



TIGER AWARD WINNER

INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM

2019



PRESENT.PERFECT.

完美現在時 / WAN MEI XIAN ZAI SHI

United States, Hong Kong | 2019 | 124 min | B&W | 1.77 |
Mandarin Chinese, Different Chinese Dialects | Documentary

A FILM BY SHENGZE ZHU

Weaving together footage filmed and broadcasted by little-known Chinese live-streaming anchors, who struggle with real-life face-to-face social interaction because of their identity, disability and social-economic status, this cinematic collage explores how individuals satisfy their cravings for human connection through virtual togetherness, and how these virtual relationships challenge standard definitions of companionship.

BURN THE FILM in co-production with TENDER MADNESS PICTURES
present

CONTACT

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FESTIVALS & AWARDS

- 2019.01 International Film Festival Rotterdam (Netherlands), **Tiger Award**
- 2019.03 FICUNAM (Mexico), **Special Mention for Best Film**
- 2019.03 Thessaloniki Documentary Festival (Greece)
- 2019.03 Cinéma du Réel (France), **Special Mention for Young Jury Award**
- 2019.03 New Directors/New Films (USA)
- 2019.04 Frames of Representation, Institute of Contemporary Art London (UK), **Closing Night Film**
- 2019.04 International Film Festival of Uruguay, International Competition (Uruguay)
- 2019.04 Moscow International Film Festival (Russia)
- 2019.05 Flatpack Festival (UK)
- 2019.05 Singapore International Festival of the Arts (Singapore)
- 2019.05 Jeonju International Film Festival (South Korea)
- 2019.05 IndieLisboa, International Competition (Portugal)

REVIEWS & INTERVIEWS

[Screen Daily](#) : "The emotional dependence on connections forged over the internet that gives the film its queasily troubling fascination." (by Wendy Ide)

[Film Comment](#) : "In a nod to documentary's historical claims to truth, the film's titular grammatical tense signals Zhu's interest in liveness and recording." (by Becca Voelcke)

[Cinema Scope](#) : "A project offers an alternative concept of (self-)observation as mediated by digital technologies." (by Jesse Cumming)

[Screen Anarchy](#): "It's a daring and unpolished effort that challenges the boundaries of documentation by re-defining the found footage genre" (by Paige Lim)

[Film Comment](#): "...a portrait of China at-this-very-second that is as allusive as it is curiously engrossing." (by Dan Sullivan)

[The Brooklyn Rail](#): "... the private, the social and the economic as fully merged." (by Giovanni Marchini Camia)

[IndieWire](#) : (by Adam Cook) [Artforum](#) (by Travis Jeppesen) [New Yorker](#) (by Richard Brody)
[Filmathque](#) (by Ursula Grisham) [South Morning Post](#) (by Clarence Tsui) [desistfilm](#) (by Aldo Padilla)
[The Film Stage](#) (by Leonardo Goi) [CINEVUE](#) (by Sucheta Chakraborty) [NERO](#) (by Tijana Mamula)
[Le Monde](#) (by Jacques Mandelbaum) [端傳媒](#) (by 謝以萱) [搜狐](#) (by 峴杰)



SYNOPSIS

Live-streaming has exploded in China and become one of the most profitable industries over the past several years. While it produces enormous revenues and numerous “Internet celebrities”, it also provides a popular gathering place for masses of Chinese netizens. People that would never cross paths in the real world are now connected in virtual showrooms and interact in real-time, and one could instantaneously experience what others are experiencing. Such digital hangouts become unprecedentedly crucial for those craving for social connection but shunned in real life because of their identity, disability and social-economic status. *PRESENT.PERFECT.* weaves together a diverse range of moments and occurrences filmed and broadcasted by little-known Chinese live-streaming anchors from various parts of China, including a street dancer, a tower crane operator, a man with Idiopathic Short Stature, a girl with Muscular Dystrophy, a middle-aged farmer, a young single mother, and among others. What they cherish most in the streaming craze is not fame or fortune, but a companionship they could hardly seek in real life. Although this virtual community doesn’t exist physically, the shared emotions and feelings generated through virtual togetherness are real.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I've been attentively following a vast array of Chinese live-streaming anchors for almost a year. More than 800 hours of footage has been collected. At first, I was astounded and intrigued by certain absurd, bizarre activities, for example, a young man letting dozens of worms crawl around his mouth, then chewing them alive and swallowing them with a bottle of yogurt, or two middle-aged men holding each other and rolling their naked bodies on a large frozen lake with quasi-rock music. Insane stream of live comments (also called "bullets") and virtual gifts like planes and rockets often swept across my computer screen when I was watching this kind of shows. I know that hundreds or even thousands of people were watching it at the same time — well, it perhaps isn't accurate enough to say "at the same time", since most of them should watched the show in China while I did so in Chicago. But I did feel that the physical distance and time difference between us was eliminated. We watch the show simultaneously, regardless of where we are and what time it is, and more crucially, we instantaneously experience what others are experiencing.

