



(In)authentic Participation:
Contemporary Participatory Performance Practice,
Social Media & Neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT

There has been a (re)emergence of participatory modes of audience engagement in contemporary western European theatre and performance since the mid-2000s. The concern at the root of contemporary participatory performance practice is the authenticity or inauthenticity with which one constitutes and presents one's self in contemporary digitised society. Social media technology is not inauthentic in of itself, however the wider political economy in which social media operates encourages users to participate in a way that promotes the constitution, maintenance and presentation of a consistent, static and commodifiable self. Participation in social media in the context of neoliberalism makes users vulnerable to external influence and manipulates them into disengaging with their fundamental agency while promoting an ideology of choice and self-creation.

Contemporary participatory performance practice problematises this inauthentic orientation by appropriating, reflecting and critically amplifying both social media technologies and modes of participation inherent in neoliberally induced social media. Contemporary practice also provides participatory alternatives that help audiences approach selfhood from an authentic orientation, embracing individual agency, responsibility and a liminal position between internal intention and external influence. This thesis draws upon the phenomenological ontology of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre to investigate the question of why this has come to pass by exploring the recent changes to the way that one presents oneself and interacts with other people through online social media.

INTRODUCTION

One's authentic self is the self that is most true to one's unique Being. But how important is authenticity in contemporary western society and what are the factors that could influence one to express oneself more authentically or inauthentically? The two phenomena that I have noticed emerge since the mid-2000s include: ubiquitous participation in social media and the increased implementation of audience/spectator participation in theatre and performance art. I propose that they are connected both by modes of participatory engagement and as forces of influence in the ways that one expresses oneself either authentically or inauthentically in contemporary western society.

I. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The central interrogation of this research project concerns the growing number of contemporary¹ performance events that can be interpreted as somehow reflecting on and engaging with contemporary forms of participation. By drawing together examples of this performance practice and critically reflecting on them within the frame of authenticity I will instil a critical awareness around the modes of participation that one may regularly engage with as a member of contemporary western European² society.

The primary claim of this thesis is that contemporary participatory practice is a response to an intensely inauthentic modification of the way that one encounters, engages and interacts with others in contemporary western society. The chief aim of this investigation is therefore to interrogate this claim by identifying and critically analysing what these modifications are, how and why they are caused, and how they are reflected and problematised in contemporary performance.

¹ The term 'contemporary' here means a period of almost two decades spanning from the turn of the 21st century until the present day, where participatory practice has re-emerged in performance. It is often however explicitly referring to the last 8-10 years.

² The performance practice that this thesis employs as evidence originates chiefly from the United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany although it may include more countries geo-politically. There may be other minor examples used throughout that extend these boundaries to the United States of America, but their inclusion should reinforce rather than undermine the conclusions made.

In order to comprehend this dramaturgy in performance, I have provided a conceptual framework drawn from the fields of political, economic, cultural and existential philosophy. The inclusion of these different strands, in a project that is largely preoccupied with performance phenomena is testament to the interdisciplinary nature of performance studies and performance analysis. If performance can be considered “an ensemble of activities with the potential to uphold societal arrangements or, alternatively, to change people and societies” (McKenzie, 2001, p. 30), then performance is in a reciprocal dialogue with society, politics and culture.

This research project is primarily a reaction to the recent, increasing emergence of participatory strategies in contemporary performance making. What I initially intended to discover was why audience participation in theatre and performance had become such a popular dramaturgical device in the work of western European practitioners. Participatory theatre is a reflection on the digitalised world in which our existence becomes increasingly inauthentic. Therefore, it seemed interesting to me to return to my mounting interest in the continental existential philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre which had led me to question whether leading an ‘authentic’ life was possible in contemporary western society. Both my concern with participatory performance and contemporary authenticity seemed to be intuitively and tentatively answered by what I had noted to be a distinct development in the everyday ways that people communicated digitally.

The digital augmentation of human social interaction on social media platforms has undeniably had a significant aesthetic and academic impact in performance and performance studies. This is evident in the significant number of productions that engage with the subject: *Western Society* (Gob Squad, 2013), *The Artist is Kinda Present* (Xiao, 2010), *I Wish I Was Lonely* (Walker & Thorpe, 2013), *Karen* (Blast Theory, 2015), etc. Such an increased interest of practitioners in participatory performance is reflected in a range of publications: *Theatre & Social Media* (Lonergan, 2016), *Theatre & the Digital* (Blake, 2014), *Performance, Technology and Science* (Birringer, 2009), *Performance and Technology* (Broadhurst & Machon, 2013), *Digital Performance* (Dixon, 2007), etc. Each of these texts explores a layer of how digital technology or social media have manifested themselves in performance. In this research I take into consideration the use of digital technology in performance, how this reflects contemporary participation in online sociality, the political economy of social digitality, and how all of these phenomena are underpinned by the authentic or inauthentic expression of one’s Being.

The impact of social media on contemporary forms of existential authenticity, and hence on participatory modes of performance, does not come purely from the digital and online translation of human sociality³. While

³ This digitalisation of sociality does play a significant role in both.

inauthenticity of the self can be influenced by a series of factors, I am interested in how inauthentic modifications to the way one lives life or presents one's self in society could be caused by the influence of technological developments, political and economic shifts, and/or changing cultural trends. Each new development has the potential to fundamentally alter the ontological relationship between the self and Other, and acutely affect the emergence, realisation and manifestation of the authentic-self⁴. So, although the mode of participation one engages in on social media is a central concern, scrutiny of the broader political economy of social media participation produces a far more nuanced image of how and why participatory performance is responding to it.

In this thesis I highlight causal connections between the modes of participation entrenched in neoliberal capitalism – as the primary political economy reflected in social media and contemporary western Europe (Fuchs, 2017) – social media, and contemporary performance. I also explored how contemporary participatory performance practices engage audiences dramaturgically and elicit behaviour that highlights the intensity of their daily alienated, mediated and inauthentic lives. In doing so, participants are made more mindful of their day-to-day inauthentic behaviours, which in turn opens their awareness to the possibility of authentic self-expression. Ultimately, I try to provide a possible reading of social media and participatory performance that reveals their effects on contemporary users/audiences in the light of the existential concept of authenticity.

The objectives and research questions of this investigation fall under multiple emphases, some of which overlap. Such an approach is a result of the diverse range of influences and stimuli that could compel one to express oneself inauthentically, alongside the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of performance studies.

For example, what does authenticity or inauthenticity mean in contemporary western culture and society, and how is one to recognise these binaries in contemporary performance and the socio-political, economic and cultural phenomena that they are responding to? Early in Chapter III I define authenticity (based in the ontological thought of Heidegger and Sartre) in terms of liminality. The expression of one's authentic-self as a fundamentally liminal-self is mapped onto modes of participation both in performance situations and in the context of social media.

The emergence of social media in the everyday lives of many people living in western Europe raises the question of how the emergence of the authentic-self is affected by modifications to the way that one interacts with other conscious beings. By engaging with social media and mobile internet technology, is the presence of the ontological Other intensified, made absent, or both? Analysis of both social media participation and participatory

⁴ A detailed examination of how the relationship between the self and the Other impacts one's authenticity can be found in Chapter III.

performance that exploits social media technologies reveals a complication in the way that one encounters the Other as either embodied or digitalised and virtual.

The simple mediation of social interactions between conscious beings represents only a fragment of how social media affects one's authenticity. Why users participate in social media must be revealed, despite the inauthenticity that participating cultivates, by asking whether social media and its broader political and economic context can be considered as modes of inauthentic *influence*. Chapter IV demonstrates how social media operates as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality that orients users towards social media in ways that reinforce capitalist ideologies concerning artificial freedom, while exploiting and commodifying them.

However, the central concern is how contemporary participatory performance practices reflect, problematise and subvert neoliberal capitalism and digitised sociality. Chapter V finds social media and neoliberal capitalism are predicated on modes of participation that explicitly promote agency and freedom by exploiting participating users and inhibiting their authentic mode of becoming. In doing so, the aesthetic strategies employed by contemporary performance practitioners are identified as the means to problematise these modes of participation.

By answering these questions, fragments emerge concerning the discrete elements of authenticity, participation, selfhood, otherness, cultural performance and social efficacy. Achievement of my project aims has been dependent on the overlay, assembly and critical composition of these fragments. From these synthesised fragments, I have constructed a detailed image of performance practice, engaged in problematising participation in the context of social media and neoliberalism.

II. OBJECTS OF INQUIRY

There are two groups of material that I have used. I have firstly applied a series of analytic tools to contemporary western European performance practice to achieve my investigatory aim and answer my research questions. By interrogating the participatory strategies of these practitioners, a pattern emerges indicating a common stimulus founded in the increasing use and participation in social media sites and apps. Therefore, prominent contemporary social media platforms are also probed; they are the potential impetus for the (re)emergence of participatory practice in contemporary performance. By collecting fragmented 'artefacts' (Pearson & Shanks, 2001) from a range of different performance events and social media platforms, I have been

able to analyse them through the lens of (in)authenticity, identify how they respectively employ different modes of participation, and reveal the impact that they may have on one another.

Rather than suggesting contemporary performance practitioners respond explicitly to the phenomenon of social media itself, this thesis argues the emergence of social media has established a modification in the ways people in western Europe participate socially, politically, economically and culturally. It is this modification to one's broader participation I believe has catalysed a renaissance in performance-based artistic practice that engages with and dissects participatory modes.

When searching for practice that engages with participation, I was drawn to the works of Gob Squad, initially because they implement mediative technologies but also circumvent these to stage interpersonal encounters that have the potential to reveal realness and therefore some semblance of authenticity. Ontroerend Goed also use technology in their performances, but more as an instrument of reflection. Their primary mode of participation brings spectators face-to-face with themselves. Awareness of how one perceives oneself and how one thinks one is perceived by others has a significant influence on how one constitutes and presents one's self, and can dictate whether this expression of selfhood is authentic or not. The artist's collective Blast Theory reflect on the pervasiveness of technology in their work by saturating the participatory experience with technology, often highlighting an underlying risk the use of technology generates. Mindfulness of the underlying risks of technology (and participation in activities and behaviours grounded in technology) is one of the first steps to developing a relationship with technology that facilitates an authentic expression of one's agency. Each collective or practitioner⁵ engages on one or more level with modes of participation and either social media, mediative digital technology or the broader political economy of neoliberal governmentality.

Most examples of performance practice are based in the United Kingdom⁶; however, evidence of the type of practice that reinforces my claim has also emerged in Germany and Belgium. The boundaries between discrete nation-states are transcended by both the ontological effect of social media, neoliberalism and the movement and influence of participatory practitioners. Companies such as Gob Squad operate out of both Nottingham and Berlin, allowing them to draw from the economic and cultural wealth of both countries. Ontroerend Goed have established strong partnerships with UK-based organisations such as Theatre Royal, Plymouth and Richard Jordan Productions, although they produce most of their work in Ghent, Belgium. Other

⁵ Of which Gob Squad, Ontroerend Goed and Blast Theory are only a fraction.

⁶ Such as Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, Charlotte Spencer, Blast Theory, Michael Landy, Royal Shakespeare Company and Tim Crouch.

companies such as Rimini Protokoll and Blast Theory tour their work internationally (as do the previously mentioned companies), but predominantly around Europe.

The socio-economic, political and cultural influences on each practitioner and the reach of their work is certainly not limited to isolated geo-political contexts. There is a correlation between where this performance practice is emergent and where social media penetration is most concentrated in western Europe. Behind Sweden, the United Kingdom and Belgium are the two western European countries that have the highest percentage of social media penetration (Kemp, 2018). The prevalence of social media usage in these geo-political sites and the success most of the following practitioners and groups have had (both nationally and internationally) is indicative of the impact that social media has had and how it is being responded to artistically throughout western Europe.

Correspondingly, the social media platforms that I will analyse are owned, operated and developed by providers that are exclusively based in California, USA. Nonetheless, the impact these companies and technologies have on people worldwide, is so culturally entrenched that the significance of the geographical location of the social media fabrication and delivery becomes trivial.

III. CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Each chapter in this thesis approaches the relationship between participation, performance and (in)authenticity from a different, but intersecting perspective. The literature review and methodology chapters establish my position in the wider context of performance studies, ontological analysis and digital political economy. (In)authenticity is grounded in the primarily existentialist tradition. Participatory modes of aesthetic practice are consistently identified within and defined by socio-political contexts. Social media is embedded in neoliberal modes of governmentality. This foundation of knowledge is urged forward by analytical strategies that consider semiotic, phenomenological and ontological approaches in an ascending hierarchy of expediency which reveal (in)authenticity in both performance-based and socio-economic modes of participation.

The three core chapters examine the general characteristics of (in)authenticity, locate possible sites of contemporary inauthentic activity and interrogate how and why performance practices are employing participatory approaches in response to the ubiquity of inauthenticity. I identified examples of participatory performance practice that engage with the significant elements of negation, selfhood, otherness and liminality that shape the constitution of a functional conceptual model of (in)authenticity. I have investigated how these performance examples (and others) not only engage with the issues that surround (in)authenticity, but how they

also problematise both the contemporary inauthentic orientation towards social media and ways that an alternative orientation could promote authenticity in participants.

The literature review firmly positions this thesis in the interdisciplinary tradition of performance studies. This means that the strategies and concepts selected for this research draw heavily upon a corpus of critical theory ranging from continental philosophy, through political economy to dramaturgical analysis. This chapter begins by considering the existing ways that participatory performance practice has been theorised. The literature about participation in theatre, performance and art is primarily concerned with how much agency participants perceive themselves having in contrast to how much control they actually have.

A common theme and conclusion that emerges from this analysis is that the theoretical underpinning required to understand how and why participation is used in performance is primarily political. Different writers and theorists such as Grant Kester (2011), Claire Bishop (2012) and Alexandra Kolb (2013) have differing arguments as to whether audience participation is an approach that incites radical political change or promotes political stasis. Both arguments are true of the participatory examples given by these writers; however, neither is representative of the contemporary forms of participatory practice that respond to modes of socio-political and economic participation that cultivate inauthentic expressions of the self. The new wave of participatory practice instils a liminal position of moderation, which although radical for reintroducing the possibility of authenticity, is not meant to incite political revolution.

The political context identified as the instigator for the (re)emergence of participatory forms in contemporary performance is defined by a ubiquitous engagement in online social media and the neoliberal political economy that surrounds and permeates it. Therefore, by aligning myself with a theory of political economy that considers social media as a manifestation of western neoliberal governmentality, I can draw connections between social media and neoliberalism based in a paradox of regulated capitalist freedom. In doing so I have highlighted the participatory modes operating within social media and neoliberalism and revealed how participatory performances interrogate these modes by subverting participation itself.

Finally, I interpret participation in performance and social media/neoliberalism through the lens of existential and ontological traditions of philosophy. These traditions consider the authentic expression of one's self as conscious agent to be fundamental to one's navigation of society, economics and culture. By grounding and positioning this thesis in these fields, a clear approach emerges that is employed to investigate contemporary modes of audience participation.

In the methodology chapter, I describe and evaluate the methodological tools that I have selected to identify the participatory dramaturgies that contemporary performance practitioners use and why they use them. First, I introduce ‘theatre/archaeology’ (Pearson & Shanks, 2001) as a means of collecting both performance fragments and the traces of participation engaged in on social media. This section of the thesis also critically assesses three distinct forms of analysis: semiotic, phenomenological and ontological analysis.

Both semiotic and phenomenological analysis are the primary means used to encounter and process performance events. Semiosis proves itself a useful tool for deciphering not only the deferred meaning of performance objects and acts, but also revealing any compounding of representation that may indicate an inauthentic interaction. Phenomenology becomes equally valuable in the interpretation of the more immediate affective conditions of a performance encounter. This becomes particularly significant when considering the way that one’s proximity and relationship with other participants, performers and spectators is modified in a participatory situation.

These same tools are also appraised for how effectively they recognise the binaries of the inauthentic and authentic-self. Semiosis and phenomenology may be suitable starting points for the analysis of one’s encounter with participation in both performance and social media. Contemporary performance practice that engages in participation, one’s participation in social media as a user, and one’s participation in neoliberal capitalism, all require however analysis to determine their potential for cultivating (in)authentic behavior. I argue throughout the thesis that (in)authenticity is the underlying value that connects these disparate phenomena. Therefore, an ontological approach is implemented as a deeper secondary layer of analysis to connect the phenomena with the relevant theoretical frameworks concerning (in)authenticity.

These objects of analysis are diverse, and the chain of cause and effect that connects them spans ontological, social, political, economic and digital strata. For instance, to associate Ontroerend Goed’s *£/€/\$ (LIES)* (2017) with the paradox of neoliberal freedom may only require a semiotic analysis. To interpret the panic induced by the performers, as a group of participants are on the brink of losing all their fictitious financial capital, but also interrogate how this affects one’s awareness and perception of one’s agency in digital society, requires additional phenomenological and ontological analysis.

Therefore, the strategies and conceptual underpinnings of the three approaches are explored with the intention of constructing a multi-layered analytic tool. Not only are they considered in isolation, but also as a complementary methodological synthesis.

The main body of the thesis is split into three chapters. Having situated myself in intersecting academic fields, and outlined and appraised the proposed research methods, the first of three chapters considers authenticity and inauthenticity as the fundamental connection between modes of participation in contemporary performance and those in the wider sphere of digital sociality and neoliberal economics.

This chapter poses the question of what authenticity or inauthenticity means in contemporary western culture and society. To answer this question, throughout this section, the philosophical models concerning authenticity, proposed by Heidegger and Sartre, are considered and broken down into their constituent parts. Each aspect of their thought concerning authenticity and inauthenticity is explored and introduced into the contemporary context of participatory performance, online sociality and neoliberal governmentality.

The chapter initially outlines Heidegger and Sartre's thought concerning human ontology as *Dasein* and Being-in/for-itself respectively. These ontological models (founded in an original negation) are then identified in the processes of human consumption and appropriation, catalyzed by neoliberal governmentality. Concurrently, I consider Ontroerend Goed's *World Without Us* (2016) and Michael Landy's *Break Down* (2001) as interpretations of and responses to these models and their manifestations.

There is then a consideration of Heidegger and Sartre's thoughts on how one exists perpetually in one's situation and how this is manifest as one's facticity and/or fundamental being-in-the-world. The chapter includes a discussion about one's contemporary digital situation as a 'prosumer' (Toffler, 1980; Fuchs, 2017) and how one's immersion in one's situation (as prosumer) is explored in Walker and Thorpe's *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013) owing to mobile internet technology.

Human perceptions of temporality are explored in the context of the digital memory of social media and how it somehow conforms to both Bergson's models of *temps* and *duree* (1889). These categories are also then traced through the work of Heidegger and Sartre, who place emphasis on the human capacity to project into the future. Blast Theory's *Karen* (2015) is brought in as an example of how digital memory is stored and made present in the mind of social media users when they generate further content.

The ontological concepts concerning the constitution and maintenance of the self are brought to bear in Ontroerend Goed's *A Game of You* (2009). This performance provides evidence that participatory performance practice can be utilised to problematise the different ways that one's self can be presented to and received by others.

Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2013) emerges as an example of how participatory performance can present audiences with an opportunity to question how one negotiates one's freedom and agency. Between

cultivating a pretense of random participant selection, managing the participants' perception of social risk, and speaking through participants using a wireless microphone and headphone system, Gob Squad apply fluctuating pressure to participants' agency.

Finally, ontological and socio-political perspectives of the Other are explored in Ontroerend Goed's *Internal* (2007). In a betrayal of participants' trust, Ontroerend Goed generate a mindfulness of how one acts for the Other, by publicly disclosing information elicited from participants in confidence. This mindfulness maps onto what Sartre calls one's 'being-for-others' (1943) and leaves participants with a distinct awareness of how they are perceived by others.

The next chapter aims to prove the current ubiquitous mode of participation in social media is an explicit and concentrated example of inauthentic behaviour. The chapter takes the conclusions made in Chapter III, concerning how inauthenticity is manifest in contemporary western society, and not only reinforces the claim that social media operates principally as an extension of neoliberal capitalism, but that the ways that this exploitation factors into social media participation is fundamentally inauthentic.

By using Heidegger's framework of 'modern technology' (1954), social media itself can retain a neutrality and even an authentic potential, whereas the contemporary orientation towards it and one's participation in it should be considered inauthentic. A detailed analysis of the features that span multiple social media platforms, reveals an intensification of the neoliberal ideologies that participatory performance has been contending with, as well as an intensification of the causes of inauthenticity and 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943) that Heidegger and Sartre observed in everyday life.

This chapter also includes an extended engagement with Alexandra Kolb's proposal that the contemporary re-emergence of participatory forms only presents the opportunity for a pseudo-authentic experience. From this statement, the chapter considers the question of whether current participatory performance practices can be considered a reflection of neoliberal capitalism and digitised sociality. The performance practice seems rather to be problematising the modes of participation employed by social media and the nuanced subversion of participatory modes are explored in Royal Shakespeare Company and Mudlark's *Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010), Ontroerend Goed's *£¥€\$ (LIES)* (2017), Rimini Protokoll's *Home Visit* (2015), Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2013) and Charlotte Spencer's *Is This A Waste Land?* (2017).

The final chapter of the main body draws together all the claims made in the preceding chapters to explore specifically what aesthetic strategies contemporary performance practitioners are employing to problematise the

modes of participation as a user of social media. The chapter starts however, by establishing a model with which to evaluate the input, agency and exploitation of participants, based in sociality.

Using this evaluative model, three modes of participation (problematized by contemporary performance) are explored: exploited social media usage, indoctrinated neoliberal consumption and pseudo-authentic politically-motivated aesthetic practice. This chapter returns to Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2013) and Walker and Thorpe's *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013) for the final time, as well as exploring An Xiao's *The Artist is Kinda Present* (2010), Ontroerend Goed's *Audience* (2011) and Tim Crouch's *The Author* (2009), to reveal how contemporary performance practitioners make audiences mindful of the many inauthentic modes of participation, but also present opportunities for participatory modes that promote authenticity.

CHAPTER I:
LITERATURE
review

As mentioned in the introduction, this investigation engages with the intrinsically interdisciplinary processes and structures of the field of performance studies. This thesis primarily engages with four different, yet interwoven fields of inquiry: participatory performance practice, the political economy of neoliberalism and social media, and existential authenticity. This chapter is dedicated to establishing an academic position that considers all four fields. I initially locate myself in each field respectively, before triangulating a position from which analysis can be performed and conclusions drawn.

The participatory tradition in theatre, performance and live art is subsumed by a wider pattern of interaction, emphasis on sociality, and focus on socio-political efficacy. Therefore, not only does this inquiry need to channel and isolate the performance-based practices and ideologies, but also requires the clear appropriation of more politically-driven sociological models into the realm of performance theory. Chrissie Tiller's (2014) collation of such political and sociological models of participation provides a framework from which one can identify performance-based participatory practice by introducing largely political interpretations that are postulated by theorists such as Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), Grant Kester (2011) and Claire Bishop (2012). Alexandra Kolb (2013) provides a counterpoint to Kester and Bishop's optimism about participation as a force of political efficacy by introducing a more critical position with regards to the function of participation as another form of consumerism. Gareth White (2013) offers a model of audience participation that explores the inner-workings of the participatory invitation.

These writers provide explanations for the socio-political intention behind participatory performance practice. The question of which socio-political phenomena may have roused participatory strategies from obscurity, requires another layer of positioning. A reading of Bishop, Kester and Kolb, makes it apparent that a common target of participatory art is late capitalism as it operates within the ideology of neoliberalism.

Between Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse (2009) and David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism can be defined in terms of a broad ideology, but one might summarise it as a historically anchored set of ideals working through political and economic channels to liberalise the individual producer and consumer. Far from considering neoliberalism a passive and benign ideology of liberation, Ronald Aronson (2015) and Michel Foucault (1991) consider neoliberalism a source of social alienation and governmental control. Such social alienation not only

distances people from one another physically or geographically (by employing intermediaries as substitutes for face-to-face interaction), but can also use the competitive drive of neoliberalism to drive a wedge between people and disincite them towards conversing and interacting. In systems of neoliberal governance, power is decentralised but still possessed by those that possess the most capital. Those that control the most capital also control those who have the least.

A form of this alienation and control could be seen as manifesting in social media (Fuchs, 2017). From the writings of danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison (2007) and Dhiraj Murthy (2012), one is able to establish the distinction between, but symbiotic relationship of social media and social networking. Murthy proposes that “social media are mainly conceived of as a medium wherein ‘ordinary’ people in ordinary social networks (as opposed to professional journalists) can create user-generated ‘news’ (in a broadly defined sense)” (2012, p. 1061). By generating content “social media corporations capitalize on users’ desire for social, intellectual and cultural worth in order to exploit their labour and make them create monetary value.” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 77) With this definition in mind, the social media providers and platforms (selected for this investigation) that cultivate forms of what one could regard as inauthentic behaviours include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Snapchat. Christian Fuchs (2017) considers these social media interfaces (alongside a few others) to be digital manifestations of neoliberal ideology. He suggests that neoliberalism is fundamental to the way these platforms are engaged in by users, inherent in the means of sustaining the model of user-generated content, and it also permeates the modes of incentivising social media workers.

If considered historically, the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity can be traced through the existential tradition into contemporary thought. The Danish Søren Kierkegaard (1846) and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1908) promoted an expression of selfhood that came from within, rather than being influenced by external systems, structures and/or beliefs. Their thinking influenced 20th century philosophers Martin Heidegger (1927) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) who questioned the fundamental structures of what it means to exist, and what it means to exist as a human. In doing so they both echo the conflict between expressing oneself authentically and bending to pressures that come with existing in a pre-determined world⁷, with pre-determined social, political and cultural regulations and conventions. They both identify that this pressure arises from the ontological prerequisite of other conscious beings.

⁷ Determined before one’s own existence.

The contemporary thought of Charles Taylor (1991), Charles Guignon (2004) and Somogy Varga (2012) considers authenticity and inauthenticity in more political and cultural ways. Where Taylor and Guignon suggest how important one's active engagement in authenticity is to the democratic process, Varga concludes that contemporary authenticity is bereft of any real meaning because it has been diluted by a culture of self-help and commercial essentialism.

I. PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

The generic act of one being actively involved in an endeavour (participation) is considered in three specific contexts. I will discuss mass cultural participation in neoliberal capitalism across western Europe. In this respect, I consider the participation of online users in social media as the most recent manifestation of neoliberal participation. Finally, I reflect extensively on how performance practitioners are aesthetically engaging with these socio-economic and political modes of participation. The primary mode of participation that this inquiry is concerned with is the problematisation of participation in performance, and how it may manifest in the employment of active audience participation.

The bias towards the modes of participation that occur in performance demonstrated by this thesis is largely a result of my concentrated formal training in drama, performance studies and theatre research. There has been an academic shift in performance studies towards the analysis of the social efficacy of performance events and the increasingly popular forms of post-dramatic and experimental contemporary theatre. However, my experience of undergraduate dramatic study was still fundamentally dedicated to preparing young performers to enter into the world of dramatic script-based performance or literature-driven drama education. As a continued (post-graduate) student of theatre, I have however, been encouraged to explore political, social and cultural phenomena through the lens of theatre and performance and how these issues are manifest or addressed in front of an audience. Consequently, the intricacies and ideologies of political economies, cultural theory and metaphysical strains of philosophical thought were less familiar to me.

In each of these three contexts, I consider to what extent participation reflects one's *engagement* with one's own agency and freedom. For the most part, participation is defined in juxtaposition with coercion. If one adopts the existentialist belief⁸ that humans are fundamentally free beings, then if one is not physically

⁸ This investigation is heavily immersed in existential philosophy and uses the thought of Heidegger and Sartre as a foundation for subsequent conceptualising and analysis.

overpowered, one's involvement in any of the aforementioned behaviours and activities is one's own free choice. Participation is founded on the bedrock of human freedom. This binary distinction does not consider whether one acknowledges this freedom and takes responsibility for the choice to participate. Nor does it sufficiently consider the impact or efficacy of this choice. Throughout this research, modes of participation (across neoliberalism, social media and performance) are evaluated against considerations of freedom, responsibility, agency, efficacy and the possible threat of exploitation. By doing so, any given instance of participation can be approximately located on a spectrum of (in)authenticity.

The model of participatory performance that I use is a synthesis of a number of different ideas from a relatively small range of sources. Concepts of interactive art, 'emancipated' or active spectatorship (Ranci re, 2009), and artistic collaboration have been written about widely over the last twenty years, substantial literature dedicated to participatory strategies employed specifically in the performing arts and theatre represent a relatively small percentage of this corpus.

I employ the term 'participatory performance' and it refers to modes of performance whereby audience members are invited to contribute to the performance. It is indicative of instances of performance practice that do not necessarily directly implement bodily audience participation, but rather question and/or subvert the role of participant in several different ways. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2012) proposes that all spectators are active in some way and could not possibly be passive in a performative encounter. There is a continuum of engagement, activity and participation that differentiates traditional modes of theatrical experience from what I endeavour to discuss.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an intensification of scholarly interest in the increasingly social, collaborative, interactive, 'dialogical', 'relational' or overall *participatory* output of artists and practitioners working in western Europe⁹. Across the literature about participatory performance practice there are two historical participatory hotspots in the late-1970s and early-1990s that overlap but indicate a clear lull in participatory activity in the arts in the West (with a focus on western European and British performance practice) during the 1980s. The 1980s were not completely bereft of any participatory, socially engaged or relational performance or art. There was however, a dense artistic and academic output surrounding participatory practice particularly during the 1960s and continuing into the early and mid-70s. This trend began to slowly build again in the early to mid-

⁹ The focus of this investigation is on a UK-based neoliberal political economy, the artists subject to analysis are based in the UK, across western Europe and occasionally beyond. The socio-political, economic and cultural conditions in which these examples of participatory practice emerge, could be seen as being comparable due to being rooted in neoliberal culture and policy making. Or at least, they are similar enough to form claims and conclusions that apply to most (if not all) examples, on the level of the existential and ontological relationship between the conscious being, the self, the Other and the modifications to these bonds and networks.

90s and gained a substantial cultural foothold in the early and mid-2000s. It reached saturation at the turn of the decade and could now (as we approach the end of the 2010s) be considered one of the accepted and increasingly orthodox tools of contemporary performance dramaturgy.

These historical periods of intensified participatory aesthetic activity are referred to in Nicolas Bourriaud's (1998) investigation into 'relational art' during the 1990s, which does not extend further into the past beyond 1990, indicating the inception of the emerging *zeitgeist* in participatory practice that parallels the technological developments of that period and beyond. Gareth White's (2013) detailed exploration of the aesthetics and functionality of the participatory invitation draws examples of his own participatory performance practice during the early-90s, when he operated a theatre in education company delivering forum theatre style performances. He largely focuses on the practice of others starting in the early-2000s and continues with those relevant for the next decade, during the time when *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* was published.

Authors that engage predominantly with the socio-cultural aspects of participatory art and theatre include Pablo Helguera (2011) who identifies the origins of the first-wave of participatory practice as "socially engaged art [...] rooted in the late 1960s." (p. ix) Claire Bishop (2012) also highlights the 'neo avant-garde' movement that prevailed through the 1960s, culminating in the student riots of 1968 and "The conspicuous resurgence of participatory art in the 1990s" (p. 3) which she attributes to the fall of communism – at least in the Eastern Bloc. Alexandra Kolb states that "late 1960s and 1970s performance theories abounded with calls for a democratization of theatre and theatrical processes" (2013 p. 32) and then moves swiftly on to critically describing participatory practice in the late-90s and post-millennial period as "*en vogue*" (ibid. p. 34), problematising its efficacy and cementing its canonical status within contemporary performance practice.

Performance groups in the sixties and seventies, such as Julian Beck and Judith Malina's The Living Theatre, and Richard Schechner's The Performance Group, were driven by the democratisation of the audience by either reconciling the often-segregated performers and audience (Penner, 2014) or blurring the traditional divide between performance and everyday social reality (Schechner, 1994). They differ from the practitioners of participatory theatre today, who I believe reveal whether or not online social media acts represent an intensified and explicit form of existential inauthenticity. They try to demonstrate how participatory practice can be a suitable response to it by providing the conditions necessary for existential authenticity to emerge. This more recent resurgence of participatory modes of performance, similar to the one during the sixties and seventies, is a response to a universal shift in the way people *interact* on an ontic and ontological level in a social context.

The advent of the internet was the first of several seismic shifts in the way that people interacted; it functioned as a means of altering the spatial and temporal circumstances commonly tied to co-presence and communication. The introduction of the ‘world wide web’ (Berners-Lee, 1994) connected users across the globe. The development of ‘web 2.0’ (DiNucci, 1999 and O’Reilly, Dougherty, 2004) encouraged the production of user generated content. Most recently (and significantly), the widespread use of social media and social networking has become a central means of interacting with one another. These technologies and the way users engage in them have seeped into the way that artists and performers think about how they interact with an audience in the age of online social avatars. Performance practitioners operating in the social media age adopt technologies synonymous with social media and online sociality such as screens, cameras and smart devices. They also juxtapose this integration of technology by dismantling the fourth wall and engaging spectators socially.

Participatory Performing Arts: A Literature Review (2014) is a codification of both participatory theory and practice compiled by Chrissie Tiller Associates on the behalf of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Tiller’s review gives a broad outline of the way in which participation has been theorised in contemporary performance practice. Understood through the lens of ‘social practice’ and ‘cultural value’, the report focuses on the commodification of participatory practice and how the “intrinsic and instrumental” (2014, p. 16) value of participatory art is evidenced.

Tiller et al. (2014) primarily concentrate on the ways participation in performance (and artistic practice) is evaluated in terms of audience involvement. In doing so, she cites Sherry Arnstein’s *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), Pablo Helguera’s *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011), and Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak-Leonard’s study, *Getting in on the act: How Groups are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation* (2011) which all inform Tiller’s own ‘spectrum’ of participatory performing arts practice.

Tiller defines different modes of participatory engagement along a spectrum of engagement and agency. She locates Arnstein’s extreme mode of non-participatory engagement (‘manipulation’), Helguera’s similarly ‘nominal’ participatory mode, and Brown and Novak-Leonard’s ‘receptive’ (and non-participatory) mode of ‘spectating’ or ‘ambient’ engagement at one end of the spectrum – which are all considered *passive* in some way or another. By appropriating and combining the modes of ‘placation’ (Arnstein), ‘directed’ participation (Helguera) and ‘curatorial’ engagement (Brown & Novak-Leonard), Tiller acknowledges these modes of ‘active engagement’ as participatory. These participatory modes conform to Arnstein’s socio-political notion of ‘tokenism’. These tokenistic and insincere modes of participation are situated in contrast to the activation of

‘participants’ initiative’ (Tiller): participatory modes built around ‘control’ (Arnstein), ‘collaboration’ (Helguera) and ‘inventive’ engagement (Brown & Novak-Leonard) on the part of participant.

Contrary to Fischer-Lichte (2012), who proposes that the act of interpreting performance events qualifies as active engagement, Tiller considers what could be termed ‘passive’ spectatorship in an artistic endeavour and/or performance to be on one extreme of a spectrum of participation. Tiller has arranged a spectrum of participation around politically loaded criteria by synthesising Arnstein, Helguera, and Brown and Novak-Leonard. Her spectrum of participatory engagement makes distinctions between passive, tokenistic and active modes of participation. This distinction becomes important when one considers the ways participation is employed by contemporary performance practitioners to evoke modes of passive or tokenistic social media engagement but also alternative modes of active social and political engagement.

Tiller conflates passive spectating with manipulation, which suggests if one is not actively affecting the product or outcome, or engaging with one’s agency, then one is submitting to the will of the artist or practitioner. The same can be said of the tokenistic modes of participation; although a mobilisation of the spectator is only participatory in that it placates participants who still submit their agency to the will of the artist. Here a distinction needs to be made between active spectatorship and active participation. Modes of participation that simulate control and agency without necessarily relinquishing it to audiences, can still play a part in revealing participatory manipulation in everyday life beyond the artistic encounter. Participation (albeit passive or tokenistic) can be employed to promote authenticity without meaningful creative collaboration or physical activity. It can be wielded as an instrument of mindfulness and caution, indeed as well as cultivating authentic behavior in the immediate encounter. I consider active spectatorship to be a mode of passive participation. In this framework, what might be called participation in the context of social media can also be considered a mode of manipulation. By approaching participation from this direction, practitioners can be read as employing participation to make audiences mindful of their exploitation and then present alternatives to his inauthentic situation by engaging them in more active forms of participation.

Nicolas Bourriaud introduced ‘relational aesthetics’ into the discourse to describe these more active forms of engagement in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998). Fundamental to relational aesthetics is a mutual interaction between artistic producers and consumers. Thus, one could argue that at the core of audience participation, one is engaged in an artistically orchestrated mode of social relation. The rhetoric and conceptual composition of relational aesthetics is pertinent to this investigation in three ways.

Contemporary participatory practice emerges in the wake of a shift in sociality. Bourriaud suggests that relational aesthetics' primary concern is the very sociality that is currently in flux. In the late-1980s and early-1990s he observed "a set of artistic practices which [took] as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 113) Rather than consuming art in isolation, relational aesthetics promotes the shared encounter that only exists between those sharing it. This form of artistic practice was specific to neither performance, nor audience participation. Nonetheless, I consider relational aesthetics an umbrella categorisation that participatory performance practice falls neatly under. Furthermore, Bourriaud stresses how these types of artistic practice were and are a departure from other solely artist-centred modes of aesthetic production. Relational aesthetics seem a pertinent foundation for an investigation concerned with the connection between social media and participatory performance practice. Bourriaud appropriates jargon and terminology commonly associated with internet usage in the 1990s. Relational aesthetics draws a clear connection between the internet, the world wide web, and more active modes of artistic engagement that are highly concerned with sociality.

Finally, Bourriaud's emphasis on aesthetically-framed social encounters is in direct juxtaposition to any object-based art process. In the avoidance of a commodifiable artistic product, the relational practice that Bourriaud observed and promoted can be read as resistance against the commodification of online sociality that proliferates social media usage (Fuchs, 2017).

My designation of the term 'participatory performance' as physical involvement in the performance event is reasonably analogous to Gareth White's definition of 'audience participation' in *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (2013). White states that his "definition of audience participation is simple: the participation of an audience, or an audience member, in the action of a performance." (2013, p. 4) This broad classification creates a lot of opportunity, for a wide range of aesthetic strategies. Such a classification focuses on performance-based artistic practice, but the simplicity of White's definition also breeds ambiguity. This ambiguity is problematic because White's general definition of audience participation could extend to include live performance forms such as British pantomime, 'happenings', or clapping and singing along at music concerts. These forms of audience participation are not indicative of the more recent wave of participatory practice of this investigation. In pantomime for example, audiences are encouraged and expected to call out in unison "he's behind you!" when an antagonist appears on stage, or to respond "oh, yes it is!" when the performer says "oh, no it isn't." These modes of participation have been codified over several centuries (Hughes, 2013) and do not draw the audiences' attention explicitly to the mode of participation itself. Happenings are generally not located in theatre

or traditional art spaces and audiences may not be aware that they are encountering a performance, nor that they are an audience (Sandford, 2003). The audience of a happening are not made aware of their spectatorial role, let alone their participatory role. Periodic clapping and singing along at music concerts are not an additional level of engagement. It is such a common and largely undirected occurrence that it is an accepted and inherent convention. There is little attention drawn to the mode or manner of this type of audience participation. Contemporary participatory practice has efficacy by making audiences mindful of their mode of participation and the specific ways that it operates relative to the ways audiences participate in everyday life.

The examples that White analyses however do inquire into the mechanics of participatory strategies and consider how spectators are likely to react not only to the invitation to participate, but also to the modes of participation they are accepting. He assesses how audiences may perceive the risk of accepting the participatory invitation. In doing so, he gives insight into the potential shift of agency, augmentation of the visibility of spectators, and modification of one's relationship with the discernible embodied and anonymous virtual Other. The juxtaposition White accentuates makes plain the expectations of spectators before and after accepting the invitation to participate, relative to how they express their public self.

Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and White's model of audience participation have helped to partially focus the definition of participatory practice I intend to pursue. These two models represent both a large umbrella and generic definition under which participatory performance practice falls. The generality and simplicity of these two models means that they do not wholly consider the shift of control, agency and responsibility, and the subtle oscillations between producer and consumer that occur during social media use and contemporary participatory practice.

Two writers that come closer to describing the mode of participation that I have identified in contemporary performance making are Grant Kester and Claire Bishop. Bourriaud and White documented and analysed broad modes of participatory dramaturgy, but Kester and Bishop question to what end participatory strategies are being implemented.

In *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (2011), art historian, critic and theorist, Grant H. Kester takes up Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics' by analysing 'collaborative' or 'socially engaged' art. By doing so, he problematises not only the political conditions that give rise to collaborative projects, but also the political and ethical implications of artists working with communities, non-specialists and other artists alike, whilst maintaining an optimistic outlook on the (inventive) quality of participatory engagement.

Tiller's report finds Kester on one end of a 'spectrum' that identifies participation as an artistic strategy "that places social cohesion and breaking down the hierarchy between professional and non-professional artist at the center of its practice." (2014, p. 14). Claire Bishop on the other is situated at the opposite end, which defines participatory art as "intentionally provocative and disruptive, challenging the status quo and dealing directly with the class, social and economic issues that may face the participants, while leaving the artist in a position where she/he retains their autonomy and makes the final creative decisions." (ibid. p. 14)

Bishop (2006) discusses and examines the 'social turn' – a term coined in her article 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' (2006)¹⁰ – with this ideal of hierarchical participatory aesthetics and efficacy in mind. For her, the social turn describes a historically anchored¹¹ cultural moment where a large majority of publicly subsidised artists purportedly began to focus on working collaboratively with communities and non-specialist individuals (in aesthetic practice and artistic production) to produce art that is founded in sociality. Such an art form is bound to the participants and their interactions, and resists objectification and commodification.

In the extended sequel to 'The Social Turn', (2012's *Artificial Hells*) Bishop cites Bourriaud and Kester on a number of occasions but cautions her readers to not confuse Bourriaud's emphasis on aesthetics with her own preoccupation with "the creative rewards of participation as a politicised working process." (Bishop, 2012, p. 2) This is a position that she largely shares with Kester. Both Bishop and Kester agree the very sociality participatory strategies and encounters are founded upon is fundamentally political. Tiller's study draws attention to the contrasts between them despite their common ground; they represent the most consistent and prominent voices in "the socially engaged or participatory visual art debate for the past ten years." (2014, p. 14) Kester and Bishop's separate positions on the politicisation of participatory aesthetics become most pronounced in the way they respectively approach the issue(s) of authorship in participation.

As my own political beliefs lean towards a type of liberal socialism¹², it is my view that any form of participation is a fundamentally political act. Correspondingly, I also believe that political decision making should be built around universal and unprejudiced mass participation. From my own socialist perspective, Kester's inquiry (into the issues surrounding authorship in collaborative and participatory modes of artistic practice) inevitably confronts challenges to fair and unbiased processes of artistic and creative decision making. That is not

¹⁰ Discussed at length in Chapter V.

¹¹ Early to mid-1990s.

¹² Not to be confused with social liberalism, which is more akin to neoliberalism.

to say, however, that the output of these practices do not generate viable instances of social and political efficacy. Although professional artists often guide collaborators or participants, the contributions made by non-artists remain valuable and valid, as long as participants are not manipulated into contributing, nor their contributions exploited without their knowledge and consent.

A level of transparency is therefore required not only for participation to remain voluntary, but also to avoid (intentional or unintentional) (mis)appropriation of participatory contribution. Bishop juxtaposes Kester by suggesting that the creative process in participatory practice need not be entirely democratic. However, she also argues that the efficacy of artist-led participation is not diminished providing the aforementioned transparency is preserved. A purely democratic process of participation that prioritises neither artist nor participant is the ideal aesthetic mobilisation of sociality for political means. But if participants experience a sense of agency and the artist does not deceive them in an exploitative manner, participation can both disrupt manipulative and exploitative norms of socio-political engagement, whilst also offering participants an opportunity to contribute.

The key difference between Kester and Bishop is not in the potential of participatory practice, but rather in their view of how participatory art has been or is being implemented. Where Kester is quietly optimistic about (but nonetheless aware of the dangers implicit within) the socio-political efficacy of participation, Bishop is critical of the instrumentalisation of participatory practice for political means and laments (but also endorses) its hitherto unfulfilled socially disruptive potential.

Both theorists refer to subtly contrasting modes of artistic engagement that respond to one or more manifestations of the transformation of global and/or local communities, shifts in modes of communication and the fluctuating relationship between self and Other. Kester writes predominantly about projects that engage with particular social communities such as Dialogue and their collaborations with the Adivasi tribe or Park Fiction's work in Hamburg's Hafensstraße neighbourhood. Bishop investigates how artists collaborate with *one another* like Marina Abramović and Ulay or the collected members of Gob Squad, Ontroerend Goed and Huit Facettes. Both have also engaged in critical thought concerning the collaboration between artists/practitioners with other (not necessarily artistic) third-party organisations to produce work. Stuart Brisley and Hille Furniture Company, Koh and Chu Yuan and the Myanmar government, or Ala Plastica as both an artistic collective and nongovernmental organization all serve as examples of this collaboration.

All these different forms of collaboration make up the vast web of participatory practices. My thesis however is centred around performance practice that invites audience members (with no restrictions or prejudice as to who participates from the pool of spectators) to contribute in the process and production of the performance.

This practice can also be more easily categorised within Bishop's model of participation whereby the artist/practitioner retains substantial creative control. This formulation of the participatory aesthetic falls under the rubric of 'directed' or 'creative' participation (Helguera), 'co-creative' or 'interpretative' engagement (Brown & Novak-Leonard) and 'collaborative making' (Tiller).

No matter the minutiae of the specific creative affiliation, it becomes clear the formal focus of participatory artistic practice seems to be on the generation of work that emphasises process and relies heavily on the interactions and relations between individuals on a level of sociality. This strategy is not unique to participatory performance but the artistic practice in question operates in the current socio-political and historical situation that finds participation to be a ubiquitous mode of political, economic and cultural engagement. Participation is employed as a strategy of formal aesthetic destabilisation (radically breaking the fourth wall and actively engaging spectators physically and socially), but also as a means to question and critically consider the very mode of involvement both within and beyond the aesthetic (and likely fictive) frame: as it operates in the spheres of politics, economics, technology and culture.

Both Bishop and Kester consider participatory practice in terms of the ways in which artists and practitioners collaborate with individuals and communities. The examples of practice they cite, although pertinent to and clearly evocative of the political efficacy of participatory practice, are not representative of the primarily performance-based samples I have identified. The complex and nuanced issues of authorship, production, agency and potential for exploitation that Bishop and Kester highlight are however easily transferrable to exclusively performance-based works and are key to analysing and theorising the participatory performance I believe to be a response to the social, political, economic, cultural and ontological impact of social media engagement.

Alexandra Kolb's article, 'Current Trends in Contemporary Choreography: A Political Critique' (2013), questions how far participatory modes of performance (primarily in contemporary dance practice) can be considered emancipatory both in the immediate aesthetic situation, but also in the more general socio-political and economic context. Kolb's commentary on the political and socio-economic implications of participatory praxis in performance-work integrates the concerns by Bishop, but suggests these participatory dramaturgies reinforce socio-political concerns rather than destabilise or disrupt them.

Kolb's article is an important point of reference for this investigation because it presents an existing counter-argument to my central claim that contemporary forms of participatory performance can cultivate conditions ripe for the emergence of authentic behaviour. Rather, she suggests this new wave of participatory

practice should not be uniformly or uncritically labelled as socially progressive because it can often mirror the ills of society that form from Debord's (1967) spectacle.

Across this discussion of literature, the specificity of my comprehension of participatory performance comes into focus. Bourriaud's relational aesthetics acts as a broad umbrella to describe interactive modes of artistic engagement. White's pragmatic definition of audience participation can be employed as a skeletal structure for active and dynamic engagement with performance events. His emphasis on the participatory invitation also opens the discussion around the audience's awareness of participation as a means of influencing one's relationship with and towards the Other. The political economy of participation provided by Bishop, Kester and Kolb is a point of access for ways that participation is problematised, destabilised and subverted. Kester and Kolb's positions do not necessarily further my argument, but they both confirm the socio-political efficacy of participatory dramaturgies. Kolb's argument acts as a foil to my own, but can also inadvertently show how the use of participatory strategies in performance have developed considerable nuance within the last decade. Bishop's argument considers participatory practice as a force for disruptive socio-political efficacy. I agree that participatory performance borrows from modes of interaction employed in inauthentic everyday life, however I also offer up the possibility that in doing so it can have subversive socio-political efficacy.

II. THE POSSIBLE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM AS AN IDEOLOGICAL FRAME

Tiller, Bishop, Kester and Kolb all identify participatory practice within an ongoing socio-political context. Throughout this thesis the political economy of neoliberal ideology and late capitalism repeatedly emerges as a frame to explain the reappearance of participatory dramaturgies. Such a framing is primarily a consequence of associating participatory practice with social media (Fuchs, 2017). I propose that contemporary forms of participatory performance practice have emerged in response to an inauthentic orientation towards digitised modes of participation and interaction. I characterise an inauthentic orientation as one that displaces one's agency and entices one into acting against one's self-interest. As a result of acting in 'bad-faith' (Sartre, 1943), one expresses and presents an identity that is not one's own but is rather a composition of the desires and intentions of others. I argue in Chapter IV that the root of the inauthentic orientation towards social media is a fundamental immersion in neoliberal ideology. Although neoliberalism can refer to a number of different geopolitical phenomena from around the globe, the term 'neoliberalism' as it is used in this thesis, is situated in a specifically western capitalist perspective. Michel Foucault did not live to see the rise of social media, but he was

able to identify a system of governance and devolved power that I mobilise to provide a possible reading of social media as a delivery system for neoliberal ideology in western political economy.

Foucault (1991) proposed that governance¹³ is fundamentally symbiotic with the economy. One's active participation in any mode of economy, is also an expression of one's participation in larger political decisions. An initial governmental development model and reformation of economic policy¹⁴ – inclined towards economic liberty and minimal state intervention – sets in motion a normalisation of neoliberal ideology in the prevailing national and international climate. Once established, a process of neoliberal governmentality (founded in a model of political and economic devolution) is perpetuated by continued public participation.

Foucault's definition of governmentality was synonymous with his definition of neoliberalism (Peters, 2007). He considered the forms of devolution (inherent in governmentality) typical of the liberalisation of economic controls that defined neoliberalism. Across the academic literature pertaining to both neoliberalism and neoliberal capitalism, a common statement is that the term 'neoliberalism' is a fundamentally ambiguous one. This ambiguity is primarily a consequence of the nomenclature 'neoliberalism' being used in different academic fields to describe the political economy, cultural motivation or purely financial practices of any given object of study.

In 'Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan' (2009), Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse problematise the use of neoliberalism as a placeholder for the generic criticism levelled at the contemporary capitalist economy. The authors identify three key (but broad) rationales for defining neoliberalism and the way it has been mobilised across academic literature: as a set of economic reform policies, a model of economic development, and a normative ideology¹⁵. Such a broad and varied application may be the primary contributor to (what Boas and Gans-Morse consider to be) the misrepresentation and misappropriation of neoliberalism in academic inquiry.

The economic policies that liberalise the economy, reduce the economic role of the state and "contribute to fiscal austerity" (2009, p. 143). These policies are tangible manifestations of neoliberalism as a model for political and economic development. If it is considered as a 'normative ideology', neoliberalism represents a

¹³ Taken by Foucault to signify one's capacity or responsibility to alter or shape the conduct of others (1991).

¹⁴ Like those experienced in the late 1970s (Harvey, 2005).

¹⁵ Boas and Gans-Morse do identify one final way that neoliberalism is characterised in academic literature. They suggest that neoliberalism is employed to identify a particular 'academic paradigm'. The paradigm in question is far more concerned with empirical economics and "neoclassical economic theory" (2009, p. 144) than this current investigation needs or seeks to be.

more general reflection on the underpinning ideological tenets that drive the model of development and therefore the emergence of economic reform policies¹⁶. Boas and Gans-Morse suggest that “if a neoliberal development model is a specific plan for how a certain society *will* be organized, a neoliberal ideology is a more general statement about how society *should* be organized.” (2009, p. 144, emphasis in original). For example, the broader conceptions of how individuals relate to their wider community and how under neoliberal ideology, freedom is considered the “overarching social value” (ibid. p. 144), are the fundamental guides for how development models are conceived and then substantiated in economic policy.

