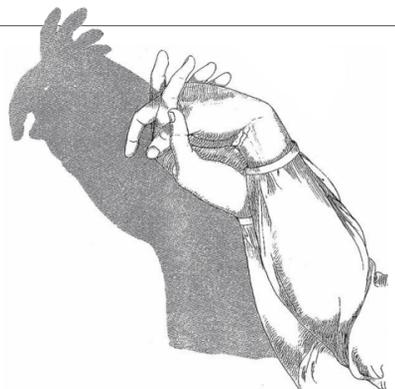
#### ACCESSORIZE AND SHINE

Look like you’ve got it together with these Zoom-friendly hair doo-dads **D3**



#### WALLED IN, CHICLY

Refresh your quarantine décor without buying a thing **D9**



#### THE SHADOW NOSE

Puppets for the poppets **D6**



#### THREE-INGREDIENT CUISINE

An easy approach to cooking that does a lot with less **D8**

JACK RICHARDSON

## GEAR &amp; GADGETS



## When Novelty Becomes the Norm

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who's holing up with her parents in Queens, N.Y., has gone on FaceTime dates and attended Zoom speed-dating events with 60 people from her community. The platforms let her gauge eye contact and hints of body language, but there's "too much mystery." Ms. Kohavy craves a return to her normal dating life. "My love language is physical touch. So when it's completely safe to be out and about, I damn sure want to go back to in-person dates."

Despite our initial burst of enthusiasm, video fatigue is already starting to set in, said Mr. DuBravac over Zoom from Washington, D.C. "You're already seeing pushback to the fact that we are trying to replicate things that were happening in the real world."

A father of two in Brooklyn, N.Y., Matt Toder has noticed how quickly his kids' zeal for virtually connecting with classmates has waned in just the few weeks under quarantine. "The change has been quite notable among them and their friends," he said. "At first, class-wide zoom calls were all energy and chaos. Now the kids are husks of themselves."

Connective technologies, however, are helping many others achieve something akin to the work-life balance they've long fought to establish. The 4,000 employees of the education publishing giant McGraw Hill held more than 14,000 Zoom and WebEx calls during a single week early in quarantine, many of them frustrating as people struggled to understand when it was their turn to speak. "You've got to be a bit more of a conductor in the orchestra," when hosting meetings, said CEO Simon Allen.

But he's since seen dramatic shifts, including a 32% increase in employees logging on to work weekends as they've been freed to determine their schedules—spreading their work hours across more days while taking time to enjoy family and better themselves. When offices reopen, Mr. Allen expects the percentage of his employees that elect WFH to double, from 20% to 40% or more. "We're not going to go back to what we would define as normal before. I think the shift is going to stick. And that's good because it's forced people to think about how they set up their lives."

The technologies we adapt now might also help shift the real-estate and travel markets, predicted Omar Khan, chief product officer of the Plantation, Fla.-based tech startup Magic Leap. As people prove they can use these tools to work efficiently from just about anywhere,

**'We're not going to go back to what we would define as normal before. This shift will stick because it's forced people to think about how they live.'**

he said, they'll be empowered to live in any locale with reliable Wi-Fi. Mr. Khan's company uses spatial computing that renders 3-D "volumetric video" to create shared photorealistic virtual spaces in which people can mingle and collaborate via Magic Leap headsets. He hopes this futuristic WFH reality can help free companies from the financial and carbon-footprint burdens that come from business travel and let people spend weekends exploring hobbies, staying active and engaging with family.

And many who've adapted to video chats just to keep up a social calendar said they plan to make it a fixture. "It's nice to get a dozen people talking over each other," said Dr. David Dozack, 67, of Horseheads, N.Y. He and his wife, Toni, regularly host happy hours with friends and Friday calls with family. "Video is important, especially when talking to those you haven't seen in a long time. Now that I've become comfortable with it, I definitely feel like it will carry on into the future."

Others will rush out to rejoin the world, hugging strangers at bars or dancing tabletop at weddings, creating a "hybrid approach" that lets people interact in the way they're most comfortable, predicted Mr. DuBravac. "Inevitably we will return to a world where we are back in offices and interacting with people and riding busy subways. Just maybe not back to the same levels," he said. "We'll still have the live experience, but we'll just augment it by streaming the digital or virtual experience we're all adapting to now. That blurring had been happening for years. The outbreak just accelerated it in many ways."

You'll likely find me closing every bar in Brooklyn when fears surrounding the pandemic finally pass. But I'll still set an alarm for my virtual coffee with Joe. First things first, I need to do something about these walls.