My focus thus gradually shifted to the digital hangouts and virtual togetherness formed through live-streaming, especially after I found out that there are actually a great number of anchors who don't really care about how many fans they have or how much money they could earn through streaming their lives. What motivates them to turn on the camera is the ease of getting connected with like-minded people, and what they cherish most in the cyberspace is a companionship they hardly could seek in the real world. Of course, this number is tiny compared to the enormous amount of people who are enticed by fame and fortune in the live-streaming industry and who aspire to be "Internet

celebrities". Nonetheless, their lone existence is exemplary for us to re-evaluate our cravings for human connection in this digitally connected world.

Live-streaming is essentially a social experience. Through the "bullet screen" function, the audience can interact with the anchor as well as each other simultaneously in real-time. The "bullets" sometimes can become so dense that they basically obscure the entire screen. In this case, the point is often not to watch the show, but simply to gather together. Such instant interaction reinforces the sense of companionship in the streaming community. Although the showrooms don't exist physically, the shared emotions and feelings generated in such virtual space are real.

In addition, although anchors use fake Internet names, most of them don't mask their real identity online. Instead, they want to share with others their stories or even the most personal moments of their lives. This is particularly true when comes to those who are less socially active in real life. Some live in remote countryside, some are stuck in menial and dead-end jobs, some have disabilities... These are people who hardly could find their own place in the real world, thus finding themselves lonely, isolated and alienated. It's only in this virtual society that they can really be themselves or even go beyond their identity, regardless of gender, sexuality, education and social-economic status. This largely explains why many anchors are from lower-tier cities or rural areas, and why people with disability who fear face-to-face interaction have the courage to put the spotlight on themselves. It's essentially an existence full of loneliness, of hunger for connection.

As live-streaming gains prominence in the lives of many anchors, it's no longer separable from their real life, but an integral part of it. Many turn the camera on for eight hours or more every day, persistently showing every aspect of their lives and enthusiastically interacting with people they

would never meet offline. For them, the communication in the cyberspace seems more real than the actual world around them, and they enjoy their lives much more in the virtual society than in the real one. Such friendship might not last long — just like live-streaming itself, which is doomed to be replaced by other forms of interaction and communication with the development of new technology, but at least, it brings profound warmth to these lonely hearts at the moment.

Last but not least, I want to point out a fact that, as an explosive industry that grows at an astounding speed — in 2017, China's live-streaming industry produced revenue of more than 4 billion USD with more than 400 million netizens actively involved, but back to 2010, it barely existed in China — its rapid growth and the spread of anonymous, unregulated and user-generated content has already caught the attention of the authority. Thousands of showrooms were shut down, and a formal set of regulations and laws have taken effect since 2016, aiming at cleaning up the cyberspace as well as maintaining cybersecurity. Although streaming anchors can determine their online persona, they must now register the account with their real name and citizen ID number, and their online behaviors are strictly regulated.

Shengze Zhu
2018.12



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Shengze Zhu is a documentary filmmaker and producer. She co-founded BURN THE FILM with Zhengfan Yang, and they have been collaborating as dynamic duo since 2012. **OUT OF FOCUS** (2014) is Zhu's directorial feature debut, which premiered at the Cinéma du Réel in France. Her second feature documentary **ANOTHER YEAR** (2016) premiered at the Visions du Réel in Switzerland and received the Sesterce d'or / Best Film Award; it also received the Grand Prize at the RIDM Montreal International Documentary Festival, the Critic's Award at the Olhar de Cinema (Brazil), and was honored as "Top 10 Films of the Year" in 2016 by *24 Images* magazine (Canada). **PRESENT.PERFECT.** (2019) is her third feature, which premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and received the prestigious Tiger Award.

Zhu has also served as producer for Yang's films, including *DISTANT* (2013, fiction, Locarno), *WHERE ARE YOU GOING* (2016, documentary, IFFR) and *DOWN THERE* (2018, short fiction, Venice).

CREDITS

Director – Shengze ZHU

Producer – Zhengfan YANG

Co-Producer – WANG Yang

Editor – Shengze ZHU

Sound Mix – Aymeric DUPAS

Colorist – Yov MOOR

Poster Design – Weijia MA