These definitions of neoliberalism bleed into one another in David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005). Harvey approaches these conceptions of neoliberalism as historical developments in political economy that were thoroughly realised in the late 1970s and early 1980s by individuals such as Deng Xiaoping in China, Paul Volker and Ronald Reagan in the United States, and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. To demonstrate how the development model of neoliberalism materialised in policy reformation, Harvey offers the following definition:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

(Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

This definition establishes that the underpinning value of neoliberalism is freedom. However, Harvey mines neoliberal history and unearths a litany of occasions where the concept of freedom had been misappropriated to benefit the economic elite and maintain clandestine control. Harvey’s chronicle of neoliberalism in practice provides historical evidence for the paradox that operates at the heart of neoliberalism: one is free, if one can pay. I refer to this paradox throughout my investigation. It is a central block in the foundation of my argument for the manipulative neoliberal misappropriation of participation.

Harvey approaches neoliberalism from a primarily historiographical standpoint. He forms a definition of neoliberalism as a political and economic ideology from his analysis of existing political and economic decisions.

¹⁶ Like those initially introduced by Thatcher and Reagan in the 1970s and 80s (Harvey, 2005), and those executed in the wake of the Greek debt crisis in 2009 (Pettinger, 2018).

This analysis highlights the disparity between those with or without economically driven power, but it does not consider the capacity of those subject to neoliberal structures to mobilise and retake power. He has not done so because it has not happened. Ronald Aronson's 'Surviving the Neoliberal Maelstrom: A Sartrean Phenomenology of Social Hope' (2015) remarks upon the apparent 'non-death' (Crouch, 2013) of neoliberal capitalism. He takes the broad thesis of neoliberal ideology and considers how its rhetoric of individualism affects one's political efficacy. Aronson states that neoliberal capitalism "invades every nook and cranny of our social, natural and psychological space" (Aronson, 2015, p. 24), where hitherto it had only been a "sub-system of social life." (2015, p. 23) By employing the general ideology of neoliberalism, Aronson reveals the cultural and fundamentally socio-political impact of neoliberal thinking on isolated individuals and communities.

In the article, he is primarily concerned with one's capacity to participate collectively and enact socio-political change whilst also contending with the constantly shifting dynamics of power engendered by capitalism. Not only does the article map the political economy of neoliberalism onto issues surrounding the ontological relationship between conscious subjects, but it does so by drawing upon the ontological and political thought of Sartre. It explores the impact of neoliberalism on sociality and collaboration. Both sociality and collaboration are fundamental to the efficacy of participatory modes of spectatorship. Aronson's Sartrean inquiry into and definition of neoliberalism bring together some of the hitherto disparate components of this thesis as it begins to outline some of the connections between participation, neoliberalism and (Sartrean) ontological approaches to sociality.

A combination of all three conceptions of neoliberalism (economic policy, development model and ideology), as well as its conception as politically, economically and culturally ubiquitous can negotiate contemporary phenomena on political, social, economic and cultural levels, that range from the purely conceptual to the legislative and concretely historical. The proliferation of neoliberal ideology in contemporary culture (that Aronson cites) is primarily expressed through neoliberal economic models of development and economic policy making. All three stages of conceptualising and realising neoliberalism are bound together in Michel Foucault's theory of 'governmentality'.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA: DEFINITIONS AND CONCERNS

I cite social media as not only a technological innovation, that allows millions of people across the globe to interact digitally, but also as a manifestation of contemporary neoliberal exploitation (Fuchs, 2017). “Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.” (Kietzmann, et al., 2011, p. 241) Social media are the primary tools used to enable social networking. Such tools come in the form of social media platforms developed and disseminated by social media providers such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, YouTube and Snapchat.

These platforms share several features and functionalities under the umbrella of social media as tools for online and digital social networking. Where I do not cite a particular social media provider and employ the generic term ‘social media’, I am referring to this common set of tools. These common attributes include (but are not limited to) personal profiles and profile pictures, a ‘news feed’, ‘timeline’ or ‘story’, posts, status updates or ‘tweets’, shared (and re-shared) content, notifications of activity, ‘friends’ or followers, and ‘likes’, views, comments or other responses.

This investigation is not only concerned with these tools and modes of functionality solely as means of online communication and interaction, but also as instruments of exploitation and capital generation. Therefore, the significance of the idiom ‘social media’ is two-fold, and unless stated otherwise, should be read as a representation of both the digitalisation of social interaction *and* exploitation of online users.

Only a handful of texts seemed useful to me to conceptually grasp what social media engagement implies. Most of the literature that I have discovered, which tries to establish the features and implications of mass social media participation, is built around the application of social media as a tool to further one’s business or widen appeal as a public figure. Texts that were concerned with social media and authenticity did so under the rubric of authenticity as a marketing tool or mode of self-help. Such an attitude towards the authentic expression of one’s self is indicative of the fundamentally inauthentic context that social media operates within. In the context of social media as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality, the weaponisation of one’s “authentic” self to compete in the online global marketplace conforms to the inauthentic commodification of one’s online identity. The relevant key concepts mentioned in the literature are: connectivity, digitised sociality, presumption, the exploitation of users and the fundamental components of social networking and social media.

There is a wide global range of social media providers and platforms, but the following examples have been chosen primarily as a consequence of their empirical popularity in western European society (Kemp, 2018). If a social media platform is more popular, there is a higher probability that it permeates one’s life. Such ubiquity

and intense exposure are more likely to affect one's behaviour. If the behaviour of enough people is modified, there is a greater possibility that this behaviour will be reflected and problematised aesthetically.

danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison's 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship' (2007), act as a brief primer on the different elements of social networking sites (SNS) and how they employ social media to help users build large and interconnected online social networks. boyd and Ellison define social networking sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." (2007, p. 211)

boyd and Ellison's definition of social media corresponds with how Dhiraj Murthy explains social *media* in 'Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter' (2012). In the article Murthy describes social media as "a medium designed to facilitate social interaction, the sharing of digital media, and collaboration." (2012 p. 1061) He also surmises that social networking sites (SNS), although not interchangeable with social media are the primary delivery system for disseminating social media artefacts and fragments.

With this distinction in mind, I have focused primarily on the ways in which social *media* is used in and out of social networking contexts to establish the online self of any given individual user. YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram are all fundamentally examples of social media. These platforms deliver content primarily through video media and photographic means of representation respectively and users transmit, receive and respond to content being shared between one another. Whereas, Facebook is an unambiguous case of a social networking site and Twitter follows in the web 2.0 tradition of blogging, more recently termed a 'microblog' (ibid. 2012). Both of which circulate social media content however, the text-based posts (or 'tweets') on the latter are limited to 280 characters per post.

All of these online social media frameworks are founded on the concept of 'user generated content' (OECD Working Party on the Information Economy, 2007) which is the term used to describe online content created or generated by users of social media or social networking platforms. With the emergence of user generated content also comes Henry Jenkins' notion of 'participatory culture', which he explores across a number of texts, but primarily in *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce and Politics* (Jenkins, et al., 2015). Jenkins suggests that user generated content and social media are the tools of a society of participants that can increase wide-spread creative and artistic expression, and promote civic engagement simply through their unfettered online participation.

Christian Fuchs, on the other hand, suggests there is a far more pragmatic and economically inclined impetus for the mechanisms of social media and how users participate in it. In *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2017), Fuchs exposes the neoliberal motives of social media providers. He suggests that the political economy of social media providers and the platforms that they cultivate are rooted in a culture of exploitation and surveillance. Users not only give up their time and labour freely (as ‘prosumers’), but their online activity is monitored, captured and sold to advertisers, who bid for the chance to place targeted advertising on social media in strategic positions that will reap the highest amount of ‘clicks’ and therefore, potential profit.

Between the functionality of social media to digitise one’s social interactions, the utopian potential of online participatory culture and the underlying neoliberal exploitation of users, social media is revealed to be a rich and multifaceted object of study. All these aspects of and potential perspectives on social media also mean the potential for it to be a tool for authentic action can emerge. Despite the overwhelming case for social media participation as a catalyst for the intensification of inauthenticity, by considering the ways that it can promote authentic engagement with one’s ontological condition, a much fairer appraisal can be made.

IV. A HISTORY OF (IN)AUTHENTICITY

Throughout this investigation I use the term ‘(in)authenticity’ or refer to the ‘(in)authentic’ to discuss both modes of expressing one’s (conscious) existence *and* situations that may influence these modes of expression. By placing the ‘in’ of inauthenticity in parentheses, I can evoke both the authentic *and* inauthentic without specifically referring to one or the other. If I were to simply refer to the ‘*authenticity*’ of any given situation or expression of human existence, one might be tempted to consider the phenomena in question as purely or wholly authentic. Referring to the “authenticity” of an act or situation may indicate the degree of authenticity, however it does not also equally indicate the degree of inauthenticity. By instead referring to the (in)authenticity of an act or situation as a generic term, it enables me to avoid making any misleading value judgements without first analysing the ontological conditions that surround it.

Therefore, if one discusses the (in)authenticity of a situation, one is acknowledging the pervasiveness of inauthenticity in human existence, whilst also maintaining authenticity as a possibility and conceptual counterpoint. Both Heidegger and Sartre were sceptical about any form of sustained or stable authenticity (Golomb, 1995) and rather theorised more concretely about the prevalence of inauthenticity and the (more likely, albeit slim) possibility of one performing anomalous authentic acts.

Such a use of terminology is also useful for evoking the contradiction and ambiguity surrounding the distinction between what can be considered authentic and inauthentic. Wolfgang Funk (2015) circumnavigates this ambiguity by arguing that authenticity is a 'black box'. By this he means that although one can observe and identify the potential causes and effects of the authentic, one can never glimpse or comprehend the inner-workings of it. Daniel Schulze (2017) applies this black box model of authenticity to contemporary live art, in which he includes theatre, performance and performance art. Rather than engaging with a primarily existentialist encoding of authenticity, Schulze traces authenticity in theatre to the tension between what could be considered a mimetic imitation or fake, and the "genuine, truthful, immediate, undisguised, unadulterated, certified, guaranteed, binding." (Knaller, 2012, p. 25) The issue of authenticity that Schulze identifies in theatre and performance is largely concerned with how an audience negotiates "the relationship between reality and its representation." (Schulze, 2017, p. 43) This project to discover and encounter the real emerges at the forefront of a high percentage of the practice this thesis engages with. I have attempted to peer inside the black box by employing the ontological and phenomenological thought of Heidegger and Sartre.

Throughout this investigation I will be arguing that authenticity should be considered as fundamentally liminal. Such a liminality qualifies authenticity as inhabiting a position "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967, p. 93) more everyday modes of inauthenticity. Heidegger and Sartre's work makes recognising inauthentic expressions of one's mode of Being (and the situations that make it so) relatively unproblematic; however, the definitive identification of authentic Being is far more challenging.

Despite their antithetical relationship, authenticity and inauthenticity are contingent upon one another, which makes the threshold between the two ambiguous. This investigation seeks to employ the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity as one of the lenses through which one can interpret the relationship between different forms of contemporary participatory performance. Therefore, a lexicon that engenders the fluid continuum of (in)authenticity is an expedient tool for describing and critically exploring this relationship.

The emergence of the concept of authenticity – to indicate more than simply the counter to dishonesty – can be traced back to at least the 16th century (Trilling, 1971), but it was not until the mid and late 19th century that it is recognised as a "primary virtue" (Flynn, 2013, p. xi) of metaphysical and ethical philosophical thought. During this time, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche both faced the overwhelming ubiquity of dogmatic social, political, cultural and religious institutions (Golomb, 1995). In particular, the ostensibly unshaking moral systems established and maintained by organized religion which (in the case of 19th century Europe) was predominantly the Lutheran and Catholic denominations of the Christian church. These organisations were

manifestations of prominent influence originating externally to the individual (like neoliberal capitalism), that may have affected one's engagement with one's own choice, and therefore the authenticity of one's acts and constitution of one's authentic self.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche respectively rejected the rigidity of these objective, presumptive and "morally bankrupt" (Altman, 2003, p. 3) structures, because they were not convinced by a morality that was located externally to the individual (in pre-established organisations). Instead, they suggested a more fluid approach to ethical conduct, which was supposed to empower the individual and could also be regarded as being a subject to generate their own moral procedure. Kierkegaard proposed that one should "become what one is" (1846, p. 55), while Nietzsche responded to this call to arms over forty years later¹⁷ by urging his readers to "become what you are." (Nietzsche, 1908)

By questioning the significance and dominance of established socio-political and cultural institutions, Kierkegaard refocused the prevailing ethical questions and standpoints of the time. Kierkegaard shifts the central responsibility with regards to how one should live one's life onto the *individual* and away from external social, economic and judicial pressures. He examines how the self could be constituted *between* one's given situation and one's commitment to actions or projects. The authentic position proposed by Kierkegaard can be mapped onto one's situation as a participant in either social media or in a performance encounter. Both modes of participation establish one as either a user or spectator amongst other users and spectators. What discerns the authentic from the inauthentic is whether one steps out from this situation to transcend the established order. For Kierkegaard, transcendence of the order meant casting off the constraints of man-made structures and orthodoxies, and instead "devotion to a single external principle" (Altman, 2003, p. 3): God.

Compared to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche suggests that one should avoid established dogmatic (particularly religious) virtues and rather act on one's beliefs that arise from rigorous questioning and transcendence of conventional morality. Kierkegaard still clung to faith, however when Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra¹⁸ proclaimed that "God is dead" (1891, p. 11), he did so with the knowledge that where organised institutional Christian faith did once reside at the heart of western culture, a void would be created. Thus, mankind would need to find its individual subjective truth in the face of a meaningless world. By rejecting the conventional morality

¹⁷ Nietzsche wrote *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are* in 1888, but it was not published for another twenty years in 1908.

¹⁸ Acting as literary proxy for Nietzsche.

of his time, Nietzsche offers an ethics that proposes that one transcends the ‘herd’ and takes responsibility for shaping one’s own belief and acting upon one’s freedom as an authentic self.

In the contemporary context of social media and neoliberal capitalism, stepping out of the established order is more likely manifest in a persistent critical awareness concerning how and when one operates online. Thus, one is separated from the herd of other online social media users. If one’s engagement with social media is moderated and sporadic then one’s data cannot be commodified as easily as if one is periodically participating on social media and generating content. By disengaging oneself from the immersion of social media, one is less likely to constitute oneself based in a foundation of big data feedback.

This dichotomy and tension between one’s own existence (as free subject) and the existence of others (as equally free subjects) was one of the central ontological properties of Martin Heidegger’s theory of human existence (*Dasein*), that he set out in *Being and Time* (1927). This tension was also therefore at the foundation of how one negotiated the world and realised one’s ‘ownness’. This tension is manifest in the constitution of one’s Being as the culmination of one’s actions over the course of a person’s finite life. According to Heidegger, one’s Being *is* this project. The influences – of those other than oneself who have projects of their own – on one’s own project can (and do) instigate a deviation from one’s own possibility and therefore one’s own project. ‘Falling’ is a mode of Being that Heidegger considers to be an intensified integration and loss of one’s self into the ‘they’ (*Das man*). This slight augmentation of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s ‘herd’ or ubiquitous set of external dogmatic systems, puts more emphasis on one’s *doing* as one’s Being and the authentic mantra shifts accordingly. Almost a century after Kierkegaard, Heidegger transforms “be what one is” into be what one does and in turn, do what one is.

In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), Jean-Paul Sartre translates and augments the tension – identified by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger – between one’s own existence and the existence of others into a tension between one’s ‘facticity’ and one’s capacity to transcend it. One’s facticity is not only the corporeality of one’s bodily existence, but also the facts of one’s existence such as one’s past actions that are *fixed* in one’s own memory, but also the memory of others that witnessed them, unchangeable. Sartre’s radical notion of human freedom implies that one can transcend this facticity – which is often reinforced by others, the herd or the ‘they’ – and it is one’s fundamental engagement with one’s freedom, agency and responsibility that is indicative of one’s authenticity.

There have been several writers (over the past thirty years, since Sartre) that have also made significant contributions to the developing concern of authenticity and inauthenticity¹⁹ that I want to consider here. Across his works, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989) and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), Charles Taylor suggests that modernity breeds self-absorption. He proposes this inward turn is partially a backlash to the increasing secularisation that characterised modernity. This mode of inwardness is far more focused on introspective reflection and the generation of the self by ontologically domestic and interior means. Such an attitude contrasts with engaging with one's ontologically intrinsic freedom and generating authentic acts, that are subject to the reflective gaze of both the acting agent and others observing said action.

Taylor proposes that the authentic generation of the self (through authentic acts) is displaced by the conformity of living in a way that frames other people as 'ready-to-hand' or 'present-at-hand' (Heidegger, 1927) instruments to complete tasks in the most economical manner. He suggests that this is a result of the rise of individualism, interest in socio-political and economic efficiency (or what Taylor terms 'instrumental reasoning'), and the oppressive institutions and structures (governmental or otherwise) of the 'industrial-technological' society that has characterised modernity and postmodernity.

Alternatively, Charles Guignon (2004) defines authenticity within a far more conceptually political frame. He suggests that authentic acts are a public expression of one's basic "feelings, desires and convictions." (Guignon, 2016) He proposes that these expressions are fundamental to one being an effective member of a democratic society and crucial to combating any despotic, fascist or dictatorial political alternatives.

Finally, Somogy Varga (2012) suggests that the project of authenticity has been misappropriated; the idea of an overall authentic project is fundamentally at odds with the liminal and transitory definition of the authentic act. What stands in the place of true authenticity is a superficial "quest for self-realization." (Varga, 2012 p. 5) Varga identifies a trend in self-help literature that claims to reveal an 'inner-self' that is allegedly analogous to one's authentic-self.

These more recent iterations of authenticity draw heavily from canonical and established explanations (like those already established by Heidegger and Sartre) and seek to investigate how authenticity sits in the socio-political, technological, economic and cultural contexts of modernity. These writers provide insightful contextual scenarios, where one can apply a rhetoric of authenticity and inauthenticity, however they are not necessarily adding to the fundamental models of these established by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and augmented by

¹⁹ Including but not limited to Charles Taylor, Alessandro Ferrara, Jacob Golomb, Charles Guignon and Somogy Varga.

Heidegger and Sartre in any radical way. This might be because what these more contemporary writers are doing (and to a certain extent what I am also doing) is applying existing conceptual models of authenticity and inauthenticity to present phenomena that demand critical attention. I would argue that although there have been several significant shifts in the ways that people interact with one another since Sartre wrote (developing ideas from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger), there have been none that have had the same impact as the internet, Web 2.0 and social media. Taylor wrote about authenticity before the global interconnectedness of the internet had become ubiquitous. Guignon primarily wrote just as Facebook launched and before social media and social networking had properly taken hold. Only Varga has been engaged with authenticity since social media's impact could have affected users' authentic expression of the self. However, he does not especially engage with the internet as a source of (in)authenticity, let alone social media. This could be because social media had not been specifically engaged with critically until writers like Jenkins and Fuchs a few years after Varga made his claims about the misappropriation of authenticity. Therefore, to investigate modes of (in)authentic influence and behaviour in a digitised society, I draw from Heidegger and Sartre because I consider their contributions to be the most conceptually applicable and not explicitly bound to any historical context.

V. CONCLUSION

I have discussed my position in each discipline to try and constitute a robust central framework. It has become evident that the critical theory surrounding participatory performance practice is politically inclined. Writers such as Tiller, Kester, Bishop and Kolb emphasise the agency of participants as the central value from which participatory practice can be located on a spectrum. This spectrum of participation accommodates practice that not only draws the audience from their seats and grants them creative control, but also practice that problematises modes of participation through manipulation. Irrespective of the specific participatory mode in use, contemporary participatory practice is consistently sensitive to the socio-political context from which it springs. From this position I can argue how contemporary participatory practice responds to the political economy of social media.

Neoliberalism can be approached from several different perspectives, however the definitions established by Foucault, Harvey, Boas and Gans-Morse, and Aronson clarify it as a holistic political ideology that seems to have permeated everyday western life through socio-digital modes of governmentality. By drawing on a range of prominent social media platforms, the abstract construct of social media is given a sort of corporeality, or at least

a pool of actual entities that can provide evidence for claims about sociality and (in)authenticity. Writers like boyd and Ellison and Murthy provide definitions of social media that are still applicable. These descriptions of online sociality are further augmented by the critical positions of Jenkins and Fuchs. Fuchs' analysis of the political economy of social media establishes a firm foundation for my own interpretation of how this political economy is reflected in participatory performance.

Finally, I have drawn together the thought of writers who imbue authenticity with history, nuance and complexity beyond its position as a synonym for 'genuine' or 'real'. Although Taylor, Guignon and Varga demonstrate that authenticity is still a concern for contemporary thinkers, Heidegger and Sartre's ontological models not only locate the balance between authenticity and inauthenticity at the centre of human existence, but also provide further specificity by building upon the frameworks proposed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Heidegger and Sartre's models of authenticity are the central building blocks for my reading of contemporary participatory performance practice in the context of online digital connectivity, alienation, manipulation and commodification.

CHAPTER II:

METHODOLOGY

To effectively reveal the connection between contemporary participatory performance practice and the neoliberal structures intrinsic to social media, one must engage in a methodology of semiotic, phenomenological, and ontological analysis. The visible rendering of this connection dictates these analyses must engage with both contemporary performance events (that employ participatory dramaturgies) *and* the current socio-political, economic and cultural phenomena I believe they respond to.

The performance case studies that I have selected for inclusion in this investigation are handpicked. They have been selected because they exemplify some of the different ways contemporary performance practices mobilise participatory strategies to address issues surrounding digital technologies and contemporary expressions of identity and interpersonal influence. What makes these examples distinct is the ways they problematise how the former affects the latter. These specific examples are also significant to this investigation because audiences often (if not in every case) begin the performance in a traditionally theatrical role of silent and unseen spectator, but are then invited to destabilise the boundary between spectator and performer. This explicit modification to spectatorship is precluded from other interactive forms of performance such as immersive theatre (Schulze, 2017), which alters the frontier of spectatorship from the outset and therefore does not offer this juxtaposition. The narrowness of the pool of examples from which I draw is a necessary condition of the aim of this investigation: to transect contemporary performance, philosophies of selfhood and the political economy of digital communication technologies. A wider sample should be sought in future research, however in this initial inquiry, one should be continually mindful of the modest sample size.

Each methodological approach is sensitive to the different ways these participatory phenomena are *constituted* and *perceived* in 21st century western European society, and can therefore be used as tools to interpret their meaning and effect. If the analytical approaches are applied to both performance and socio-political phenomena, then the underlying concerns that connect them (existential (in)authenticity) have clear anchoring points across the boundary between art and life. Furthermore, each methodological perspective can also reveal how these processes of artistic/socio-economic constitution and audience/user perception may have been modified to cultivate concentrated conditions of sociality that foster either the authentic or inauthentic-self.

Theatre/archaeology, for instance, is a method of critically gathering and positioning evidential materials

(or artefacts) so that they may be analysed and used to incite, fuel and reinforce one's claims. I employ theatre/archaeology to identify, select and assemble the materials that are subject to the forms of analysis. This method was primarily developed by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks to problematise the 'aesthetic event' (2001, p. xiii) through the collection of performance detritus, both intentionally generated and accidentally produced.

Once collected, performance artefacts can then be interpreted and subject to analysis. Theories of semiosis, semiotics and the application of semiotic analysis²⁰ imply that "meaning itself is born in the marriage of material object or action and immaterial concept – in the *sign*." (Counsell & Wolf, 2001, p. 2) The interface between the signifying object or action and the signified concept are intrinsic to modes of representation. Both participatory performance and the contemporary phenomenon of neoliberally induced social media function by operating on varying levels of representation and therefore require a semiotic reading.

Charles Sanders Peirce's theoretical framework of 'semiosis' (1867) can be employed as a form of semiotic analysis to interpret the actions of performers, spectators and participants as signs that represent either an object, person, concept or phenomenon. Peirce's system accommodates the reading of signs that refer to phenomena beyond the boundaries of the performance event or social media platform across modes of likeness, causality and convention. It can also be used to infer modes of (in)authenticity where they pertain to sociality and indeed alienation. By identifying where and how representational modes are being employed in social media or participatory performance, semiotic analysis can reveal the severity of the mediation between the object, person, concept or phenomenon and the sign.

Phenomenology, phenomenological reduction and analysis provide an alternative way of approaching the (in)authentic-self in the contemporary participatory contexts: performance and social media. Across the phenomenological thought attributed to Charles Sanders Peirce (1894)²¹, Edmund Husserl (1931) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), there has been a consistent emphasis on both stripping away layers of symbolic meaning and focusing on the body as site for immediate experience and as a result for action, intention and expression of one's self.

Husserl's process of phenomenological reduction was initially adopted by theorists such as Bruce Wilshire (1982) and Bert O. States (1985) as a counter-methodology to semiotic analysis. By placing the layers

²⁰ 'Semiosis' is Peirce's theory of signs, whereas 'semiotics' is the general study of signs and sign processes and 'semiotic analysis' is the application of these theories to an object or action.

²¹ Peirce should be considered within the field of semiotics first and foremost, but he provided a route for the phenomenological thought later expressed by Husserl.

of representation (used in performance) in parentheses, Wilshire and States were able to provide a reading of performance events that did not rely on the audience's capacity to imagine. They were able to determine how performance encounters were affecting spectators in a more immediate way.

The shedding of representational modes of communication in performance soon led to an emphasis on the phenomena of 'bodied spaces' (Garner, 1994). By looking past signs or symbols, theorists such as Stanton Garner (1994) and Alice Rayner (2006) were able to concentrate their analysis on the relationships between the embodied consciousnesses proposed by Merleau-Ponty. In doing so, they were able to draw distinct parallels between everyday embodied encounters and performance-based encounters between bodies sharing space and time.