## Will We Still Join Video Chats When All This Blows Over?

For some, friendly chats will unfold over video even after the quarantine. Others who miss live interactions see little future in virtual meetups. Here, two opposing views



## LOVE THEM

**BEFORE MARCH**, I'd rarely used FaceTime, had never used Zoom and actively avoided any "live" videos. I'm not against talking on the phone or using social media, I just prefer not to be on candid camera when I do so.

In the past weeks, though, I've started to crave face time—yes, even through a screen. I've joined video happy hours and workout classes with friends, jumped in on game nights and even celebrated Passover with my family.

Adam Rosante, a celebrity trainer and certified youth-exercise specialist, said he was using Zoom and FaceTime to train clients long before the pandemic. Since New York put social distancing measures in place, he's upped his game with "Gym Class With Adam," free YouTube workouts aimed at elementary school students currently stuck at home. "YouTube Live has given me the ability to get kids all around the world moving more."

It's the real-time connection that's so important. Despite be-

ing physically distant from everyone, I feel like video has actually enhanced my relationships. Instead of chatting on speakerphone while doing nine other tasks, I'm forced to be present and pay attention to the people I'm talking to—something I should have been doing all along.

Mr. Rosante realized how many kids across the nation don't actually have regular gym classes even while school is in session. He plans to keep broadcasting once kids head back to school. "Video and social-media platforms are just tools. It's what we do with them that matters."

I know that when things go back to normal, it's unlikely people will make as much time for uninterrupted video chats, and I'm sure even I'll go back to doing dishes while on the phone. But I hope we do continue to prioritize these almost face-to-face conversations, where we're more present. You probably still won't catch me on an Instagram Live, though. —Ashley Mateo



## HATE THEM

**IN RECENT WEEKS**, video calls have become the Soylent of interpersonal communication: temporarily nourishing during this social famine but leaving us craving a solid, restaurant-cooked meal. While I'm grateful for any chance to see my loved ones' blurry faces, I won't miss having my own rubbery expressions projected back at me, or the underlying fear that we'll have to slow...things...down because: Do you hear me? Is the mic clear? OK. Great. Oh, now you're disconnected. One sec.

"Everyone is exhausted by all the Zoom," said Deborah Heitner, author of "Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) in Their Digital World," adding, "You have to do so much performance of interest with your face."

Dr. Heitner isn't the only one who has found focus more difficult than usual to maintain without the ambient commotion of co-workers passing by your cubicle. I, for one, have taken up the socially maladjusted habit of co-

vertly playing the videogame "Temple Run" during video chats, iPhone angled to maintain what might pass for eye contact.

Plus, scheduled video calls will never replace the interstitial interaction, "the small, seemingly insignificant 'water cooler' conversations, lunchtime rambles and impromptu walks around the block," that make the workday go 'round for New York City communications professional Ally Bruschi, 27.

I've started to favor phone calls over Zoom happy hours, often conducting them while on a jaunt around the pond near my shelter-in-place safe house (my parents'). I welcome a three-dimensional change of scenery from screens, and there's less pressure to approximate a real, in-person hang.

After a few socially distanced weeks I can't wait to return to my life of non-virtual workouts, lunch dates and actual dates. As soon as I beat my high score on Temple Run. —Rachel Wolfe.

## CAN YOU SEE ME NOW? / FIVE QUARANTINE-FRIENDLY APPS AND BROWSER TOOLS THAT WE MIGHT BE GETTING A LITTLE TOO USED TO



## Zoom

**Best for: Nascent Video Chatters**  
The app's ease of use has made it a favorite for all things business and pleasure. But beware your aunt's invite to her virtual potluck. [zoom.us](https://zoom.us)



## Houseparty

**Best for: Solitary Socialites**  
Drop in unannounced, bring push-ups, play games and lock the "door" on undesirables, just like an offline soiree. [houseparty.com](https://houseparty.com)



## BlueJeans

**Best for: On-the-Go Execs**  
Join from any device (no laptop leash required) and easily corral colleagues between break-out sessions and full-team meetings. [bluejeans.com](https://bluejeans.com)



## NetflixParty

**Best for: Chatty Cinephiles**  
Sync your "Tiger King" binge with friends' accounts so everyone can chat through the show while at a safe social distance. [netflixparty.com](https://netflixparty.com)



## Roll20

**Best for: Gung-ho Gamers**  
Your weekly table-top campaign goes high-tech with the site's virtual boards and embedded video chat—all in one window. [roll20.net](https://roll20.net)