To form a holistic account of any performance encounter and ensure that one has not neglected any crucial element, semiotic and phenomenological analysis could also be employed symbiotically. In a mode of 'binocular vision' (States, 1985), one can view performance and socio-political phenomena through both semiotic and phenomenological lenses, without diluting the effect of each one in isolation.

Finally, a combined approach of semiosis and phenomenology can conceivably draw out the valuable components of a participatory encounter. The semiotic highlights how objects and actions can refer to concepts or events beyond the spatio-temporal reach of the performance event. Whereas, the phenomenological can make one mindful of how the embodied positioning, proximity, motion and primal noise produced during a performance event could stir something within spectators.

The results of these analyses can tell one relatively little about how the shifting of bodies across symbolic boundaries affects spectators' mindfulness of their own and others' (in)authenticity. The underlying analysis that subsumes these disparate semiotic and phenomenological findings however is ontological. The ontological approaches promoted by Martin Heidegger (1927) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) help to underpin the interpretations rendered by analysis grounded in semiosis and phenomenology. It does so by rooting observations made about bodies and signs in a framework of consciousness, temporality, selfhood and otherness.

I. (RE)BUILDING PARTICIPATORY EVENTS WITH THEATRE/ARCHAEOLOGY

In the course of my research I found *Theatre/Archaeology* to be a very useful theoretical approach and methodology for returning to performances previously attended or discovering the form and content of those I had not. Within the framework of theatre/archaeology I can keep revisiting moments and picking them apart

further each time. This methodological approach was established by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks and outlined in Pearson's book: *Theatre/Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues* (2001). Theatre archaeology synthesises performance theory and analysis with theoretical archaeology to investigate live art and performance from a historiographical perspective. It problematises the liveness, ephemerality and the ambiguity of interpretation inherent in contemporary performance practice.

The general thesis of Pearson's *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001) (and by extension the theatre/archeology method) is that it is problematic to inquire into and analyse live performance given its ephemeral nature and the rapid degradation of the shared performance text as event. Pearson and Shanks suggest that a range of 'artefacts', 'traces' or 'relics' can be recovered from any past performance encounter. This detritus provides essential information about both what happened during the event and what it might have been like to attend. These traces are a type of evidential documentation that, when pieced together and '(re)contextualized' in the present, provide a distinct and fluid point of reference for analysis that does not purely rely on memory. By drawing together the residual materials of a performance, I have been able to (re)build a picture of what was happening during the event that I can keep returning to for fresh detail and analysis.

Pearson and Shanks' project was primarily instigated from a need to consider performance 'artefacts' that transcend text-based dramatic literature. This paradigmatic shift in focus is reflective of the many performance practices they believed had developed modes of efficacy that operate without reliance on the traditional foundations of written scripts. The efficacy of these emerging practices were instead largely contingent upon the spontaneous, improvised, unplanned or unexpected input and expression of both performers and audiences. The objects of my interest in any given performance are the strategies employed by performers and practitioners and the impact they may have had on an audience. This evidence contrasts with how these strategies were initially designed or developed before being presented to audiences. The expedient fragments that remain are the product of *intra* and *post*-performance documentation; not documents generated *before* the performance event. I consider this distinction to be analogous to the binary between text-based and non-text-based performance events. Participatory events could also have derived from a text, in which case there is an abundance of material.

My investigation is chiefly engaged in how audience participation in performance may reveal something about the contemporary condition of the (in)authentic-self. For that reason, performance artefacts that are of most use to my inquiry are those with the capacity to evoke the performance events as they happened and as they integrated the engagement of participating audience members.

The same archaeological method of situating and organising event-based vestiges is equally applicable

to instances of social media user engagement. One's activity on social media is not bound by the same ephemerality as the live performance event. In fact, it is common practice for one's online activity to be logged (with or without one's knowledge and/or consent) and often presented (usually with one's consent) to other users (Lupton, 2015). The 'traces' of one's social media activity are predominantly (if not exclusively) *ex post facto*. The abundance of this social media residue makes it far easier to collect and build a larger and more general picture of the functionality of social media platforms and the habits of social media users.

Not only can the methods (proposed under the nomenclature) of 'theatre/archaeology' be employed to trace and assemble participatory performance artefacts, but they also can excavate significant evidence from the rich seam of social media participation. Once assembled, this evidence can be analysed through the lenses of semiosis, phenomenology and ontology.

Performance artefacts, traces, fragments and relics can encompass *anything* connected to a performance: scripts, performance programs/info-sheets, set designs, lighting plots, reviews and so on. The range and representational quality of artefacts has increased markedly with the development of (initially analogue, but increasingly) digital audio-visual recording and reproduction technologies, such as audio-recording devices and video cameras. These technological advances give a second-hand observer (or investigator) of the performance event, the impression of experiencing the encounter in roughly the same spatial and temporal conditions expressed in the original phenomenon. This method of approaching past performance events has opened the field of performance studies and allowed more researchers than ever to access performance material and undertake analysis that was hitherto challenging and compromised, if not impossible.

One must exercise caution in immediately conflating the reproduced performance trace with the original event. Caroline Rye suggests that the spatio-temporal resemblance between the live encounter and the industrially reproducible 'mediatized' (Auslander, 1999) document presents problems, concerning the epistemological modes of encountering and discerning both versions of the event. Instead, one should approach the trace as a "[collapse of] the moment of image recording and the moment of image reproduction, ultimately producing a notion of equivalence between the two." (Rye, 2003, p. 16) As a result, one should consider all traces from a performance event(s) as signifiers of a past event and not the event itself, which would reduce the risk of conflation. A nuanced attitude towards the trace should be adopted as a matter of good practice.

Despite the potential complications inherent in digital video footage of performance events, such as inadvertent analysis of traces as earnest instances of performance, it presents a good place to start one's investigation and compensates for not having experienced the event first-hand. The availability of digital

performance footage is also increasing, which signifies greater access for researchers. For example, Gob Squad have recorded and released nine of their 39 projects (listed on their official website²²) as DVDs. This collection represents a substantial amount of their practice in a mediated form – not considering the video trailers used to publicise all their performance works. As performance artefacts, these DVDs have become the primary means to encounter Gob Squad’s blend of multi-media participatory live performance art, in lieu of attending the performance events themselves. In a similar vein, Ontroerend Goed, Tim Crouch and Walker and Thorpe have all published books – *All Work and No Plays: Blueprints for 9 Theatre Performances* (2014), *Tim Crouch: Plays One* (2011) and *The Oh Fuck Moment/I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013) respectively – that provide textual blueprints (including detailed stage direction, dialogue and material requirements) for a number of their performances alongside online-based video performance footage and video performance trailers.

The digital documentation of performance events and literary production of performance-texts (produced and published *after* the event) have become largely common-practice amongst contemporary performance makers, artists and practitioners. As mentioned above, the primary motivation behind the production and dissemination of digitally recorded and rendered performances is to advertise upcoming and ongoing performance events, using the far-reaching conduit of the internet as a delivery mechanism for relatively cheap-to-produce marketing materials. Nevertheless, this documentation also generates an extra stream of income from the sale of physically packaged products (e.g. play texts, books, DVDs, etc.) to augment ticket sales and other revenue streams. Despite the financial gains achieved by these ‘artpreneurs’ (Harvie, 2013), by combining the mediated DVD/online video artefacts, digitally recorded performance sections (uploaded to the groups’ YouTube and Vimeo sites²³) and published performance texts (generated by performers and artists), with first-hand experience of multiple live performance events, the different fragmentary stratum of contemporary (participatory) performance practice can be effectively cross-examined. Once prudently knitted together to form a sequence of investigative points of reference – approaching (but never really achieving) the complete strata of the performance event(s) – the synthesised artefacts can be analysed according to participatory aesthetic strategy and audience reception. Both named participatory strategy and critical facility share a teleological relationship in relation to the authentic-self in performance which can be combined to theoretically generate evidence to suggest a correlation between these examples of participatory practice and the evanescent emergence of the authentic-self.

²² <http://www.gobsquad.com/projects/archive>

²³ e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/user/gobsquadarts/videos> or <https://vimeo.com/gobsquad>

From a phenomenological standpoint, there is no substitute for attending the live performance event. Many performance scholars have discussed and argued for the merits of the liveness of performance over mediated reproductions²⁴. However, the theatre/archaeological approach does not exclude one's first-hand encounter from the collection of artefacts, rather it forms the centre-piece around which all the other fragments congregate. The synthesis of one's memory of the performance encounter with more empirical traces (e.g. video footage, written texts, reviews, etc.) constitutes a far more holistic article of evidence, receptive to analysis. In this jigsaw puzzle of performance artefacts there are inevitably missing fragments. If for example, one is unable to attend the live event, the nucleus of one's bank of evidence remains empty, forming a vacuum that sucks in a different (potentially less analytically valuable) artefact to try and replace it. Alternatively, Pearson proposes that "we can work on the archaeological fragment to reveal what is missing; the shattered remnant invites us to reconstruct, to suppose that which is no longer there. The fragment refers us to the rediscovery of what was lost." (2001, pp. 93-94) Rather than attempting to substitute one's encounter of the live performance event with something else, the available fragments can help to indicate what that live encounter may have been like. To dwell on what performance artefacts have been lost and what information *could* have been harvested unavoidably leads to an impasse, each remaining trace alludes to those that are no longer present and the performance event as a whole.

The concept of the archaeological 'trace' that Pearson and Shanks employ as a central component in their methodology is notably implicated in the structuralist *and* post-structuralist thought of philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. It is only briefly mentioned in *Theatre/Archaeology* alongside other concepts such as those also proposed by Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu, as the representatives of "French thought" associated with the "*new* archaeologist" movement of the 1960's (ibid, 2001 pp. 6-7).

The inclusion of Foucault and Derrida's respective theories on a discursive 'archaeology of knowledge' and the deconstructive 'trace' provide richness to the theatre/archaeology model. Their thought helps to situate theatre/archaeology as an appropriate trope for studying, reading, interpreting and critiquing the emergence of (in)authenticity, even though they may never have intended their conceptions of 'the trace' to be employed in the endeavor of performance analysis.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault retroactively outlines the historiographical methodology that he employs in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966). In these works, archaeological traces emerge as signs and sequences, representing the underlying

²⁴ Most notably Philip Auslander (1999), but also Matthew Reason (2006) and the aforementioned Caroline Rye (2003).

processes that precede and contribute to present situational circumstances. These traces are less stable than the semiotic sign that one might encounter during a performance because they refer to a fleeting event. The trace becomes less reliable and valuable the further from the original event it is discovered chronologically and engaged with critically. By maintaining the fragmentary character of these discursive traces, Foucault denies the possibility of their holistic reconstruction, stating that:

Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogeneous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions.

Foucault, 1969 p. 4

Foucault chose to study discursive traces in isolation as they emerged and transformed, tracking their development into the fractured structures of modernity. Derrida's understanding of the trace is fundamentally bound up in his method of 'deconstruction', whereby the trace is the mark of the absence of what was once present²⁵. The binaries that Derrida subverts are mined from signs which carry meaning in their difference from other signs. Derrida follows the trace of what the sign does not mean to apply his critical deconstruction. For example, liveness can only be understood relative to mediation. The trace of mediation is implicit within one's comprehension of liveness. His critique of philosophical models of language, communication and representation in texts such as *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967) and *Limited Inc* (1988) reinforce this concept of the trace by disrupting the dominance of one binary over another.

Like Foucault, Derrida considers the trace in terms of significative material that refers to and presupposes a *signified something* that is (without exception) beyond itself. Where Foucault insulates individual discursive traces from theoretical and representational cross-contamination, Derrida acknowledges the infinitely complex web of simulacra and only forms pockets of localised meaning.

Neither philosopher considered the application of the archaeological method to theatre or performance in identifying and analysing artefacts and traces to reveal something about a past event/phenomenon. Within the framework of Pearson and Shanks' theatre/archaeology, Foucault's reticence to pull traces together to form

²⁵ Like the chalk outline of where a corpse once rested.

general theories of past events, and Derrida's warning concerning the identification of the trace – as anything but a signifier (for an absent signified) – act as valuable principles and parameters to guide the archaeological collection and analysis of performance fragments. By being mindful of Foucault and Derrida's approach to the trace, I can problematise digitally-mediated encounters within a framework based in the original conscious negation proposed by Sartre (1943). I can also approach digital video footage of performance events critically. I can do both without conflating the trace with the event itself and making conclusions about participatory practice based purely on unstable artefacts.

II. SEMIOSIS AND MEDIATED ENCOUNTERS

Participatory performance sits at the apex of a long tradition of theatre and performance that is traditionally representational (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). Analysis of theatre and performance practice has historically turned to semiotics to tease out the sign-object from the signified and employ structuralist methodologies to give performance studies more academic validity. It has done so through the work of scholars such as Keir Elam (1980), Patrice Pavis (1982), Elaine Aston and George Savona (1991), Erika Fischer-Lichte (1992), Anne Übersfeld (1999) and Eli Rozik (2008), to name but a few.

A significant amount of contemporary participatory performance does not employ obviously representational modes (e.g. dramatic narrative and character) in quite the same way as its dramatic and theatrical forebears, however it still attempts to reflect, represent (Kolb, 2013), and have some effect on society and culture (Bishop, 2006) in an ongoing reciprocal process of 'social efficacy' (McKenzie, 2001). Gob Squad for example, describe their mode of performance as being founded in "tasks not roles." (2010, p. 51) Similarly, in *All Work and No Plays* (2014), Ontroerend Goed refer to performers not as characters, but rather in operational capacities, like 'the female seducer' in their performance *Internal* (2007). Gob Squad and Ontroerend Goed often use their own names and draw from personal anecdotal experience in performance, as do Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe (2013). None of the above typically work from traditionally dramatic play texts that employ conventional character and narrative strategies. Despite this lack of overtly fictive representation, socio-political, economic, technological and cultural phenomena (like social media and/or neoliberalism) are being represented and scrutinised in a performance environment using signs (objects and/or actions). In which case, semiotic analysis remains an appropriate and effective way to interpret the objects, bodies and actions onstage.

Social media users operate almost exclusively in a mode of 'self-representation' (Rettberg, 2017). The

‘visual, written and quantitative’ modes of presenting oneself online are clearly significant of a person or concept²⁶ that exists beyond the photos, videos, blog posts or step-count data employed to represent them. The online cultivation of neoliberal ideals (Fuchs, 2017) can also be considered a compounding of the representational modes fundamental to Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). In a society permeated by ‘spectacle’, ‘being’ degrades into ‘having’ and then mere ‘appearing’ by virtue of economic accumulation of capital and alienation of individuals from one another. The application of semiotic analysis to describe and interpret participatory performance and social media, also allows for a discussion about how the intensified process of making and layering signs and representations (semiosis) in these contexts influences one’s relationship with others and affects one’s capacity to be one’s authentic-self.

This investigation is also founded on the belief that one’s (in)authenticity only becomes *evident* through the perceivable acts of the (in)authentic-self. Under this supposition, the ‘self’ is known through acts (or behaviors²⁷), causally related to the intention of the conscious being (via mood, emotion, cognition, etc.), which is in turn governed by free will (Golomb, 1995, p. 35). There is no ontological distinction made between one’s conscious intentionality and the manifestation of this intentionality through one’s embodied acts²⁸. Sartre considers one’s body as something, that when witnessed by other conscious beings becomes ‘for-others’. He also posits that because the very nature of human existence is predicated on a blend of bodily presence and conscious absence, one’s self (and the acts that comprise it) is in fact a ‘presence-to-self’ (1943). There is a chasm that separates one’s intentional consciousness²⁹ from one’s embodied acts and conscious intentionality can only be apprehended by other conscious beings via one’s acts. The self can therefore be negotiated as a codified instrument of significance and meaning, that relates and interfaces with the self of other conscious beings. Documentation and analysis of the nature and modification to such semiotic interactions can also importantly give a clear indication for one’s engagement with authenticity.

There are two principal theories of semiotics that I can draw from for this investigation. Ferdinand de

²⁶ Not all social media user accounts/profiles represent people; not all social media users are necessarily human. Varol et al found that “between 9% and 15% of active Twitter accounts are bots” (2017, p. 1)

²⁷ See Butler’s model of ‘performativity’ in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988) heavily influenced by the embodied phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty.

²⁸ This situation is firmly established within the ontological models of both Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1943) that propose a collapse of the Cartesian subject-object dualism (1641).

²⁹ According to Sartre, “the for-itself must be its own nothingness” (1943, p. 102) and therefore consciousness (for-itself) is the chasm.

Saussure developed his method of 'semiology' (1916) in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Saussure considered any sign structure to be solely comprised of the 'signifier' and 'signified'. He proposed that the relationship between these two significative components was "arbitrary" (1916, p. 67). Therefore, one could substitute any given signifier for another without there being any logical consequence to the way the signified is represented³⁰. Saussure's preoccupation was predominantly linguistic, therefore the majority of his work was centered around symbolic signification. Because symbols are founded in convention, the connection to their signified object/action/concept is more likely to be arbitrary.

Charles Sanders Peirce defined a sign as "anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person." (1908, p. 478) Peirce proposed a third component, in addition to the signifier (which he termed the 'representamen') and the signified (the 'referent'). The "effect upon a person" that Peirce refers to in his definition of a sign (above), he also calls the 'interpretant'. In Peirce's theory of 'semiosis', the representamen is determined by the referent through the imposition of certain parameters it must fall between. The interpretant is the observer's understanding of these parameters and therefore the connection between the referent and representamen. By positing a triadic sign structure rather than a Saussurean dyadic structure, Peirce not only suggests a meaningful connection between the representamen (signifier) and the referent (signified), but also allows for the heterogeneous interpretation of a wide variety of semiotic situations, conditions and overlapping modes of signification that go beyond spoken and written language. By considering all three modes of connection (afforded by Peirce's three semiotic components) one can build a complex understanding of how signs are being deployed and interpreted in any given situation. This is of particular use in performance analysis because not all signs used in performance are linguistic in nature.

Peirce suggests the referent generates an interpretant in one of three ways. An 'icon' (or 'iconic' sign) is where a representamen is linked to the referent through *similarity*: a photograph or detailed illustration. 'Indices' (or signs designated as 'index') are signs that are causally connected to the referent through "brute existential fact" (Atkin, 2013), for instance the smoke from a fire. Lastly, 'symbols' are a type of representamen where the referent is connected to it through a generally agreed *convention*. For instance, the widely-recognized symbol of the dove as the signification of peace. Spoken and written language are also prime and ubiquitous examples of symbolic signs.

³⁰ It is worth noting that Saussure was primarily concerned with linguistics and therefore the arbitrariness of how certain words (as written and spoken symbols) are significantly associated with certain objects, actions or concepts. E.g. the word 'sister' and the concept of female familial relation.

By introducing the interpretant, Peirce not only creates opportunities for the semiotic analysis of any and all objects, actions or phenomena (not just language), but gives a much wider range of possible connections between the signifier and signified. Peirce's far more holistic and inclusive approach means that I can subject digital artefacts and processes and shifts in social proximity in both social media and participatory performance to semiotic analysis. I can produce a reading of social media and participatory performance that employs representational modes to problematize increased engagement in representational modes.

Peirce's strain of semiotic analysis can be employed to identify these signs (verbal, gestural, contextual, written, etc.) and analyse what each individual sign might mean or what a collection or network of sign 'vectors' (Pavis, 2003) could refer to beyond the signs as objects/actions themselves. In my investigation, semiotic analysis is deployed to approach participatory performance practice in two distinct ways. Firstly, it can be applied to performance artefacts in the exploration of the processes of interpretation that audiences engage in when presented with these sites of signification. If one can confidently speculate about how audiences could be drawing meaning from significant objects and actions in the performance, then one can also hypothesise about how mindful they are about the (in)authenticity of the represented phenomena – how well the performance makers are evoking the consequences of engaging in social media for example. Secondly, it can be used to describe and evaluate the different ways that performance practitioners might employ aesthetic strategies, founded in representational and significant sign structures, to critically explore contemporary (digitised, intensely representational and mediated, alienated, etc.) communication³¹.

This same methodological semiotic bifurcation that I am using to explore modes of participation in performance³² can also be applied to ways that one engages in social media. This method can be applied to modes of online spectatorship, as one considers the significant material that one has generated online, or views the representations generated by other users, thus engaging in the process of interpretation and meaning making. It can also be used to investigate the significant modes that one employs as a user – in the (re)presentation of one's self online.

A semiotic approach that considers representational and significant phenomena from the perspective of both reception and constitution aligns with the model of consciousness proposed by Sartre and Derrida's model

³¹ For example, if *Gob Squad* wanted to explore contemporary western society through the lens of interpersonal relationships, then why did they choose to form an additional layer of 'iconic' signification in *Western Society* (2013) by placing a large projection screen between the performers and audience?

³² That, although not original to this investigation, has not been expressed in this way by those performance analysts (mentioned above) engaging in semiotics.

of the discursive trace. As mentioned, Derrida suggests that the trace (or temporally-bound sign) generates meaning not only by referring to an absent (in the words of Peirce) referent, but by evoking what it is also not signifying. Sartre's understanding of consciousness is that it is primarily a negation. In the participatory encounter on social media with mediated objects, people, and their actions and utterances, one's experience of the inauthentic is shot through with some understanding of the absent influence or patterns of authenticity. In contemporary participatory performance, this juxtapositioning between the inauthentic and authentic can be read as being intensified using distinctly mediated encounters.

Semiotic analysis can be used as a tool to identify these systems of signs as they are manifest in online digital culture and in the performance events that respond to them. The study of how one generates and interprets sites of signification in both performance and online encounters is one way³³ to explore the fluctuating relationship(s) between conscious beings as sociality. In human sociality, modes of communication are necessary because of the ontological and existential presumption that one inhabits the same physical/phenomenal world as other conscious beings. By physical necessity one receives and therefore, perceives the world discretely and differently. Without the existential precondition of the Other, the way that one uses signs³⁴ would be neither necessary or possible. The use of signs would not be necessary because we would not need to commune with anyone or anything else inhabiting the same ontological territory (as being-in-the-world) if there were no such being. The generation and use of symbolic signs would also not be achievable because there would be no others with whom one could agree a significative convention. Sartre offers the following proposition for consideration in the discussion of the necessity and inevitability of significative modes and primarily (what Peirce would term) *symbolic* forms of communication, in a world where one is faced with the existence of other conscious beings:

Language is not a phenomenon added on to being-for-others. It *is* originally being-for-others; that is, it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the other. In a universe of pure objects language could under no circumstances have been "invented" since it presupposes an original relation to another subject.

Sartre, 1943 p. 372

³³ I will discuss what I propose to be the other two ways (phenomenologically and ontologically) below.

³⁴ Particularly symbolic signs.

The constitution of sign networks and their interpretation is fundamentally bound to our 'being-in-the-world-with-others' (Heidegger, 1927). Furthermore, immersion in environments that establish shared symbolic convention, and prolonged employment of symbolic modes of communication are manifestations of one's falling away from one's authentic path and towards the pathways laid out by others. If audiences become more sensitive to the range of different signs and representations (iconic, indexical or symbolic) that are being generated and how they are being interpreted in the performance events and online, they may be able to identify how susceptible they are to socio-political, economic, historical and cultural pressures and the other conscious beings that generate and reinforce them. In determining the influence of representational encounters, I can speculate as to the authenticity/inauthenticity of any participatory event in either performance event or social media and draw comparisons between the modes of authentic/inauthentic participatory engagement.

Authenticity is characterised by mobilising one's ontologically given freedom (as per Sartre and Heidegger), manifest in a modification of one's relationship with the Other. Therefore, this modification has a fundamental effect on the operation (and even necessity) of significative/representational communication that is subject to semiotic analysis. If semiotic analysis is taken not only as a tool for examining representational strategies in performance and on social media, but also a marker with which to gauge the modification of the relationship and interaction between the self and the Other, then it may be implemented as an indicator for the emergence of the (in)authentic-self. To do so involves the identification of an accretion of representational layers separating conscious beings from one another either physically, temporally, politically, economically or socially. As signs are encountered in performance or social media, I will follow the trace using Peircean semiosis that leads from the representamen to the referent via the interpretant. If this connection is but one in a substantial series, I interpret it as a mediating obstacle that alienates spectators, users and participants which suggests an inauthentic relationship.

My application of semiotic analysis to performance events and social media practices is often not explicit. Participatory performance operates partially in a representational mode because I believe it is responding to and therefore reflecting the orientation users have towards social media. As I have suggested and will expand upon later, social media is an intense layering of representational modes of online digital interaction. Without an implied semiotic interpretation of participatory events and encounters, I could not describe the issues central to the inauthentic orientation towards social media and the participatory practice that reacts to it.

III. PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION AND EMBODIMENT IN PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Semiosis and semiotic analysis can infer a substantial amount of information about the nature of interpersonal significative communication, but the immediate sensation of encountering objects, actions or phenomena cannot always be crystallised in a sign. Furthermore, the processing of semiotic data is only possible once one encounters the world *phenomenologically*. The phenomenological study of how the world (unadorned by any ontological or semiotic significance) is received and perceived by consciousness is not only an important methodology for discussing the nature of *consciousness*, but also the way that consciousness may be fundamentally engaged in one's *embodied* encounter with the world. Semiosis appeals to the reflectivity of the negating consciousness, whereas phenomenology prioritises the haptic and tactile sensorium of one's body-in-itself. Both approaches satisfy one of the two ontological components that Sartre attributes to human existence: the consciousness (non-Being, reflective and fluid Being-for-itself) and the physical being of one's body (Being, present being-in-itself) (1943).

Despite being primarily considered as part of the American pragmatist movement of the late-19th and early-20th century, something like the immediate input of sensory information into human consciousness is described by Peirce initially in *On A New List of Categories* (1867) and then formalised in *The List of Categories: A Second Essay* (1894) as 'firstness'. For Peirce, firstness is the immediate quality of feeling one has in any given encounter, before one can even react to, engage with ('secondness') or interpret its meaning ('thirdness'). The immediacy of one's conscious encounter with the world (that Peirce's categories of firstness and secondness attempt to navigate) motivated Edmund Husserl in his phenomenological project.

There is very little evidence to suggest that Peirce had any influence over Husserl's ideas or methods, and vice versa (Spiegelberg, 1956). Peirce's formalisation of the phenomenon of encounter was part of a move in the humanities towards a more scientific approach to subjective experience. Semiotics was the science of signs and Peirce's list of categories was the one of the first codified steps towards a structural and more empirical understanding of how one encounters beings in the world. In *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1931), Husserl also underlines the validity of the phenomenological approach in explaining one's conscious experience within the frame of scientific method.

Husserl originally conceived of his method of 'phenomenological reduction' in his *Logical Investigations* (1900) as a method of suspending (or 'bracketing') our usual and everyday mode of judgment of the natural world (a mode he calls the 'natural attitude') in favour of focusing instead on the phenomena experienced by a conscious

being as mental objects to be analysed. *Transcendental* phenomenological reduction is concerned with neither the object itself (as it is in-the-world prior to conscious encounter) nor the meaning that is attached to it significantly, but the encounter as it appears to a conscious being. This approach was fundamentally part of Husserl's *essentialist* project. He suggests all objects (subject to conscious encounter) can be systematically stripped of all symbolic and even ontological meaning until they are reduced to the basic and *essential* phenomenal components. When one considers all perceivable objects (including other human beings) can be reduced to pure or ideal elements or 'essences' his attitude becomes problematic in a more generally existential way³⁵.

Phenomenological reduction is appropriate for my investigation because it allows for the stripping away of the significant qualities of the performance encounter by prioritising the first-hand sensory, physiological and emotional experience and account of spectators and participants. If one considers one's encounter with or own experience of authenticity as something fundamentally ambiguous, primal and beyond the capacity of conventionally significant modes then such an approach proves helpful.

Such a reduction permits a clearer comprehension of the reality of 'bodied spaces' (Garner, 1994): the actions of the bodies³⁶ in the performance encounter, one's own embodied acts and the immediate consequence of both. By obtaining clarity between what is phenomenologically present and how the overlay of signs is interpreted, a greater appreciation for how presence, acts and the presence/acts of others have real consequences that transcend the representational strata of narrative and mediation can be built.

Equally, this approach can also be applied to the online experience of users. Rather than encountering other bodies, as a social media user one is explicitly faced with an inanimate object. Devices used for social media are revealed as distinct from the bodies of other conscious beings in the frame of sociality. The trace of the bracketed content of the online encounter points towards the primarily mediated and virtual nature of users' orientation towards social media sociality. The discrepancy between mediated and unmediated encounters becomes far more conspicuous. One can benefit from a heightened awareness of how one is negotiating one's being-in-the-world-with-others as either direct and present or mediated and in some way absent is expedient when contemplating modes of participation in performance, social media and neoliberal capitalism.

The application of a quasi-Husserlian approach of phenomenological reduction in performance analysis

³⁵ Which contradicts the existentialist mantra, endorsed and articulated by Sartre: "existence precedes essence." (1946, p. 22)

³⁶ "Bodies" does not exclusively refer to human, living or animate bodies. It can also refer to any inanimate objects one might encounter. However, it most often refers to human bodies.

is augmented by the “centrality of the lived body.” (Zarrilli, 2004 p. 655) In his critique of phenomenology as a method for analysing performance, Pannill Camp suggests that the application of Husserlian phenomenological theory and methodology in performance studies “is specifically a derivation of the “phenomenological reduction,” also known as “bracketing,” “parenthesizing,” or “suspending” the “natural attitude” to isolate the essential qualities of the perception of a particular object.” (Camp, 2004, pp. 79-80) He argues that the specificity of phenomenological application in the performing arts (and its analysis) is largely centred around phenomenology as a general approach, used to examine the strategies and instances of embodied knowledge transfer through the physical presence and acts of the body of a performer. The primacy of embodied knowledge is founded in the phenomenological thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and indicates the highly prevalent system of phenomenology that has evolved away from a strict Husserlian essentialism operating in contemporary performance theory³⁷.

Merleau-Ponty established his ‘embodied phenomenology’³⁸ predominantly in the following three works: *The Structure of Behavior* (1942), *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964). These texts (and the theoretical frameworks therein) not only followed (and contributed to) the phenomenological tradition founded by Husserl³⁹, but they also animated the embodied consciousness in a way that emphasised the active and somatic human agent. Where Heidegger (1927) engaged *Dasein* in its project-towards-death and Sartre (1943) consigned Being-for-itself to acting without limits and perpetually (re)constructing the self, Merleau-Ponty focused the site of human interaction with the world (and others in it) entirely on the body as a means of perception *and* production. Such a focus might be explained through his work as psychologist and his research of cognitive functions.

Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology can be applied in a similar way as the dual-role of the semiotic approach. Semiotics operates both as a lens with which to ‘read’ the network of signs embedded within performance encounter, but also as a means of comprehending the audience *reception* of said encounter as being-in-the-world-with-others. Embodied phenomenology can *reveal* the spectators’ body as the ground of their experience but can also consider the body as the constitutive means of *presenting* the self in a world of others.

³⁷ Adopted by Phillip B. Zarrilli (2004), Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), Judith Butler (1988), Stanton Garner (1994) and Pannill Camp (2004) to name a few.

³⁸ A term coined by individuals such as Dermot Moran (2014), Douglas Low (2013) and Jack Reynolds (2004) amongst others.

³⁹ Then developed most notably by Heidegger and Sartre (amongst others).

This reciprocity is especially significant when one is cast in the role of participant. One is not only being looked at (as a pseudo-performer), but one still retains the primary operations of reception and perception typical of one's role as a spectator, manifest as one's looking at.

Merleau-Ponty's model of bodily perception emerged consistently as part of a discourse (in performance theory and analysis) that wishes to highlight the corporeal possibility intrinsic in the body of both performer and spectator. Participation is a mode of engagement that sits liminally between performer/provider and spectator. His research might be helpful to a certain extent, because in a performance or real-life situation one's first point of reference for the Other (be it performer or individual on the street) is their body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Modes of performance analysis based on phenomenology were *initially* considered by Bruce Wilshire (1982), popularised by Bert O. States (1985) and consistently *sustained* by figures such as Stanton Garner (1994) and Alice Rayner (2006). These performance analysts and theorists argue generally along the same lines that the theatrical experience of bodies in space encountering other bodies there is deeply connected to our everyday encounters.

Wilshire (1982) contends the theatrical experience is a concentrated instance of the phenomenological encounters we are confronted with every day. The distinct encounters one has in everyday life, that seem to divorce the immediate sensory data of physical bodies in space from any socially generated meaning or signification, are presented to audiences in theatre and performance in a mode that intensifies this phenomenological detachment. Within the theatrical frame however, one's phenomenological encounter is almost explicitly dedicated to the way one encounters other people⁴⁰, and in turn, how other people may encounter you as a physical body in space. Therefore, he states the essential ecology of watching and being watched is common to both modes of human activity. The intensification comes from the directedness of the audience towards the performers on stage. Where people may glance and encounter other people in the street, when sat in the theatre or performance situation with a mass of other spectators, one is physically pointed at the performance area.

Wilshire highlights the similarities between everyday experience and the theatrical encounter of live (conscious) bodies in the presence of other live (conscious) bodies. States (1985) draws our attention to the contrast between theatre and other forms of art, whereby the semiotic connection between the signifier (the encountered object) and signified (what the object is somehow referring to) is considerably clearer and stronger in theatre than other forms, such as literature or painting. A substantial amount of performance and theatre still

⁴⁰ There are of course exceptions. Take Heiner Goebbels' *Sifter's Things* (2007) for example which is a performance that has no performers.

uses a type of fictive representation to communicate themes and content without asking the viewer to imagine it.

The representation of (possibly fictive) people or characters is rendered on stage by live performers, who are also living, breathing people themselves. Even if performers and practitioners are not necessarily specifically representing other people or characters, their presence and actions within the mode of theatre and/or performance could be significant beyond the actions themselves. In either of these situations, the presence of live bodies being watched by an audience suggests that the experience of performance is closer to if not equivalent to everyday modes of existence and “per/re-ception” and is therefore predisposed to a phenomenological approach. If there are people physically in the performance space, they are automatically more phenomenologically present than in most other forms of aesthetic production, although one cannot deny the unambiguous artificiality of some forms of theatre and the common use of an imagined fourth wall.

Garner’s (1994) position is like States’, however he talks largely about the fictive realities of theatre and how they penetrate the actuality of the audience’s experience. Once again, this approach to performance analysis suggests the primacy of the live performer in action as the foundation of any ensuing significance or meaning. With this in mind, Garner also describes the colliding of the heterogeneous spheres of art and life and therefore finding although they are discrete, they also permeate one another to form an occasionally indiscernible parallel.

As we can see from these examples, a strict process of Husserlian phenomenological reduction has become less common and what constitutes phenomenology in performance studies, is “the sensory aspects of performance considered separately from their status as signifiers.” (Camp, 2004, p. 93) This means that the problematic essentialism, that makes a purely Husserlian form of phenomenological reduction unsuitable for this investigation (that assumes a largely existentialist position), is no longer an issue that needs to be contended with. The application of the phenomenological approach in performance analysis is not simply a case of bracketing semiotic networks and considering the exclusively mental phenomena. Phenomenology in performance analysis is concerned with stripping away the significative vectors, but also comprehending one’s conscious encounters as they are experienced by one’s *body*.

IV. BINOCULAR VISION’S PARTIAL *GESTALT*

A semiotic approach to the analysis of performance events and performance fragments has the capacity to effectively establish how signs and representations can be interpreted in participatory performance encounters. A phenomenological approach can also highlight the effect of bodies and appearances on audiences. The implementation of a semiotic approach is symptomatic of the chasm between discrete and individual perceptions. It can reveal the significance of the reflected encounter. An analysis founded in the embodied reception of that same encounter is predicated on the immediate sensory impression, presence and heterogeneity. States (1985) urged that one should consider “semiotics and phenomenology as modes of seeing, [which] constitute a kind of *binocular vision*: one eye enables us to see the world phenomenally; the other eye enables us to see it significantly. [emphasis added]” (p. 8) His argument is not unlike Stanton Garner’s who also reinforces the “osmosis between phenomenological and semiotic methods” (Bondi & La Mantia, 2015, p. 7) by suggesting that:

Phenomenology offers to supplement the semiotic [...] body with the phenomenal (and phenomenalizing) body—to counter the signifying body in its dephysicalized readability with what we might call the ‘embodied’ body in its material resistance. By addressing issues of embodiment, phenomenology opens up the dimension of ‘livedness,’ of which objectifying theory can give no account and which it must bracket in order to maintain its analytic stance. The phenomenal body resists the epistemological model of a corporeal object yielding its meanings to a decorporealized observer.

(Garner, 1994 p. 50)

In doing so, he not only deepens the connection between the phenomenal and semiotic bodies, but also develops the need for a binocular approach that can accommodate both. In this model ‘embodied phenomenology’ suspends the networks of representation indicative of significant communication typical of ‘semiosis’. Equally, the semiotic approach temporarily situates phenomenal aspects (of the same encounter) in parentheses. The two procedures – having independently exposed phenomenal and semiotic features of the participatory encounter – can then be considered in parallel to form a holistic *gestalt*.

The relationship between phenomenal and semiotic interpretation becomes even more ontological when dance researcher Roger Copeland (1990) argues there is no such thing as *absolute* embodied presence. Copeland’s cross-examination of contrasting examples of presence in performance⁴¹ draws upon Derrida’s suggestion that

⁴¹ The Living Theatre’s *Paradise Now* (1968) (as an example of unmediated presence) and Richard Foreman’s *What Did He See?* (1988) (Representing the construction of mediating barriers between performer and audience).

“presence [...] is always shot through and tarnished with traces of absence, of that which is somewhere else.” (1990, p. 36) Correspondingly, he proposes that mediation is understood as a tool of signification, which infers that “authentic presence implies an absence of representation.” (1990, p. 36) He suggests the presence that is generally thought of (in everyday life) as entirely unmediated (face-to-face and subject to our direct sensory gaze), is in fact fundamentally bound up in mediated modes of representation. Similarly, theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) describes the phenomenal and semiotic body of the performer as being inseparable, whereby an audiences’ understanding of the performers’ representative/semiotic/mediated body is conditional upon the present/phenomenal/unmediated body. Sartre’s (1943) ontological framework seems to predict such a dissolving of presence and absence whereby one’s consciousness is manifest as a negation of Being and human existence is defined as the combination of both Being (in-itself) and non-Being (non-being). What is suggested is that the semiotic reading of a performance event is indicative of some kind of absence made present by embodied representational acts. It could also suggest that the absolute presence of the performer is made partially absent by means of deferral *to* and mediation *of* a referent that is elsewhere, or that spectators must retrieve from memory. Whereas, a phenomenological interpretation of the same event is concerned primarily with the absolute embodied and unmediated presence of the performers and their actions, which could be faked and therefore absent.

If a semiotic approach provides an indicator for the sociality implicit in the relationship between the self and the Other, then the reception of phenomenal acts not only establishes a sensory ground for this semiotic content, but also acknowledges the primal and often ambiguous way (prior to semiotic codification) authenticity may emerge in contemporary western society and participatory performance. In the critique of semiotic and phenomenological methodologies, it has become clear although they represent undoubtedly antithetical binaries, embodied phenomenology and semiosis present distinct limitations when viewed contemporaneously. Although the assembly of semiotic and phenomenological interpretations (as binocular vision) give an insight into what is happening sensorially and how these acts may refer to events, objects or concepts beyond the performance encounter, these modes of analysis are not fully equipped to consider what is occurring on the level of one’s fundamentally (in)authentic-self and therefore only provide a partial *gestalt*.

V. IDENTIFYING (IN)AUTHENTICITY WITH ONTOLOGICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

An isolated methodology of embodied phenomenology in combination with semiotic analysis is not entirely satisfactory for investigating the (in)authentic-self in contemporary western society and performance because of their epistemological limitations. The *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Embree et al, 2013) outlines several different phenomenological sub-categories including *existential phenomenology* which can trace its roots to Husserl's transcendental constitutive phenomenology and emerged at roughly the same time (the mid-20th century) as Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology.

This investigation requires a methodology that can account for the fluidity of the self. To do so, it also needs to be flexible enough to track the ambiguity of the authentic-self, negotiate the fundamental relationship between conscious beings in the frame of 'self' and universal 'other' and utilise an appropriate vocabulary to express the ontological modifications intrinsic to authenticity one may find in contemporary socio-political, economic, cultural and aesthetic conditions. The method that sits at the limits of both embodied phenomenology and semiosis, as epistemological understandings of participatory practice, is *existential phenomenology*, otherwise known as *phenomenological ontology*⁴². Phenomenological ontology can be understood as the ontological reception of the world primarily concerned with how the *Being* of being is revealed in one's conscious perception as one comes to understand the being's *existence* rather than its *essence*. A complementary methodology of phenomenological ontology provides a framework with which to document and analyse the modification of interaction between the self and the Other. This comes as a result of the ontologically rooted freedom at the foundation of human existence, distinctive of an existential understanding of (in)authenticity.

Ontology is a branch of metaphysical philosophy. It is "the science of being in general, embracing such issues as the nature of existence and the categorical structure of reality." (Lowe, 1995, p. 634) Both Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre were interested in revealing the meaning of what it means to exist. Specifically, they were preoccupied with what it meant to exist as a human. Heidegger (1927) believed philosophy and ontology in particular had not been thought through deeply enough or on a sufficiently fundamental level since Plato and Aristotle and set about reopening the discussion around human existence, proposing that "what it means for a human being to be is to exist temporally in the stretch between birth and death." (Critchley, 2009). Having read Heidegger as a prisoner of war during WW2, Sartre (1943) developed Heidegger's project of investigating ontology through the lens of phenomenology. Sartre criticises Heidegger however for his relatively optimistic

⁴² Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is subtitled *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*.

account of authenticity and consistently expressing one's authentic-self and forged his own model of human existence built fundamentally around negation.

Both philosophers made a distinction between metaphysics and ontology. Heidegger argued that metaphysics had ignored the question of Being and what it *means* to exist, in favor of investigating the qualities and structures of existence. Sartre (1943) considered metaphysics to be the history of Being and thought ontology should be descriptive rather than explanatory. For Heidegger and Sartre, ontology represented the most fundamental and primary means of explaining human existence and human behavior. Their ontological emphasis on Being and existence has led to both philosophers being branded existentialists. Where Sartre (1946) contentedly inhabited the role of existentialist, Heidegger never openly adopted the nomenclature. Despite the fundamental similarities between their ontological models, Heidegger criticised Sartre for claiming a place in the field of existentialism without truly grappling with the question of Being. In his *Letter on "Humanism"* (1977), Heidegger writes a response to Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946)⁴³:

Sartre expresses the basic tenet of existentialism in this way: Existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existential* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which from Plato's time on has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. With it he stays with metaphysics in oblivion of the truth of being.

Heidegger, 1977, p. 250

Heidegger did not consider himself an existentialist because he believed existentialism was still far too preoccupied with the individual human subject. Despite his discussion about human existence through the device of *Dasein*, he was not referring to singular or unique human beings, but rather a concept to explain the there-ness of being already in-the-world (Aho, 2003). He did however recognize the important ontological issues and themes of selfhood, otherness, temporality and sociality in Sartre's work, even if he did not approve of the approach. Both subscribed to a broad phenomenological approach. Heidegger states that "phenomenology is the science of the being of beings—ontology" (1927, p. 33) and Sartre's *Being and Time* is subtitled *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943).

Heidegger and Sartre's projects were defined by apprehending beings in the way they reveal themselves

⁴³ Which gives a simplified and contextualised overview of the material presented in *Being and Nothingness*.

as pure existence before the perception and interpretation of conscious intentionality. If ontology is the study of Being and phenomenology the study of how beings appear to consciousness, then a phenomenological ontology is fundamentally concerned with how the human subject can come to encounter Being in its very being⁴⁴. By navigating the purely ontological encounter whilst suspending any epistemological awareness, the projects of Dasein, freedom of human existence and relationship with the Other should all benefit from a clarity other knowledge-based methodologies would muddy or sustain a level of ontological ambiguity.

The two primary examples of existential phenomenology come in the form of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Both texts consider the question of Being from a phenomenological perspective. In doing so, they centre the question of Being around human existence from the human perspective. From human existence emerges intentional consciousness. Both philosophers are fundamentally engaged with how one (as a conscious human being) perceives and navigates one's own Being, but also the world of beings one exists in. From the negotiation of this world of other conscious and non-conscious entities, emerges the problem of (in)authenticity. The main question being, how does one balance one's own Being (a complex amalgam of agency, potential and facticity) against the Being of the rest of the world?

The approach adopted by Heidegger is largely informed by Husserlian phenomenology (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). However, where Husserl was primarily concerned with how Being was constituted in the mind of a conscious subject, Heidegger believed this phenomenological practice had to be taken one step further. To do so, Heidegger posed the question of how Being is constituted in *Dasein*. Heidegger's approach to phenomenological ontology was driven by issues not only concerning how the world was constituted in the conscious mind, but how the embodied consciousness was constituted in and acted on the world.

Sartre's approach to phenomenological ontology turned towards individual human existence. His phenomenology is founded in the ontological structure of Being and nothingness as the foundational basis from which human consciousness and subjectivity arises. Any observation that Sartre makes about how one perceives the world is grounded in this deceptively simple premise. His approach is predicated on an internal ontology, but it can and should be wielded first and foremost on the phenomena that emerge as the embodied subject acts upon the world and is in turn acted upon by the world.

Embodied phenomenology is best equipped to identify and comment on one's bodily 'Being-in-itself'

⁴⁴ The difference between 'Being' and 'being' is discussed further in Chapter IV. Briefly, 'Being' can be considered pure existence, without any distinct, discrete or distinguishing form, whereas 'being' is another way of expressing the idea of discrete entities in local rather than general ontologies.

(Sartre, 1943), condition of ‘thrownness’ (Heidegger, 1927) and how it is manifest in participatory performance as presence. A semiotic approach constitutes the absence predicated on ‘Being-for-itself’ (Sartre, 1943) and one’s capacity as conscious participant and/or user to find meaning in objects and actions that refer to other absent objects, actions or concepts. A semiotic reading of participatory modes online and in performance can identify how mobilisation of compounded sign structures is a manifestation of how spectators, performers and participants can ‘fall’ into the ‘they-self’ (Heidegger, 1927). Heidegger and Sartre suggest one falls into the they-self as a result of exclusively employing significative modes (founded in the infinite displacement of meaning from sign to sign) to share one’s experience of being-in-the-world-with-others.

There is a limit to both approaches, a missing fragment. Wolfgang Funk (2015) maintains that the inner-core of what authenticity is and how it functions, is unknowable. If one were only furnished with semiosis and embodied phenomenology as modes of analysis, then this may well be the case. These approaches can identify the influences on and effects of (in)authenticity and by supplementing them with analysis founded in phenomenological ontology, the inscrutable black box of authenticity may become more transparent. Embodied phenomenology and semiosis can only brush the edges of the (in)authentic, however they can detail the contingent aspects of (in)authenticity articulated in participatory practice so that a process of phenomenological ontology can render the structure of (in)authenticity and the (in)authentic-self distinct.

An ontological approach to participatory performance can work on three levels. Firstly, one can analyse the complex web of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and objectivity that one is presented with in the performance encounter. Secondly, by subjecting one’s phenomenological findings (concerning one’s bodily response to other bodies in shared time and space) to ontological analysis, one can make judgements about how the shifting positions and acts of other embodied consciousnesses affect one’s sense of subjecthood. Finally, one can make ontological inferences from the results of semiotic analysis. One could observe how the use of language and other representational and mediated modes of interaction could influence spectators and participants. Moreover, one is well-equipped to draw ontological meaning (pertaining to the expression of the (in)authentic-self) from the symbolic gestures⁴⁵ made in performance.

VI. CONCLUSION

⁴⁵ Not necessarily just bodily gestures, but verbal and scenic too.

To investigate contemporary examples of participatory practice, or performance that problematizes different modes of participation, performance artefacts must be uncovered, problematised and cross-examined with first-hand accounts of performance events. Missing fragments must be identified and filled where possible. Only then can these participatory encounters (both in performance and online) be subject to the trifecta of semiotic, phenomenological and ontological analysis. Embodied phenomenology is useful in this context, because it is concerned with the bodily perception of the corporeal self, based in acts and facticity. It is predicated on the embodied presence of both spectator and performer. It takes the body as its starting point and the ground for experience, Being-in-itself and one's very thrownness into a world of objects and static facticity. The semiotic approach is concerned with identifying and evaluating modes of representation and systems of signs. It is founded in the absence of objects, actions or concepts represented by arbitrarily connected signs. Semiosis provides the interpretation necessary for the means of communication required by our being-in-the-world-with-others.

Therefore, I felt the need to complement this approach with phenomenological ontology (or existential phenomenology) which sits at the limits of the phenomenal and semiotic encounter. It is not only the underlying instigator of the phenomenal and semiotic material that emerges in participatory performance, but it enriches the discoveries these two disparate approaches render. The model of binocular vision is rendered as an insightful starting block but is ultimately proven to be insufficient.

Within this methodological structure, the strategies of embodied phenomenological and semiotic analysis sit opposite one another and phenomenological ontology (existential phenomenology) emerges as the missing methodological fragment. Between semiosis, embodied phenomenology and phenomenological ontology, a clearly and fuller picture of contemporary participatory practice can come into focus.

CHAPTER III:

(in)authenticity
&
LIMINAL *BECOMING*

The primary objective of this chapter is to outline and rigorously develop a model of (in)authentic action that pertains to the constitution and presentation of the authentic or inauthentic self. This means that one should be able to identify whether an act performed is indicative of a fundamental engagement with the ontologically given choice, freedom and agency exclusive to conscious beings. The key claim that ties the strands of this chapter together is that authenticity is a liminal state of selfhood constituted through the acts of the conscious human being. This liminality however can only be understood in terms of the conditions *between* which it resides. Therefore, this chapter is primarily an account of the ontological conditions that the authentic-self is precariously balanced amid – put forward predominantly by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre (amongst others) – and how these conditions are manifest in the socio-political, economic, aesthetic and cultural landscape of contemporary Western Europe.

It is only when this conceptual model of (in)authenticity is sufficiently explicated, made whole and transparent, that it can be effectively brought to bear upon both contemporary performance practices *and* the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts the practice responds to. As outlined in the introductory chapter, the prevailing hypothesis of this investigation is that the current western culture of digitally mediated sociality (manifest as online social media) is a perpetuation of a phenomenon of neoliberal ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 1991) that invites engagement founded upon a model of *inauthentic participation*. Correspondingly, I wish to argue that by using (in)authenticity as a central conceptual anchoring point and lens through which to view performance and society, one can attempt to explain the recent surge of performance practice that seems primarily concerned with problematising modes of participation, whilst also tackling issues of technology, exploitation and commodification as a result.

Therefore, what follows is a series of brief explorations into the fundamental aspects of Heidegger and Sartre’s ontologies concerning human existence, and an attempt to reconcile their two subtly distinct theories of ‘*Dasein*’ (1927) and ‘Being-in-itself/for-itself’ (1943) within the context of both (in)authenticity and contemporary society. To synthesize their thought further, I mapped out the ontological *situation* (they both

suggest) mankind irrevocably finds itself in. This situation is manifest in one's⁴⁶ confrontation with one's 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1927), the sensation of being 'thrown' into one's situation, and the relentlessness of one's 'facticity' (Sartre, 1943).

To address how the conscious human being (within the ontologies) negotiates time and temporality, relative to their situation, a section of this chapter is dedicated to how the fixed past interacts with the potentially infinite horizon of possibility. This horizon constitutes one's comprehension of the future in the perceived present, which is often spatialised (Bergson, 1889). With the establishment of an integrated model of temporality, a meditation on the way that the *self* is comprehended, apprehended and constituted through the accumulation of action as a 'presence-to-self' is subsequently engaged in. Therefore, the condition that will hopefully have emerged and been made evident by this point, is the fundamental *freedom* that one is faced with as a conscious, intentional, but ultimately *finite* Being. What follows is a problematisation of the agency and responsibility that one has, which comes as a result of this terrifyingly liberatory condition (freedom), brought on by one's unique ontological situation – as a conscious and questioning, but physical Being.

As soon as one can comprehend the existentially conceived Being of the individual, there are issues that the existence of the Other⁴⁷ complicates human existence and the operations of acting as an authentic-self, that also require serious consideration. This is expressed in the way that 'being-in-the-world-with-others' (Heidegger, 1927) is manifest not only as *sociality*, but initially (as explained by Sartre) through 'the Look' of the Other, in 'falling' into the 'they', and how one might respond by adopting the mode of 'being-for-others' (Sartre, 1943). Finally, from the accumulated syntheses of these predicates, one may be able to define authenticity in terms of 'liminality' (Turner, 1982) and identify the authentic project as one that embraces one's perpetual *becoming*.

At each step towards discovering the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity (and assembling a robust and functional model of contemporary (in)authentic existence), I will draw out illustrations and patterns of how both modes of operation (and existential negotiation of one's project) are manifest in contemporary western society. These patterns are evident in contemporary performance and the wider socio-political, economic and cultural situation that these aesthetic practices are responding to. Each example of performance practice/encounter, or social and cultural phenomena, can be employed as evidence for the situational operation

⁴⁶ The repeated employment of the term "one" is intentionally used to not only refer simultaneously to the reader, writer and (human) objects of this thesis, but also to evoke the indefinite third-person ('*Das Man*') that one may associate with being a single conscious being in a whole world of other similarly conscious beings (Heidegger, 1927).

⁴⁷ Other beings recognised as conscious in a similar way to oneself.

of each conceptual component that factors into a working understanding of authenticity. By providing evidence of how performance practitioners intentionally (or unintentionally) engage with these various facets – that when combined reveal the conceptual structure of (in)authenticity – one is able to further interrogate the central claim the contemporary inclination towards participatory aesthetic strategies (in performance) is a reaction to cultural and societal systems encouraging, promoting and cultivating intensely inauthentic modes of Being.

I. THE LIMINALITY OF THE AUTHENTIC-SELF

The components that impact one's (in)authenticity are outlined in the ontological models of Heidegger and Sartre. The framework they are suspended in is founded on the concept of liminality. The way that one negotiates the complex relationship with the Other, in a way that preserves one's unhindered agency, is founded in an ambiguous state of balance. The balance struck between Sartre's 'Being-in-itself' and 'Being-for-itself' is a synthetic⁴⁸ state of becoming, where one is neither fixed in one state, nor entirely non-existent. This balance is reflected in an awareness that one cannot fill the void (non-Being) at the centre of human existence generated by conscious negation and is therefore manifest in a moderate approach to material and commercial consumption and appropriation.

Similarly, one is only discrete from one's situation if one can acknowledge how it is the foundation of one's Being, and yet negate one's facticity, so one may continue to develop. Again, a judicious attitude towards social media immersion may reduce one's value to social media providers as a prosumer. It would break the neoliberal cycle of exploitation typically embedded within social media participation. Withdrawal from regular and persistent social media engagement could also shift one's temporal perception away from increasingly spatialised forms and towards a more fluid durational position. From this perspective, the temporal balance that one strikes is an interpenetrative balance between the past and the future, and does not allow one's digitally preserved facticity to motivate or exert disproportionate influence over one's future.

Within this model, the authentic-self is an equilibrium between one's past actions, facticity and Being-in-itself, and one's future possibility manifest in the negation of one's past and facticity afforded by one's consciousness (Being-for-itself). To realise these multi-layered equilibria, one must fundamentally engage the freedom and agency this paradoxical ontological Being generates. To do so also requires a balance between

⁴⁸ In the Fichtean (1794) sense of the word.

isolating oneself from the Other and allowing the Other to exert absolute influence over one's agency. Online interaction with and exposure to the Other through social media complicates the way one perceives the Other (in their presence and/or absence)⁴⁹. Despite this shift from the relatively simple encounter with the embodied Other to a far more nebulous symbolic online Other, engagement with the Other over social media seems to intensify their influence over one's agency as a reflection and magnification of one's facticity. To avoid these conditions of concentrated inauthenticity is not simply a case of resisting the online virtual Other and prioritising the Other as it appears in the real world. The embodied Other can still induce the inauthentic-self. One must occupy an ambiguous state between states, which never settles and is never fixed, but always in a status of *becoming*. Such a stateless state is more imperative now because one is far more susceptible to the influence of the Other as they are manifest online.

This description of balance that characterises authenticity can be best captured in the concept of 'liminality'. Anthropologist Victor Turner first popularised the term⁵⁰ in his book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) and then developed it in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). In these texts he used 'liminality' to describe the ambiguous state that one might find oneself in during a transformational ritual or rite of passage.

Turner later makes the distinction between what is 'liminal' and what is 'liminoid' (1982) to distinguish between engagements that 'transform' and those that only 'transport' their participants (Schechner, 1985). Richard Schechner uses both terms to describe performance-based and theatrical encounters. Jon McKenzie develops the nuanced contrast between the two terms (2001). In doing so, he not only proposes the two may overlap, but also that performance and theatre (as instances of 'cultural performance') could feasibly be liminal *and* liminoid. McKenzie proposes "the emergence of digital societies [signifies] the increasing disintegration of work and play spheres" (ibid. p. 93) and therefore the categories of liminal and liminoid are redundant. In their place, he recommends the term 'liminautic' to indicate any participatory activity where one enters an ambiguous state and re-emerges in some way changed. Outside of the anthropological context, liminality can be understood as any state where one is "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967, p. 93) other states. The very in-betweenness expressed in Turner's mode of liminality can be read as analogous to the interplay between the conscious and factual aspects of human existence (Meyers, 2008) and therefore the ambiguous process of becoming one must strive for if one

⁴⁹ The problematic presence and absence of the virtual Other is explained and discussed further below.

⁵⁰ Originally coined by Arnold Van Gennep in *Netting Without A Knot* (1909).

is to express oneself authentically. I agree with Schechner and McKenzie to the extent that performance events present an opportunity for both liminal and liminoid experiences. For the study of the authentic-self, I propose that authenticity is fundamentally transitory and therefore, one is only ever transported, never permanently transformed into an authentic Being. If one has an authentic encounter however, the impact of the encounter is likely to be transformative in some way.

If one accepts the invitation to participate in a performance event, one leaves the established state of spectatorship that has been developed over many centuries and cultures (Bennett, 1997). One does not adopt the role of performer; one is not involved in the extended rehearsal process, one does not have any creative contribution before the performance event, nor is it likely that one's name is present in the credits of the show. As a participating spectator⁵¹, one enters a liminal state. Even the performers that appear in Gob Squad's *Creation (Pictures of Dorian)* (2018) are in a somewhat liminal position. They are listed on the company website and in programmes as "local guests" (Gob Squad, 2018), despite the fact they have rehearsed with Gob Squad and contributed their own stories that are integrated into the performance⁵². Nonetheless, they are not technically members of Gob Squad. Such a technicality is augmented by the familiarity in which the members of Gob Squad work with one another. Writing about their devising and rehearsal process, Gob Squad allude to the consistent use of a short-hand means of communicating ideas and methodologies. To a 'local guest', it would become clear that the members of Gob Squad have been working together for a long time and have grown accustomed to one another's modes of production. One is precluded from this familiarity, but still of the creative and rehearsal process generates a liminal position for these participants.

One's liminal engagement in the expression of one's self as participant in both social media and performance can act as a meter for (in)authenticity. One is arguably operating in an authentic mode of becoming if one becomes balanced between the binaries presented by the complex web of ontological conditions relating to consciousness, temporality, selfhood and otherness. The stimuli and pressures enacted on one's conscious Being in both participatory performance and culturally normalised social media engagement can nudge one into or out of a liminal state. Therefore, by determining the typology of ontologically identifiable pressures and considering how this affects the liminality of one's selfhood, one can analyse performance and social media for (in)authenticity.

⁵¹ What Boal termed 'spect-actors' (1974).

⁵² Which explores the process of aging and maturing as an artist.

II. HUMAN ONTOLOGY AS THE LIMITS OF LIMANILITY

To create an understanding of what (in)authenticity means in the contemporary conditions of social media, neoliberalism, participation and performance-based aesthetic response, the fundamental components of human existence need to be explicated before inclusion in the more complex and multifaceted model of (in)authenticity that follows. Both Heidegger and Sartre's conceptual models of the authentic and inauthentic-self are rooted in the ontologies of human existence they propose respectively. In broad terms, Heidegger (1927) proposes the meaning of human existence is fundamentally contingent upon how human beings encounter and persist through time. Sartre (1943) establishes an ontological structure whereby human existence is shot through with non-Being. To try and avoid superficially conflating their individual thought⁵³, I initially intend to present their models separately, investigate the way they operate in contemporary society and performance, and (by doing so) reveal the numerous ways they intersect.

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger challenged the presupposition (intrinsic to asking metaphysical questions) concerned with whether certain entities exist. He therefore set about not only distinguishing between 'Being' (as the fundamental meaning of the existence of an entity) and 'being' (the entity in question), but (in doing so), separating the 'ontical' (facts about entities) from the 'ontological' (what it means to exist). In his attempt to answer the question of Being in an ontological (rather than metaphysical or ontical) way, Heidegger's inquiry allowed him to define the ontologically unique condition of human existence, manifest as '*Dasein*'.

The priority that *Dasein* (or 'there-being') takes in Heidegger's investigation is owing to his assertion that "*Dasein* is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it." (1927, p. 10) This fundamental capacity to *question* and even *negate* (not only the Being of the being that one may encounter in the world, but *also*) one's own Being, casts *Dasein* in the uniquely privileged position of being the only being that can grapple with the meaning of Being. In Heidegger's ontology, one's (in)authenticity is determined by a "constant making of the Self" (Mansbach, 1991, p. 67) that is encumbered with the constant question of what it means to exist, facilitated by the capacity to negate.

Moreover, as the potential for negation manifests as doubt, uncertainty and ambiguity – which cleaves a path through hitherto self-identical and replete Being – the notion of *possibility* is introduced. Where possibility emerges into the everyday ontology of human existence, so does *choice* and with choice, the existential virtue of

⁵³ Heidegger's influence on Sartre's thought is evident in Sartre's writing; he admits as much in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946)

freedom. With freedom, choice and possibility emerges the increased likelihood of falling away from one's authentic-self and into inauthenticity.

One can interpret Ontroerend Goed's one-man-show, *World Without Us* (2016)⁵⁴ as taking the Heideggerian negation of Being to its extreme. Ontroerend Goed (which roughly translates as "Feel Estate") are a Belgium-based "Theatre-performance-company" who were formed in 1994 by Alexander Devriendt, David Bauwens and Joeri Smet (Schulze, 2017). Devriendt, Bauwens and Smet continue to be the primary creative driving force behind the company; however, they have since been joined by Angelo Tijssens, Charlotte De Bruyne, Jeffery Caen, Karen Van Ginderachter, Karolien De Bleser, Sophie De Somere and Wim Smet (Ontroerend Goed, 2014)⁵⁵.

Ontroerend Goed claim to embrace the tension between the inevitable doomed fate of humanity and the intrinsic value of every human act and interaction (2014, p. 7). Their concern regarding the former provides them with a deep well of content from which to draw material for their performances. *World Without Us* is the most explicit manifestation of this existential concern. Their concern with the latter informs "the direct communication between creator and visitor" (ibid. p. 7) that Ontroerend Goed establish and maintain through the vast majority (if not all) of their work.

Their apocalyptic concern is manifest unambiguously in *World Without Us*. Valentijn Dhaenens is an unnamed narrator garbed in black. In a simple and subdued narrative, he describes what the world would be like if humans were to suddenly (and without explanation or incident) disappear. The lack of a name or means of distinctive visual identification casts him in an anonymous role. He is a non-entity in the story that he tells. The combination of Dhaenens' inconspicuousness and the detached way he describes humanity's disappearance gives the impression that he is somehow separate from humanity and observing the events from a position of omnipotence. By providing a diegetic⁵⁶ account of the *World Without Us*, Ontroerend Goed invite the audience to exercise this fundamental operation of ontological negation, ironically in a situation that seems to nullify the ultimate human choice to exist. By planting the seed (of illustrative words) into the spectators' shared imagination,

⁵⁴ Alternatingly performed by Valentijn Dhaenens or Karolien De Bleser, directed by Alexander Devriendt, written by Alexander Devriendt, Valentijn Dhaenens, Karolien De Bleser and Joeri Smet. Scenography by Renato Nicolodi (executed by Vormen), sound editing by Jeroen Wuyts, lighting design by Babette Poncelet, video editing by Benny Vandendriessche and costumes by Rewind Black.

⁵⁵ Since this list was published, Caen and De Somere have left the core group and Babette Poncelet has joined (Art Happens, 2019).

⁵⁶ As opposed to a mimetic account. This dissimilarity is founded in the contrast of mimesis understood as an aesthetic form of showing and diegesis as an aesthetic form of telling.

a fictive reality is established in the mind of everyone. What would the world be like if there were no people to generate body heat, clear away yesterday's cobwebs, pilot aeroplanes, generate, route and disseminate light and power, tell the time or count the years since humans ceased to exist?



Figure 9 Valentijn Dhaenens. *Ontroerend Goed, World Without Us*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2016). Photograph by Stewart Pringle.

Ontroerend Goed present a hypothetical reality devoid of humans, by humans to humans, in the context of the prevailing (commonly agreed upon) reality that is brimming with humans. The primary difficulty and paradox of such an exercise is it justifiably struggles not only to grasp a situation in which the operation of choice is absent from humanity's ultimate disappearance, but to also comprehend and therefore represent the world without humans, without describing it within the confines of human perception and interpretation.

The emergency light here has become a shadow of its former self.
You'd almost want it to give up.
It hasn't got much time left.
It could switch off at any moment.
It's using up all its reserves.
As if it's fighting all the darkness that wants to make it smaller.
But it's too weak, the dark too strong.
And it swallows it entirely.
The last light in here.

Everything is off.

(Ontroerend Goed, *World Without Us*, 2016)

The inclusion of value judgements and colloquialisms such as “shadow of its former self” (although a clever play on words) are indicative of a very human insight into what something can be said to be, what it has been and what it may become. Even within this one sentence (and the stanza that it helps to construct) the very questioning and negating of how an entity exists, relative to how it persists or decays in time and space, is typical of a being who finds that Being is an issue and concern for them. By removing human existence (and by extension human consciousness) from the narrative but maintaining it as a mode of performance, one could read *World Without Us* as a contemplation of the tension between one’s physical Being and the conscious negation of one’s Being.

Such a concern could also be found within the field of ontology and phenomenology sixteen years after Heidegger originally conceived of *Dasein*. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Sartre introduced an ontological model of human existence that not only takes on *negation* as its foundation, but circuitously and systematically assimilates the Hegelian dialectic of existence expressed in *The Science of Logic* (1816)⁵⁷, as the opposing theses of ‘Being’ and ‘non-Being’ and the overcoming of their contradiction understood as ‘becoming’. Sartre situates one’s authentic-self as the original condition of one’s existence. Ontologically one is by default situated in a liminal state between Being and non-Being. However, one’s situation in the world and interaction with other beings, pulls one away from this original state.

Sartre adapts/adopts Heidegger’s (1927) project to collapse the subject-object split and fundamentally revises the ‘absolute’ philosophical structures and terminologies expressed in the Cartesian (1641) mind-body dualism and Kantian (1781) binaries of ‘noumena’ and ‘phenomena’, taken up and problematised by the German Idealists (Pinkard, 2002), and categorically refuted by Heidegger. This conceptualisation of the two polarities (being and nothingness) – as not only epistemological entities⁵⁸, but fundamental ontological building blocks of human existence – are manifest in Sartre’s writing as the discrete (yet blended) ontological modes of ‘Being-in-itself’ (Being) and ‘Being-for-itself’ (nothingness/non-Being) (1943).

⁵⁷ Sartre criticises Hegel “for never having got beyond the logical formulation of non-Being so as to relate it to human reality.” (Barnes, 1957, p. xxiii)

⁵⁸ Hegel theorised the dialectic as part of the German Idealist project that apprehended Being and nothingness as the most abstract forms of knowledge that structure reality and that consequently form the basis for a metaphysics of history and progress (a version of the synthesis of becoming) towards an ‘Absolute’ (1816).

In this model, Sartre suggests that humans are the exceptional and ambiguous combination of both these types of existence in the perpetually unresolved mode of *becoming*. He modifies the Fichtean dialectical model that employs the terminology of ‘thesis’, ‘antithesis’ and ‘synthesis’ (1794), consolidates Heideggerian ontology (1927), refutes Hegelian idealism (1816) and posits the modes of existence: Being-in-itself (corporeal objects/being) and Being-for-itself (consciousness/nothingness). It is in this emergence of consciousness from the bodily existence of human beings, that Sartre identifies the ‘nihilation’, negation or ‘othering’ of one’s physical in-itself by one’s intentional for-itself (1943). Although not a physical gap or abyss, this nihilistic operation generates a void at the core of human existence; one is neither wholly Being-in-itself, nor entirely Being-for-itself. The state of becoming that defines the authentic expression of human existence is liminal.

The fundamental incompleteness and liminality with which the human being is continuously confronted is therefore intrinsic to one’s everyday operation in the mode of becoming. One may not engage with this liminality and authenticity, but the danger of non-Being at the heart of human existence makes one particularly susceptible to the desire to *appropriate* the concrete entities in one’s vicinity, by means of action relative to, or possession of said entities (Sartre, 1943). To do so (or even attempt to do so) would fall firmly in the realm of acts considered inauthentic, because one would be deceiving oneself about the ontological truth of one’s existence as fundamentally incomplete and caught between Being-in-itself and for-itself. One may not want to engage with one’s own existence, hence one feels the need to go shopping, to consume goods or engage online on social and consume media to fill the void as a distraction and substitute. By striving to become entirely in-itself and attempting to fill the void of one’s consciousness, one acts in what Sartre (1943) calls ‘bad faith’, which is by definition the inauthentic disengagement with one’s existence.

According to Alan Warde (2016), the way this appropriation is manifest in contemporary western society, is through human *consumption*: the central component in what has come to be known as ‘consumer culture’⁵⁹. Warde defines consumption as “a process whereby agents engage in appropriation, of a good, service, performance, information or ambience, and which is a product of human work.” (p. 66) He also suggests that this form of appropriation presupposes some level of control or intention towards the object of the appropriation⁶⁰,

⁵⁹ The term ‘consumer culture’ has been employed extensively in academic, economic and cultural vernacular since the early 1990s by individuals such as Mike Featherstone (1990), Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang (1995), and Celia Lury (1996), amongst many others.

⁶⁰ Evident in his use of the term “agent” to refer to the entity appropriating/consuming.

which is consistent with both Heidegger and Sartre's assumptions about consciousness as intentional and therefore always directed towards something⁶¹.

Despite the control (or intent) that one might exercise in one's appropriation of commodities, one consumes all the same if given the opportunity to do so (Sartre, 1943). Economic models of capitalism have long since advanced beyond simply providing opportunity for physical and nutritional sustenance (Holt-Giménez, 2017). Similarly, it has also transcended the strictly causal oscillating structure of supply and demand that once satisfied the desire to fill the void at the core of human existence – founded in man's "original negation" (Sartre, 1943, p. 174).

Ronald Aronson proposes that "since the beginning of the consumer economy in the golden age of 1945 to 1975, people's vital needs have become less and less the driving economic force, and capitalism's own vital need to produce and market commodities has more and more become that force." (2015, pp. 22-23) This means that even if those engaged in capitalism do not generate demand for commodities (to consume and appropriate), supply persists and demand is artificially induced by the "vast, self-sustaining, need-creating machine" (p. 23). This cycle perpetuates and proliferates to the point that it might almost seem as though one has no choice but to consume.

The negation at the heart of human ontology (proposed by Sartre) can be considered the source of one's desire to appropriate. It is also the foundation from which human freedom springs⁶². The desire to appropriate and consume (that one might feel as a result of this negation) cannot however outweigh the primacy of one's *choice* and therefore the responsibility of one's actions based on that choice. One's choice is not (and can never be) taken away by external forces, however it can be profoundly influenced, and directed down particular pathways. By surrendering one's choice to forces and pressures beyond oneself, one is made more and more into an object that is acted on, rather than a conscious agent acting upon the world. However, one does not always necessarily cede one's agency knowingly.

In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (1991), Foucault identified a system of governance called 'governmentality', which is the art of governing through "the dissemination of knowledge that people internalize so that they become self-governing." (Harvie, 2013, p. 3) In the case of Aronson's "need-creating machine" (consumer capitalism), the cycle of

⁶¹ Even itself: "consciousness is consciousness (of) my consciousness." (Sartre, 1943, p. 271)

⁶² A more detailed discussion concerning freedom and agency follows below.

consumption and appropriation (that exceeds basic supply and demand), when considered an expression of choice, is so economically and culturally ingrained it is perpetuated by the populace without the need for any external or governmental intervention (De La Fabián & Stecher, 2017).

This mode of governmental control is predicated on the principle that “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault, 1982, p. 221), which itself suggests that it is *because* of the freedom at the heart of human existence, that ‘the art of government’ that Foucault theorises (as governmentality) is possible. Human freedom is predicated on the absolute responsibility for every decision and action. Sartre (1943) considered such a responsibility to be oppressive. In an attempt to relieve this oppression, one is compelled to seek an external agent to shoulder the responsibility of making one’s decisions. The devolution central to neoliberal governmentality creates the impression of freedom but instead bears the agency. Neoliberal modes of governmentality have the capacity to manipulate both the populace’s fundamental freedom and their desire to neutralise the tension of their ontological liminality through appropriation. Without even being wholly aware of it, one is motivated to act in bad faith by the subtle influence of governmentality.

Not only can the capitalistic propagation of appropriation and consumption seem ubiquitous in contemporary western society, but this very ubiquity is part of a strategy of internalisation and self-governance within the confines of neoliberal capitalism. In short, agents are manipulated into having needs that are suggested to them. Yet, when human needs are met and exceeded, production continues regardless. Consumption persists beyond saturation, despite the long-term failure of appropriation to fill the void and reconcile the tension between in-itself and for-itself. One cannot make oneself entirely in-itself, yet one is trained (governed) through socio-political and primarily cultural immersion to strive for the self-determined self-identity exclusive to the content that one consumes. However, one cannot cease the unrelenting itch that puts the ambiguity of one’s conscious Being into question no matter how much one scratches/appropriates.

Claire Bishop highlights this kind of neoliberal governmentality as a strategy adopted by the New Labour government⁶³ as a means “to allow people to access the holy grail of self-sufficient consumerism.” (Bishop, 2012, p. 13) Not only is one educated and governed in a way that normalizes consumerism (and therefore ontological appropriation), but one is encouraged to pursue consumerism as an expression of one’s freedom. The original negation unique to human existence is manipulated on both fronts, as a void to be filled with commodities and a manifestation of one’s choice, albeit within the boundaries of free-market capitalism.

⁶³ In the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Michael Landy's *Break Down* (2001) can be read as a radical response to and commentary on both affronts to authentic human ontology in so far as it is a questioning of one's need to consume and own. In 2001, British artist Michael Landy made an inventory of everything that he owned, composing a list of over 7,000 items. With the help of a team of participating 'operatives', Landy installed a "material reclamation factory" (Artangel, 2001) in an empty department store on Oxford Street, London. His choice to inhabit the empty shell of an old department store represents a failure (or stumble) of consumer capitalism. Landy reopens the store, but as a site of 'creative destruction' (Harvie, 2013) and statement of anti-consumerism. Over the space of two weeks, Landy and the 18 hired operatives systematically destroyed all 7,227 items. The inventory was printed and posted on the walls and members of the public were invited into the store as "each individual possession was [...] systematically taken apart, broken down, pulped and granulated." (2001)



Figure 10 'Operatives'. Michael Landy, *Breakdown*, Oxford Street, London (2001). Photograph by Hugo Glendinning.

By conducting a physical negation of his material possessions, Landy made an unambiguous statement about material appropriation and consumerism. James Lingwood (co-director of Artangel and commissioner of *Break Down*) suggests however that *Break Down* was not "simply a frontal attack on consumerism, but something a bit more complex – about the relationship between who we are and what we possess and desire. Of course, *Break Down* was about Western society's obsession with stuff and ownership. But it was also about a more existential question, which was: who am I?" (2016) In attempting to answer this question, Landy tried to discern who he was and separate it from what he owned by destroying what he owned and seeing what was left.

In *Break Down* Landy not only negated his material possessions, but in doing so created a critical distance between his desire to appropriate and the consumable objects of appropriation. Having destroyed all his belongings, Landy did not inexplicably express his authentic-self. In fact, in an interview with Alastair Sooke, he stated that "The truth is, it's very difficult to escape consumerism in Western society. In fact, it's almost like

breathing: you can't." (2016) What Landy was able to promote with *Break Down* was the capacity to draw "a distinct boundary between a consumer capitalist space and an authentic one." (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 11)

Landy's destructive actions were an exercise in a more authentic mode of choice and agency, that could operate outside of the pressurised climate of consumerism and neoliberal governmentality. However, as Richard Dorment (of *The Daily Telegraph*) remarks, "the ultimate irony of *Break Down* is that, as soon as it ends, Landy will have turned himself into the ideal consumer – a man who needs to be sold new underwear, pyjamas, socks, toothbrush, hairbrush." (2001)

Dorment's astute observation highlights two points concerning the authentic space that Landy was able to carve out for himself. Firstly, Landy had effectively removed himself from the temptation of material appropriation and invited participants to help him do so. However, the level of ubiquity and cultural immersion consumerism and neoliberal governmentality were operating on meant that the authentic space that Landy managed to occupy was nevertheless enveloped by the consumer capitalist space pressuring him to appropriate and consume. Secondly, the liminal space that Landy managed to establish in the cracks between the established orders of appropriation and consumer capitalism was not meant to last. Liminality is by definition "a temporary situation betwixt two structured orders." (Szakolczai, 2009, p. 151) Therefore, Landy's authentic expression of his fundamental ontological liminality was fated to fall prey to the structured orders of neoliberal governmentality and back into a cycle of inauthentically attempting to reconcile one's non-Being with material possession.

The basic need to consume for survival does not negate one's possible shift towards authenticity. Consumer culture and neoliberalism have surpassed the provision of basic needs (Aronson, 2015). One can still own what one needs to survive without falling automatically into inauthenticity. Anything in excess of this basic provision however, requires a mindfulness of how one's possession, consumption and appropriation affects relations with others and how one engages with one's fundamental freedom.

Almost twenty years on from *Break Down* the face of consumerism has changed. One no longer needs to surround oneself with superfluous material items, however one consumes all the same. Except consumerism now is typified by 'digital nomadism' (Benson, 2018). The contemporary online consumer does not need to appropriate CDs or DVDs when they can just as easily (if not more easily) download an album or track, or stream media from outlets such as Apple Music, Spotify or Netflix. The physical commodity is still available for consumption, but the digital alternative is far more convenient and gratifies one's need to consume instantly. Landy was able to make a distinction between consumerist space and a space where authenticity could feasibly

emerge by physically destroying his material possessions. But this distinction is made far more ambiguous by the digitisation of the commodified objects of one's appropriation.

Benson proposes "the obsolete technology that populates [Landy's] list harks back to a time before our most prized possession was the online data stored about us, so easily hacked and—crucially—almost impossible to destroy." (2018) Although the response to *Break Down* at the time may have been ambivalent (Sooke, 2016), the significance of Landy's demonstration of negating a neoliberally induced consumerism has been amplified as the divide between authenticity and inauthenticity becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate and disentangle.

III. THE CONTEMPORARY ONTOLOGICAL SITUATION

As the immersion in consumer culture attests to, and although it seems like a truism, human existence does not occur in a vacuum. As such, a defining factor in the ontologies of both Heidegger and Sartre is that one exists (as a being questioning Being) against the backdrop of a world full of other beings (conscious or otherwise). As such, there are a whole variety of circumstances that one is faced with, that one has not or did not choose, but still must negotiate. The discussion concerning how neoliberal governmentality perpetuates the desire to appropriate implies the existence of objects and forces external to the solitary *Dasein* or singular entity grappling with its ontological modes of being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

For Heidegger, authenticity is predicated on (and inextricably linked to) his ontological understanding of what it means to exist, and the conditions unique to conscious human existence. He posits that *Dasein* is fundamentally a 'being-in-the-world' (1927), whereby intentional consciousness is categorically directed at some-*thing* and the world that we find ourselves in is a *precondition* of our existence. To exist we need to be born and to be born necessitates the existence of a world beyond ourselves. He then states that to understand and grasp one's own 'ownness' or authenticity⁶⁴ it must be *relative* to the world. To discover what one *is* one must exercise one's capacity to negate and first determine what one *is not*.

Sartre calls this ontological environment one's 'situation' (1943, p. 481). 'Facticity' (Sartre, 1943), or 'thrownness' (Heidegger, 1927) are also terms used to describe both the systems and structures (the *facts*) of one's *situation*, and the sensation of being *thrown* into this state of affairs as a conscious being in the world. As such,

⁶⁴ Heidegger's term '*Eigentlichkeit*' is a neologism that translates to something closer to 'ownedness' or 'ownness' rather than 'authenticity', which is a term, used by individuals such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre, but has since become synonymous.

one is always in situation. The traditions, conditions and practices (that are the ground of one's situation) pre-date one's own existence and conscious perception of the world. One's immersion and engagement in them coalesce to form the inexorable aspects about oneself that overlap to form a unique basis for a fact-based identity.

The physiological, social, political, economic or religious conditions of one's existence, combined are the aspects of oneself (other than one's present actions) are comprehensible by entities external to oneself. These aspects (that constitute one's facticity) can produce static and commodifiable placeholders, and lay out inauthentic pathways that one could easily define oneself by – e.g. defining oneself exclusively by one's ethnicity, class background, religious upbringing or nationality, etc. Similarly, if one cannot establish a self founded in the process of negation (i.e. one is not this, therefore one must be this), then one becomes inauthentically dissolved into one's situation and is swept along in whatever dominant and/or proximate systems or ideologies that constitute one's situation. The significance of one's situation is contingent upon one's awareness of it, susceptibility to its influence, and how one engages with it as a reflection of one's freedom and responsibility for one's choices relative to it.

Since before the advent of social media one has been confronted with politically and socially entrenched systems of commodification, trade and consumption. These neoliberal constructs are compounded and perpetuated by digitally mediated networks whereby people interact with one another through historically and culturally established conventions like social media (Fuchs, 2017). Thrown into this situation, if one (understandably) defines oneself as a consumer or through the objects that one possesses (as a result of consumption and appropriation), then one is anchored to those objects and cannot fully engage in one's choice, freedom or agency (afforded by the ambiguity and negation at the core of human existence and consciousness) by transcending one's facticity. As consumers, people do not consciously define themselves in the frame of agency or possibility, but rather submit passively to consumer culture and neoliberal governmentality; opting to pretend that they are exercising their choice (by consuming) rather than actively take on the responsibility of being free. To consume, in a way consistent with an internalisation of neoliberal governmentality, is manifest in the alignment of one's self with the commodities that one consumes, to the point where one becomes indistinguishable from the commodity, and the distinction between the self as *consumer* and the self as producer or *consumed* becomes problematic and ambiguous.

It is this entanglement that Christian Fuchs identifies in Alvin Toffler's (1980) notion of the 'prosumer', which introduces the "progressive blurring of the line that separates producer from consumer." (1980, p. 267)

Such a blurring reinforces the ostensibly benign aspirations of neoliberal capitalism for the individual⁶⁵, Fuchs suggests however digital ‘prosumption’ on social media does in fact perpetuate a process of exploitation. In his book, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2017), Fuchs provides a well-documented case for social media as not only a product of neoliberalism, but also an instrument for perpetuating the neoliberal culture of inauthentic participation and exploitation. He states “the extension and intensification of advertising and consumer culture into the realm of online data is an expression of large-scale capitalist privatization and commodification under neo-liberal condition.” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 53)

If one returns (with this in mind) to the issue of ontological appropriation, one finds that (as prosumers) social media users are continually faced with targeted advertisements based on their online activity (Comscore, 2012). Therefore, the commodities one consumes online are tracked; this information is auctioned off to advertisers (commodifying the consumer), who feed targeted advertising back to the consumer. One becomes a consumer that is also a commodity: a digit in the homogenous ocean of digital commodities, defined by one’s habits of consumption, indistinguishable from one’s situation and trapped as a consumerist placeholder on an inauthentic pathway. Of course, one cannot generalise and therefore characterise every individual existing, living and operating in contemporary western society as a prosumer; on average only 59%⁶⁶ of western European citizens actively engage in social media (Kemp, 2018). Although this is a technical majority, it does not account for all individuals. There may be those who actively pursue and promote the choice not to consume (regardless of social media activity). There are also those who are not in a financial position to consume and must prioritise survival. One cannot assume this demographic does not also engage in social media. They are therefore also caught up in their respective situations founded in neoliberal capitalism.

These two alternative situations (the latter more so) represent two extremes of human choice and the way it is contextualised in contemporary western societies that have adopted neoliberal capitalism as their primary economic model. “In 2016, 118.0 million people, or 23.5 % of the EU population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This means roughly one in four people in the EU experienced at least one of the following three forms

⁶⁵ “Economic and political democracy, self-determined work, labour autonomy, local production and autonomous self-production.” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 131)

⁶⁶ Taken from social media penetration statistics from ten western European countries (United Kingdom 66%, Belgium 65%, Ireland 65%, Netherlands 64%, Portugal 64%, France 58%, Spain 58%, Italy 57%, Germany 46% and Poland 45%) based on “monthly active accounts on the top social network in each country, compared to total population, regardless of age.” (Kemp, 2018, p. 54)

of destitution: monetary poverty, severe material deprivation, or very low work household intensity.” (Eurostat, 2018)⁶⁷

If one broadly considers 23.5% of the EU population in relative poverty, compared with the 59% of the same population that are actively engaged in some form of social media (allowing for discrepancies between data sets), one could argue that those with the least wealth could realistically still have access to social media and are therefore exposed to the same enticements and promises made under the rubric of neoliberalism. By the same token, although the scale of consumption may be greatly reduced, “being poor does not obviate sociocultural aspirations to consume.” (Hamilton, et al., 2014, p. 1834)

Despite these circumstances, the situation remains (and as the statistics suggest) there is still a significant demographic of the western European population that are immersed in the cycles of prosumption and exploitation. This concentrated immersion in neoliberal governmentality as a prosumer, is an expression of one’s *situation*. Users consume content and commodities online; all the while being mined for their data which reveals the content and commodities they consume. This complex cycle represents the situation that one finds oneself thrown into and the influences peripheral to one’s Being that could keep one from following one’s own path. The distorting of the user as a conscious human being, and the user as a valuable commodity, is analogous to the blurring between one and one’s facticity, although the commodity produced by users is not necessarily the same commodity being consumed by users. For example, Facebook provides its services to its users for free, but there is a hidden cost. By creating a Facebook account, users automatically opt-in to granting advertisers access to their news feeds and to their data being used to tailor advertisements to the specific user, based on their online activity.

Users’ online behaviour fulfils the neoliberal objective of freely generating capital without the influence of a centralised governing body. If this is the case, then social media is the ideal delivery system for the devolution of neoliberal ideology and the self-governance of users as prosumers (Fuchs, 2017). Now, more than ever, is social media (and therefore neoliberalism) an omnipresent spectre, constantly lurking in one’s pocket or screaming in one’s hand. Mobile internet and app technology mean that one is only ever a few seconds away (the time it takes to retrieve one’s phone from a pocket or purse) from being confronted with the reassuringly regulated choices of one’s ever-present and broader neoliberal situation, but also the expectation to participate in it. The

⁶⁷ It is worth noting however, that although this figure seems dramatic, the majority (if not all) of the countries included in this study (and this thesis) are subject to ‘relative poverty’, as opposed to ‘absolute poverty’ (Townsend, 1979). This means that those, for whom the choice to consume is severely restricted by their financial means, do still earn enough to satisfy their basic survival needs, unlike those in developing countries who are subject to absolute poverty.

access to social media and online prosumption granted by mobile phone technology, is also the conduit through which one can effortlessly dissolve into one's situation and be defined by one's facticity (Belk, 1988).

To illustrate my point concerning neoliberal governmentality and immersion, I would like to mention (performance poet) Hannah Jane Walker and (performance artist and dramaturg) Chris Thorpe's performance piece, *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013). Across three collaborations⁶⁸, the duo has brought audiences face-to-face with issues and situations that they believe are difficult to express or contend with and are therefore frequently avoided.

I Wish I Was Lonely (2013) is the most recent project they have collaborated on. It not only employs and examines participation, but does so specifically through the lens of mobile communication technologies. Walker and Thorpe guide the audience through a series of workshop exercises aimed at generating a greater clarity around one's relationship with one's mobile communications device. By doing so, they are also able to approach the ways in which these modes of technological interface affect social and interpersonal relationships. Despite their active emphasis of the problems with mobile internet technology, they do not consider the digital interception of sociality to be categorically undesirable or damaging to one's relationships and to one's capacity to be oneself authentically. If Walker and Thorpe preach anything in *I Wish I Was Lonely*, then they preach moderation and balance. They ask the audience to consider the potential of mobile communication technologies that could extend far beyond glib connectedness and savvy exploitation.

Walker and Thorpe's interrogation of the unprecedented access and connectivity in the age of mobile phone technology, can be read as a problematisation of neoliberal governmentality as a strategy of immersion and devolution. It can also be considered a broader comment on one's inauthentic dissipation into one's situation, perpetuated by the constancy of one's availability to other networked users and the pressure to maintain a consistent identity based on facticity.

The opening lines of the performance (delivered by Thorpe) state that "If You have Equipment which enables you to access the Portal, this section applies to You. You are the Consumer." (2013, p. 45) Later still he asserts "we are always handcuffed to the network. We've been sold each other." (ibid, p. 52) Both of these statements (delivered directly to the audience), point explicitly towards the connection Walker and Thorpe make between access to mobile phone/internet technology, one's access to other users (also indoctrinated into digitised neoliberal culture) and one's access to the procedures of commodification and consumption typical of social media neoliberalism.

⁶⁸ Walker's *This is Just to Say* (2010) and the duo's *The Oh Fuck Moment* (2011) and *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013).



Figure 11 Chris Thorpe (Standing centre), Hannah Jane Walker (Sitting centre right, wearing blue) and audience/participants (sitting around space). Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, *I Wish I Was Lonely*, Cambridge Junction, Sampled Festival (2013). Photograph by Claire Haigh.

Following their opening statements, Walker and Thorpe’s performance takes the form of a kind of workshop. In this framework, the examination and interrogation of one’s relationship with, and attachment to one’s mobile phone (that can be considered a portal to or magnification of one’s being-in-the-world) is guided and facilitated by the two performers. Walker and Thorpe articulate this relationship as the perpetual tension generated by “living in two worlds.” (2013, p. 46) Chris Thorpe expands upon this duality by first describing a world of “direct experience” and then another of “communication outside of the experiential world.” (Thorpe, 2017) The latter world is manifest in the build-up of a set of duties associated with always carrying a mobile phone that has the potential to bear unread notifications⁶⁹. If one has notifications awaiting one’s attention, they engender an obligation and burden in need of regular discharge (checking one’s phone), even if the device is not set to notify the user of any incoming communication.

⁶⁹ Missed calls, text messages, social media notifications (comments, likes, shares, etc.), other app notifications, etc.

Consequently, spectators/participants are urged to keep their phones switched on during the performance, which preserves both levels of awareness (direct experience and incoming phone-based communication), in a situation that traditionally prohibits the latter: performance events. Walker and Thorpe do not ask the audience to turn their phones off. They attempt to uphold the constant reminders of the world beyond one's immediate sense experience (the performance encounter), without providing the brief respite that a live performance event usually would demand⁷⁰. They rather intend to maintain and even intensify the tension between our Being and agency (in the moment) and the pressure to conform to factually persistent systems and structures (such as neoliberal social media) one may find oneself thrown into and habitually returning to through one's mobile device.

Mass participation and immersion in digital neoliberalism (and the subsequent ubiquity of social media) is predicated on the ease of access and connectivity built into the foundations of both social media and neoliberal capitalism. Both constructs contain the paradox whereby they are both systems that rely on mass participation only to promote a culture of isolation. Aronson states "the central attitudinal and ideological features of the neoliberal universe are to [...] encourage individuals to see themselves as isolated from each other, responsible for their own fate and incapable of acting collectively." (2015, p. 25) Furthermore, Taylor would argue this alienation and isolation between neoliberal participants is a manifestation of contemporary 'instrumental reasoning' (1991), which denies the subjectivity of the Other and commodifies them instead.

The tension Walker and Thorpe try to accentuate in *I Wish I Was Lonely* – between engaging immediately in the performance event and digitally reinforcing one's bond with one's online situation – is indicative of the tension between feeling connected to a potentially infinite number of other users and alienating oneself from those immediately present, by engaging with them exclusively as a prosumer through the mediator of social media and one's mobile device. Rather than evangelically preaching the mindless destruction of all mobile internet devices, Walker and Thorpe advocate a moderate approach that promotes one's choice to engage in the wider world, and therefore engage in one's facticity or sense of thrownness. This choice is expressed as one's choice to be *lonely*. Participants are made explicitly aware of this choice when Walker asks the audience directly "do you ever let yourself feel lonely? And if not, why not." (2013) But the audience are also made implicitly conscious of the intentional decision to be alone or lonely through a series of participatory tasks issued by the performers designed to make them confront the persistence of their connectedness. Participants are instructed to call one another and leave voicemail messages about why they need their mobile phone. Thorpe destroys a dummy mobile phone in

⁷⁰ The audience are encouraged to also text and tweet throughout the performance.

front of the audience having convinced them it belonged to one of them. Even with the pervasive devolution of neoliberal governmentality (manifest in the persistent tension generated by mobile technology ubiquity), Walker and Thorpe urge temperance and a reestablishment of one's choice to step back from one's situation, no matter how overwhelming or oppressive it may be. This moderate approach not only allows for ontological negation and a critical distance from one's facticity, but it maintains a connection with the Other, eschewing the neoliberal isolation highlighted by Aronson, whilst preserving one's *choice* to be alone and distinct from one's situation.

IV. USER PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE TEMPORALITY

Thus far I considered how contemporary human existence (*Dasein* or Being-in/for-itself) in western society is set against the backdrop of a culture of commodification, consumption and appropriation, transmitted as such through a ubiquitous system of neoliberal governmentality, in the form of digital social media. I have also brought forward a few instances of how contemporary performance is responding to these issues by means of problematising the mass participation in such practices. One must consider a dimension vital to both Heidegger and Sartre's theses on human existence that is yet to be explored: *time*.

As Valentijn Dhaenens illustrates in *World Without Us*, even without humans:

There's still time, there are still clocks indicating the time.
There are still seconds and minutes.
A second is something human.
Something to divide minutes into.
A minute is human.
How long is a minute?

(Ontroerend Goed, 2016)

So although in a fictive world, devoid of human existence the audience are told clocks still function, there is nobody there to interpret the configuration of hands and digits as a representation of temporality. This habit of spatialising time (demonstrated by Ontroerend Goed's meditation on time without human perception) is conceptualised in great detail in Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will* (1889). It is here that Bergson asserts that as conscious beings "we project time into space, we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession. This takes the form of a continuous line or a chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another." (1889

p. 101) The most common example of this interpretation of time is the division and distribution of time into that of a clock-face or the laying out of time as a linear series of 'now-points', each separate to one another. But as one can hypothesise from Ontroerend Goed's thought experiment, the spatialised manifestation of temporality that corresponds to the movements of celestial bodies, lingers even after the demise of humanity. If this translation of motion persists without human existence, then surely it can not be representative of one's experience of temporality.

Two centuries, three, four.
500 years of darkness.
7 human lifetimes.
A family tree of 25 generations.
But nobody counts like that anymore.
No living being keeps count.
Nothing is counting the years here.
Nothing counts anymore.

(Ontroerend Goed, 2016)

This counting operation (that Ontroerend Goed allude to as being specific to humans) is indicative of the spatialisation that Bergson decries. A common framework like shared time (based on an observable and measurable physical movement of the solar system) is a useful social tool, however it also subscribes to this spatialising operation because it is a congealing of fluid encounters as discrete and communicable concepts. What Bergson in fact says is our true experience of time is characterised by past, present and future conscious states, each bleeding into one another. He defines and differentiates space and duration (time) as the disparity between quantitative, measurable, homogenous multiplicity (space or '*temps*') and qualitative, heterogeneous multiplicity (duration or '*durée*') (1889). According to Bergson's model, one cannot isolate any singular conscious state (or 'now-point') due to its interpenetrative nature. Bergson was writing at a time when capitalism was fuelling the development of reproducible media such as photography and film. The introduction of cinema and film were especially influential in Bergson's conceptualisation of *temps* as an increasingly prominent and problematic way of perceiving time (Lazzarato, 2007).

World Without Us seems to relish in the contradiction between *temps* and *durée* and manipulates the audience into experiencing the tension between the two. The lone narrator orally calls the audience's attention explicitly to the meaninglessness of the movement of watch/clock-hands and how – without the existence of

multiple conscious beings to share in a standardised measure of time – seconds, minutes, hours, years, decades and centuries can no longer be counted; counting no longer exists. The employment and persistence of spatialised time is indicative of one’s being-in-the-world-with-others. Advocacy and continued concentrated use of *temps* as a mode of negotiating temporality is a fundamental way of yielding to factual structures that prioritises the will of others. The absurdity that Ontroerend Goed draw the audience’s attention to is that clocks would still tick despite humanity’s disappearance. The spatial mode of temporality would persist even without the conscious mind to give it meaning. In the performance encounter itself – between solitary narrator and audience, in a darkened theatre space – spectators are made intensely conscious of their immediate experience of temporality and co-presence.



Figure 12 Karolien De Bleser and monolithic structure. Ontroerend Goed, *World Without Us*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2016). Photography by Ontroerend Goed.

Valentijn Dhaenens⁷¹ continuously modulates the pace of his vocal delivery to keep spectators interested/invested in the narrative and engaged in the primarily diegetic performance. There are instances where sentences are stretched out and the silences between words are pushed to breaking point. He also develops a pattern of walking around the performance area and intermittently disappearing behind the monolithic abstract statue (that resembles a tall cuboid plinth) that is the only other object on stage – other than the narrator (see Figure 4).

⁷¹ And/or Karolien De Bleser.

His disappearance behind the monolith parallels the extended silences; they are both pushed to the point at which the audience may begin to wonder if they will ever reappear or finish the sentence. This tension immediately dissipates and time contracts as the narrator reappears, or the next word is uttered. These fluctuations are intentional manipulations of how the audience experience *durée* in the performance encounter, whilst also narratively describing the shortcomings of *temps* in the fictive universe of the *World Without Us*.

Ontroerend Goed's juxtapositioning of the two conceptions of temporality could be interpreted as an emphasis of the rigidity and perpetuity of *temps*, while also testing the limits of durational liminality. If (per Bergson's model) *durée* is defined by the interpenetrative flow from one conscious state to the next, then as one is transitioning from one conscious state to another – or from the beginning of a sentence delivered by Dhaenens to the end of it after a significant, but suspenseful pause – one occupies a transitory liminal condition.

In this interpenetrative liminal period between conscious states, one inhabits a position of infinite possibility. Dhaenens could say anything, the lengthening of the liminal gap opens the horizon of expectation. He could also say nothing and leave the sentence unfinished. In either scenario, before the sentence is finished or a new sentence started, Dhaenens is presenting the audience with a glimpse of becoming. *World Without Us* evokes both modes of temporality that straddle the boundary of (in)authenticity.

Heidegger pushes the structural limits of Bergsonian temporality further by suggesting that “*Dasein* qua time temporalizes its being.” (1985, p. 319) In other words, as humans we are beings living in a world of beings; we come to exist in this world temporally and our acts, projects and the way we encounter the world are always relative to our past experiences, our future possibility and the finitude of our lives. Heidegger's conception of time prioritised *Dasein's* capacity to project towards the future and not be confined to the present. Likewise, Sartre appropriates Bergson's model of interpenetrative conscious states and systematises Heidegger's model, by integrating it into his dialectic of the in-itself (as past), the for-itself (as future) and what one might call ‘the present’ as the future perpetually *becoming* past. As a result, one is constantly experiencing the meeting between the past (memory, Being-in-itself) and the future (fluid possibility, Being-for-itself) as the present in a constant process of negation capacitated by human consciousness.

Unmitigated fixation and subscription to one's facticity can be considered a denial of one's choice and responsibility to follow one's own path. As I have discussed above, the ubiquity of social media enabled by the surge of mobile device technology, is a tool for disseminating neoliberal ideology and delegating governmental responsibility within the confines of neoliberal capitalism. The latter immerses the public in a situation that appears to permeate time and space. Such profound entanglement in one's immediate and ongoing situation

reduces the critical distance necessary for negation and the opening up of possibility which is fundamental to choice, freedom and authenticity.

So too can preoccupation with the exclusive association of the present with the static and temporally established past (as spatialisation), reinforce and augment one's restrictive situation. If one associates too essentially with one's past, this facticity can bleed into the present and affect one's conception of the future. Not only does a fixity of one's present (as a spatialised now-point) make one's life seem almost fixed on rails, but the homogeneity with which spatialised temporality operates permits very little (if any) scope for the potential and theoretically infinite possibility one projects into the future. If each second, minute and hour is homogenous, then how can one possibly conceive of a future open to infinite possibility?

By grounding oneself entirely in the mode of shared (spatialised) time, one is limited in the opportunities one could grasp in an authentic project of becoming. By the same token, the spatialisation of one's temporal 'ecstases' (Heidegger, 1927) of past, present and future through the lens of technology (mediating and recording present events) complicates the passing of future possibility into past facticity because living life through the 'fourth screen' (Miller, 2014) brings the codified, recorded and fixed past rushing into the present. Such an invasion of the past into the present not only intensifies one's thrownness into one's inescapable situation, but also interferes with one's presence with and engagement in the present encounter.

Paradoxically, social media interfaces and platforms seem to treat human temporality as both spatial *and* interpenetrative. Most social media platforms operate in terms of some kind of stream, 'feed', 'timeline' or 'story', whereby user uploads or 'posts' (and the uploads/posts of those other users that one is connected/networked with) are presented discretely, but in a constantly updated chronological directory.

In their study of social media temporality, Lewis Goodings and Ian Tucker identify the Facebook 'Timeline' interface "as a kind of force that spatialises past social media activity" (2014, p. 47) in a kind of 'prosthetic digital memory' (Lash & Lury, 2007). They also suggest that although the past endures and is stabilised online as a series of 'now-points' on social media, users become more acutely aware of the "present as the future-past, through being wary about how it will become one's visible past in Timeline." (2014, p. 48) Therefore, one's history and past (as it is uploaded to social media in the present) has considerable influence over the way one considers one's future. The past penetrates the future as persistent digital artefacts, despite the discrete and spatial configuration of one's online actions.

Social media providers attempt to imitate the fluid, interpenetrative and somewhat indefinite mode of human temporal experience, however they do not quite manage to capture its nuance or inescapable liminal

ambiguity. Social media's misappropriation and proximation of conscious human temporality is a symptom of the central remit of sociality that fundamentally drives the spatialisation of the human experience of temporality (Bergson, 1889). Although the interfaces and platforms may give the impression of fluidity, the distinct boundedness and fortitude of each social media update also allows for the straightforward and uncomplicated process of capture and commodification (Fuchs, 2017).

Blast Theory's *Karen* (2015) can be interpreted as an aesthetic participatory encounter that enhances participants' awareness of "the mechanisms of the experience of online and social media platforms." (Nedelkopoulou, 2017, p. 360) In particular, it problematises the storage of digital memory generated from the online engagement of users. Blast Theory are a UK-based "artist group" led by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj (Blast Theory, 2018). They produce "interactive art to explore social and political questions, placing audience members at the centre of our work." (2018)

Blast Theory's work often interrogates the development of new media and communication technologies, *Karen* specifically targets "how data is captured and manipulated." (Adams, 2015) By employing and integrating new and emergent technologies (like social media and mobile apps) into their practice, they strive to discover how they impact everyday life, how they transform one's perception of shared time and space, and how they modify the way people interact with one another.

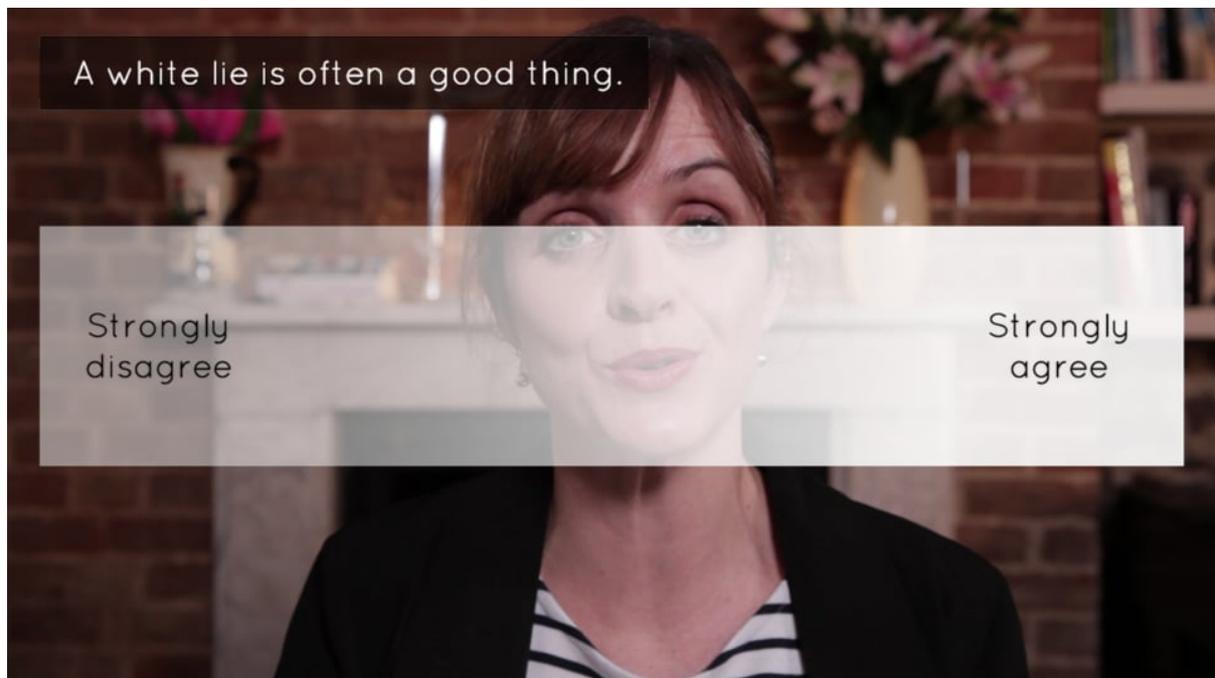


Figure 13 Claire Cage (as Karen). Blast Theory, *Karen* (2015). Photograph from screenshot taken from app.

Karen (2015) finds Blast Theory dissolving the boundary between the digital mediation of one's private and public lives and how it is manifest in the surreptitious collection of 'big data'. Having developed their own app (mobile application) that participants interact with over the course of two weeks, the software gathers the participants' accumulated data to produce a unique personality report. Once downloaded, the app presents participant/users with a series of pre-recorded videos of the titular Karen, a fictitious life-coach played by actress Claire Cage. The videos offer the participant the option to communicate with Karen via written messages or multiple-choice answers. The input of the user dictates the pre-recorded response they receive from Karen. The data one shares with the app is not simply the trigger for the bank of pre-recorded responses, "Blast Theory deliberately misuses the life-coaching format to expose the mechanism of corporate data-mining of personal and collective information." (Nedelkopoulou, 2017, p. 360)

One's digital actions are stored as digital memory and the consequences of these actions are fed back in the form of Karen's responses and the personality data report. The spatialised "bits and bytes" (Chatzichristodoulou, 2017, p. 319) of accumulated digital memory are the digital manifestations of one's past (one's facticity) encroaching on one's future. What *Karen* interrogates is the knowledge that one has of one's acts being surveilled and stockpiled and how this knowledge influences or inhibits one's possible future actions.

Although framed as a life-coaching app, *Karen* does very little (if any) life-coaching. The app does not give suggestions for how one might think or act moving forward into the future. There is no emphasis on how one should exploit one's future opportunities or possibility. Rather one is asked questions about one's existing situation, one's established habits and one's enduring opinions. For example, a statement that *Karen* proposes towards the beginning of the two weeks is that "a white lie is often a good thing." One can respond on a scale that ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The answers that *Karen's* users give do not yield advice based on those answers, but rather they influence the future line of questioning that becomes more specific as it gathers more data. In my own experience of the app, I was only able to observe the outcome of one set of answers. It did somehow seem as though by leaning towards the 'strongly disagree' end of the answer spectrum, *Karen's* later responses made a point of referring to how honest she was being.

There is an exclusive focus on one's past decisions. *Karen* mines one's past for data as social media mines one's past online activity for personal data. Social media data mining captures data concerning one's existing interests based on one's past activity on their online platforms. Data gathered about one's past online activity and existing interests are exploited to influence one's future online activity by means of targeted advertising. Through *Karen*, Blast Theory evoke the capture and manipulation of online data. Matt Adams (2015)

states that Blast Theory are not necessarily attempting to make any value judgement about data mining and the manipulation of big data. By reflecting and magnifying the process of data mining in *Karen* however, they do highlight how these processes reinforce existing and established behaviours, habits, interests and opinions.

By prioritising the unalterable past and mobilising users' personal data to penetrate their future, social media providers, advertisers and governments attempt to reinforce users' facticity and severely narrow their future horizon of possibility. By appropriating the position of life-coach, *Karen* plays on the culture of self-realisation and self-management to achieve what may be thought of as authentic (Varga, 2012). Rather than promoting authentic habits of change, possibility and becoming, it reflects the issues surrounding data mining and targets the users' mindfulness of how engagement with online digital media is perpetually nudging users back onto the hamster wheel and encouraging them to exhibit consistent and predictable behaviour.

V. THE SELF AND SELF-AWARENESS

If Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre subscribe (at least for the most part) to the hypothesis that the *form* of temporality is fluid, heterogenous and interpenetrative, then what is the *content*? Objects persist through time and may be perceived to be transforming very slowly. But animate beings perform acts and *do* things. It is this action that really highlights the heterogeneity of how one perceives temporality.

Throughout this thesis, I augment the notion of (in)authenticity with the concept of selfhood. I refer to the 'authentic-self' or 'inauthentic-self' to describe the (in)authentic expression of one's mode of Being when faced with different (performance/socio-economic) situations. It is important at this juncture to make a distinction between the 'self' and the 'subject'; although the two terms are tightly interwoven and contingent upon one another, they need to be considered as independent concepts. To establish a working definition of selfhood, one must also firstly determine how one comprehends and applies the concept of subjectivity. One cannot consider selfhood, without first considering the conscious being as subject.

Both Heidegger and Sartre define consciousness in terms of 'intentionality', which was primarily coined to discuss consciousness by Edmund Husserl (1900). Intentionality suggests that consciousness is always directed at something. This may be an object external to one's consciousness, but it also may be directed at itself: "consciousness of consciousness." (Sartre, 1943, p. lii) As well as being predicated on the notion that one's consciousness is always projected beyond itself (as one questions and negates), this ontological model also assumes there is the potential of there being *more* to any given encounter – projected into the future as *possibility*.

The intentionality of one's conscious encounter of the world fundamentally extends to the way that one interacts with it (Heidegger, 1927). These intentional acts and the conscious states that we occupy whilst enacting and/or perceiving them is the *content* most pertinent to comprehending how one constitutes one's *self* in and through time.

The entanglement between subjectivity and selfhood arises if one considers the self as an object: to be observed and acted upon. Both Heidegger and Sartre consider selfhood to be an embodied expression of one's subjectivity. If subjectivity is considered inseparable and contingent upon an objective world, then the objective self is inseparable and contingent upon the subject that it arises from. The self is how the subject considers itself as an entity distinct from the rest of the world. The self is also how other subjects conceive of one as an entity distinct from themselves and the rest of the world. If (in)authenticity is apprehended as an expression of one's conscious Being, then the modes of (in)authentically expressing one's Being (that I alluded to above), can also be considered the means of constituting one's self.

By putting considerable emphasis on the dual-process of *intentionality* within a *temporality* that juxtaposes an immanent past (in-itself) with a credibly transcendent future (for-itself), Sartre's phenomenological ontology operates in a manner that has a significant consequence for the emergence of one's self. The interface between the existential modes of the for-itself and in-itself establishes the notion of 'the self' to be a wholly objective phenomenon, composed of perceivable acts comprehended by one's own reflective consciousness *and* the consciousness of others alike. Jacob Golomb articulates Sartre's model by explaining that "just as separate notes constitute a melody, so an individual's intentional acts, states and dispositions, over time form a pattern which we perceive as personality or character." (1995, p. 97)

It is in the very slippage between the in-itself (the series of observable acts that are fixed in the past that constitute the self) and the for-itself (the intrinsic reflective consciousness projected into the future) that Sartre located the source of human freedom; one's consciousness or subjectivity is fundamentally distinct from one's self. And yet, one's self is an accumulation of one's intentional acts, fixed in the past as memory. One's acts are physical manifestations of one's intentional consciousness, perpetually pressing on towards the future. As and when one acts, these acts add to the accumulation of one's facticity as they become fixed in the past. However, this does not mean one's self is permanently fixed; although one's past actions are unchanging, the future promises an infinite possibility of actions to perpetually (re)constitute one's identity. Consequently, one is not a static self,

but rather a ‘presence-to-self’⁷² (Sartre, 1943), at liberty to alter the dynamic self from one act to another. As such, there is no definitive or stable self, only *acts* that are responsive to the freedom afforded by the negation produced by human consciousness.

As an illustration of the separation of one’s presented self, acts and free and intentional consciousness, in *A Game of You* (2009) Ontroerend Goed⁷³ use one-on-one performer-spectator participation to explore the “subjectivity of self-image.” (2014, p. 130) Through a series of encounters with mirrors (both inanimate and performer), participants are brought face-to-face with the series of observed actions that they identify with their own self. In the performance and in subsequent reflections⁷⁴, Ontroerend Goed refer to participants as ‘visitors’ and performers as either ‘avatars’ or the ‘dungeon master’ (Ontroerend Goed, 2014); I will adopt their vernacular henceforth in the description of the performance encounter.

The visitor (Visitor 1) is first ushered into a waiting room where they are asked to wait. The visitor is sat across from a large two-way mirror, from behind which an avatar (Avatar 1) surreptitiously observes the visitor’s physical gestures and actions as they are waiting. Visitor 1 is also recorded in the waiting room, with a hidden camera. Already the conditions of being surveilled and one’s acts recorded (with or without one’s knowledge) by an unseen and physically absent spectator have been established. Such a mirroring of the conditions of social media highlights two issues. Firstly, as the visitor’s actions will later be repeatedly fed back to them across a number of different performance situations, this observation and reproduction of acts (that constitute the self) stresses one’s enduring circumstance and the sensation of constantly being watched or monitored in the “surveillance-industrial internet complex” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 5). Secondly, (and possibly more troubling) if as a visitor in the waiting room, one has no suspicion whatsoever that one is being watched, then not only is the visitor grossly underestimating their being-in-the-world-with-others, but also misjudging the worth of their (commodifiable) bodily exploits as both social media user and participant in *A Game of You*.

A second avatar (Avatar 2) enters (who has worked with a previous visitor) and begins telling the visitor about themselves. What the visitor does not know (at this stage) is the avatar is demonstrating their imitation of a previous visitor (Visitor 2), who has already been through the process and the imitated visitor (Visitor 2) is now

⁷² Always removed and alienated from the in-itself.

⁷³ In this project are comprised of Alexander Devriendt, Charlotte De Bruyne, Kristof Coenen, Nicolaas Leten, Maria Dafneros, Joeri Smet, Eden Falk, Aurélie Lannoy and Sophie De Somere.

⁷⁴ *All Work and No Plays: Blueprints for 9 Theatre Performances by Ontroerend Goed* (Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

also observing from behind the two-way mirror. If one's awareness of their condition of constant surveillance is not already stimulated, from being put in the intensified position of one being watched, then the reversal of roles (into that of the one watching) should lay any ambiguity to rest concerning the way that one's bodily acts are observed by (increasingly hidden and ubiquitous) others in the configuration, interpretation and establishment of one's self.



Figure 14 Angelo Tijssens and participant. *Ontroerend Goed, A Game of You*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2015). Photograph by Mihaela Bodlovic.

This phenomenon is far more explicitly rendered as Visitor 1 is escorted out of the waiting room into a corridor where they are faced with Avatar 1, who (armed with a set of ‘remarkable actions’) mimics the movement of Visitor 1 as they walk down the corridor. Eventually, when Visitor 1 clearly understands the imitative game being played by Avatar 1, Avatar 1 leads Visitor 1 into another room (called the ‘copy room’ in the reflective literature⁷⁵), identical to the waiting room. This time Avatar 1 joins Visitor 1 immediately and begins asking them questions, whilst all the time imitating their movements. By stimulating the visitor with questions, the avatar can “pay special attention to the visitor’s reactions” (2014, p. 141) and elicit more material for later mimicry. Not only

⁷⁵ *All Work and No Plays: Blueprints for 9 Theatre Performances by Ontroerend Goed* (Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

does the avatar mimic the visitor responsively, as a direct mirror image to the situation, but they also integrate gestures and actions observed in the waiting room. Just before the visitor is asked to leave the copy room, they are presented with a projected video of themselves in the waiting room.

The feedback loop that Ontroerend Goed establish in this relatively short space of time (surveillance, reproduction and appropriation) could be considered an imitation⁷⁶ of the cycle one becomes caught in when engaged in social media. As demonstrated above, many people in contemporary western society, perform digital acts online as users on social media platforms. Social media providers⁷⁷ monitor and record these digital acts of online users with the intention of selling this data to advertising agencies. The collected online digital acts of any given user are collated and sold. If one assumes that the self is a collection of acts performed by a conscious being, then it is the online/digital self of the user that is commodified by social media providers. The aforementioned advertising agencies use the data (the online digital activity of social media users) to establish targeted advertising that floods those users with advertisements for products most suited to their activity, in the hope they will purchase them (Fuchs, 2017, pp. 131-142). Continued engagement in online activity (most notably on social media), commodification of one's online self and consumption of commodities (targeted at commodified users) traps the user in a feedback loop of exploitation.

Not even half-way through the performance encounter, the visitor has already been confronted with a mirroring of their actions in three different forms: physical glass mirror, performative imitation by an avatar and projected video. Through these three different mediums, the participant is encouraged to consider how their actions constitute a self that is particular to them. And yet, these actions are subject to a process of objectification; they are both transferred into a reproducible digital medium and adopted by another intentional conscious human being.

Ontroerend Goed do not state any explicit objective concerning the use of social media in the establishment and development of one's self. However, the cultural context of their work cannot but help to influence their decision to investigate selfhood. The company refer to *A Game of You* not as a one-on-one performance, but as a "one-on-oneself" performance (2014, p. 133). Their investigation is in at least some small way responsive to the impact that digitally apprehended acts (posts: videos, photos, written thoughts, etc.) and

⁷⁶ The specificity of Ontroerend Goed's intention concerning social media neoliberalism is unclear.

⁷⁷ Christian Fuchs asserts that Facebook and Google are the two primary examples of social media providers that engage in the collection, commodification and sale of users' data to advertising agencies (Fuchs, 2017).

digitally generated endeavours (likes, shares, comments, etc.) have on how the self is constituted and commodified in contemporary western society (Lonergan, 2016).

One's offline actions (subsequently uploaded) and online actions accumulate in the same way that actions will have accumulated prior to social media. However, the permanence of one's feed, timeline or story (Goodings & Tucker, 2014), combined with the expanded social audience afforded by the 'digitality' (Negroponte, 2015) and connectivity of the internet means that the self-presented online augments one's facticity. If the anchor of one's facticity is made heavier by the weight of one's online presence, it makes it that much more difficult to transcend.

By reminding and confronting participants with the factual fragments of their self, Ontroerend Goed fortify a static image of the participant in his or her own mind. If one is defined by what one already is, one is caught in a cycle of reinforcing one's facticity and not embracing the opportunity to engage in an ongoing mode of becoming. One falls into the ordered structures that flank the liminal condition of authenticity. This reinforcement of one's self is pushed to such a point that the audience member becomes hyper-aware of their tendency towards certain patterns or behaviours. Such a mindfulness can lead to a subversion of and rebellion against the static self in favour of change and development. Ontroerend Goed reveal the inauthentic inclination of clinging to socially conditioned self-identity. They do so by conducting a character study of each participant that volunteers to play *A Game of You*.

VI. FREEDOM, AGENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY

It is this very transcendence that Heidegger and Sartre hold up as the counterpoint to one's facticity, and as central to negotiating one's authentic-self. In the process of problematising the participatory modes of engagement intrinsic to both neoliberal culture and social media engagement (such as generating content and big data), the issue of individual agency (against the backdrop of one's facticity) persistently underpins participatory practice in contemporary performance. Works such as Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2013) confront the issue of agency in contemporary western society through modes of audience participation, albeit in ways that subverts the initial choice to participate. They operate within the frameworks and ideologies of possibility and responsibility.

To be able to discuss agency in the context of authenticity however, one must first consider how agency emerges from fundamental human freedom. Heidegger considered human freedom in primarily temporal terms; although *Dasein* is steeped in history, one's ability to project into the future cracks open the immutability of the

past (made present) to express a theoretically infinite field of possibility. Similarly, Sartre takes on the root of freedom, as located in the rupture between Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. Once again, this is a codified rendering of the Heideggerian model, whereby elapsed acts are fixed in the past, as solid and self-identical (as any other Being-in-itself), and the for-itself represents the wide-open emptiness of one's reflective consciousness, but also of one's future, pregnant with infinite possibility.

Sartre's impression of freedom is not typified nor really associated with the giddy heights of liberation from physical bondage. Rather, his concern dwelt in the crushing responsibility that one confronts in the face of freedom, encapsulated in his oft-quoted mantra: "man is condemned to be free." (1946, p. 29) The heightened sensation of the responsibility for one's choices is only alleviated by denying one's freedom or operating in a mode of self-deception, whereby the responsibility for one's choices is projected onto an external source or agent. Sartre calls this mode of self-deception 'bad faith' (1943, p. 47).

Often the external source comes in the form of one's own facticity, in some cases compounded and nurtured by other conscious beings⁷⁸. These scapegoats of one's own freedom offer a reprieve from one's responsibility. But prolonged investment in this practice of bad faith brings about a loss of one's own 'ownness' (*Eigentlichkeit*) (Heidegger, 1927). One's ownness is absorbed and replaced by an identity almost entirely constituted of motivations and actions foreign to one's individual and unique authentic-self. If one is unable to take responsibility for one's own choices (founded in basic human freedom) then one cannot hope to have any efficacy in the world.

The impression of having some impact on one's situation due to one's choices is characterised as one's *agency*. With no agency, one cannot expect to cut a path through the world distinct to oneself and discrete from all others. If one does not engage with one's own freedom, take on the responsibility for this freedom and exercise one's agency as a being-in-the-world, then one will soon find oneself under the influence of the agency of others, following pathways laid out by others (that are not one's own) and succumbing to one's facticity.

In *Western Society* (2013), "bi-national artists collective" (Gob Squad, 2010, p. 10) Gob Squad sustain a nuanced presentation of agency by exposing participating audience members to (what they may perceive as) both opportunities to exercise their freedom, and others where they are gently relieved of their agency and responsibility and encouraged to act in bad faith. Gob Squad are made up of a central roster of Sean Patten, Sarah

⁷⁸ Which are discussed in more depth below.

Thom, Sharon Smith, Simon Will, Johanna Freiburg, Berit Stumpf and Bastian Trost⁷⁹, however since their inception they have collaborated with a range of different performers, designers and artists.

Gob Squad claim to “try and explore the point where theatre meets art, media and real life” (Gob Squad, 2015) and do so by producing live performance-based work that integrates video-art and often invites the audience to participate in the action of the piece in some way. The performers in any given Gob Squad performance tend not to adopt a fictional character, opting rather to present a version of themselves who then engage in both predetermined and improvised tasks. Although Gob Squad’s work is mostly structured and rehearsed, there is plenty of opportunity for digression and extemporisation. This is especially true when participants from the audience are introduced into the performance action.

In *Western Society*, the process – to make the audience mindful of their agency – begins approximately half-way into the performance. The performers come to an impasse whereby they state they cannot continue the performance without the help of members of the audience⁸⁰. To select participants from the auditorium they throw seven stuffed animals (“cuddly toys”) one by one into the audience, one per participating audience member. Gob Squad’s choice to employ cuddly toys as their method for inviting audience members to participate could be an attempt to evoke an innocent playfulness and comfort. The tactile softness of the toys is non-threatening and more inviting than a pointed finger or verbal command. It is also at odds with the digitally mediated encounter that the audience will have experienced thus far in the performance. In the moment of deciding whether to accept the invitation to participate the audience are confronted with the potentially authentic act to engage with their freedom. Because their freedom also carries with it responsibility and consequence, the discomfort that a spectator may feel as a result of the choice to choose freely and face the consequences is neutralized by the offer of a comforting cuddly toy. This act is but the culmination of the selection phase in Gob Squad’s process of participation, which breaks down into two parts: (a) observation and reception of audience communication and (b) analysis of this communication through a set of specified criteria.

In an FAQ answer video on the Gob Squad website, Sarah Thom talks about how Gob Squad observe how potential participants communicate with one another and how they (maybe unknowingly) communicate with the performance maker before the performance has officially begun (Thom, 2010). In the video, she describes

⁷⁹ The group was formed in Nottingham, UK, but all members are based and live in Berlin, Germany. As a result of both their extended residence and gradual integration into the German theatre scene, Gob Squad have benefitted from the support and encouragement of the thriving German arts community and robust German cultural policy.

⁸⁰ There are only ever four performers attempting to re-enact a video (found online) that features seven individuals.

how that, even without this up-close contact, Gob Squad can make certain judgments and decisions based on their mediated interaction with the audience. She states that “often you are able to tell who is curious and might be up for talking or doing something, by the way they look at you” (2010, p. 90) and conversely that “their body language and eye contact will soon tell you if they are interested in participating.” (2010, p. 91) All of these communicative characteristics (described by Thom) are examples of where verbal and tonal communication are *not* present. In this situation, the performer only has the physical and visual communication of the audience members' bodies and their actions, to decide as to whether they select them to participate in the performance or not.

There is a nuanced process of selection at work as evidenced above by Gob Squad. The manner in which the cuddly toys are *thrown* out into the auditorium however, introduces an important element of *chance* into the invitation process. Where Gob Squad may have narrowed down the pool of potential participants they plan to invite into the performance, the impression of randomisation, that launching the object into the audience has on the prospective participants, generates the illusion that *any* of the spectators could be invited to participate.



Figure 15 Participant (with cuddly toy) exiting the auditorium and travelling to stage. Gob Squad, *Western Society*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin (2013). Photograph from video footage documentation.

The pretense of chance is important for the invited spectator because once they receive the cuddly toy, it puts the choice wholly in their hands; the toy could quite easily have ended up in the lap of another unsuspecting audience member. The external influence on their agency is minimised if it was not driven by the intention of

other conscious subjects. The weight of responsibility generated in this situation not only fortifies the choice to participate that is eventually made, but verifies the autonomy of that choice in the mind of the invited spectator. To have made a choice and to feel the choice was one's own, with little to no external influence or pressure is the definition of an authentic choice. The capacity to make such a choice, to think that, that choice was a product of one's own motivations, and to accept any consequences borne by the choice, all indicate an authentic engagement with one's fundamental freedom and liminal existence.

The responsibility for the choice to participate is further impressed upon the audience in another exchange between Sharon Smith (who has just thrown the first cuddly toy into the audience) and Sarah Thom (who is sat behind the projection screen on a sofa in the performance area):

Sharon: But what if they don't wanna come?

Sarah: They just hand it on to somebody else/that little bear...

Sharon: They just throw it away; it's as simple as that?

Sarah: Throw it to someone who *does* want it Sharon.

(Gob Squad, 2013)

This exchange between the two performers reinforces the sense of agency the invited spectator has by stressing the freedom the audience has in the choice of whether they should participate or not. This method of 'overt' invitation (White, 2013) takes the initial steps to drawing the invited spectators' attention to the freedom fundamental to their existence as spectator, participant and embodied subject. But more importantly, in the context of contemporary western neoliberal digital society, it engenders an awareness of how one's agency may not be realised in the way one may have thought it had been, as a social media prosumer. Alternatively, even if the participant(s) were fully cognizant of the intentional devolution of their freedom, such an intense focus on and engagement in one's agency may stir something in the participant to take hold of their agency beyond the performance encounter and in their online and capitalistic activity.

Pure (albeit concentrated) alertness to the potential of one's freedom does not constitute an active engagement with one's agency. The question now becomes: why would spectators choose to accept the invitation to participate once they have been made painfully aware of their responsibility for their freedom? Of course, it is not only this realisation that they are wholly responsible for their decision to participate, should they make it. Gareth White suggests that:

When participatory theatre invites performances from audience members, it presents special opportunities for embarrassment, for mis-performance and reputation damage, such that the maintenance of control and the assertion of agency that protects this decorum is important to the potential audience participant, especially at the moment of invitation.

(White, 2013, p. 73)

This describes the *risk* audience members (facing the invitation to participate) perceive and the risk that ultimately influences the decision as to whether they will accept the invitation. This risk is founded in the fracturing of one's established public identity. One may have cultivated a consistent identity that presents a certain image to one or many people. Entering a participatory situation where one may not have as much control or one cannot easily foresee the outcome of one's involvement, there is a far higher risk of disrupting or contradicting one's public identity. Participants may be put in a situation where they must react to events or are asked to perform tasks. Their immediate reaction to a performance event or direct response to a task may present a self that is contrary to what had previously been established and maintained. The mobilisation of one's agency as a means to sustaining a consistent and static identity for others presents an (in)authentic tension. How can one be authentically engaged in one's agency and freedom, while also attempting to preserve an inauthentic-self that is fundamentally bound to one's facticity? One cannot. One's agency is not contingent upon the constitution of a self that is perpetually engaged in a liminal mode of becoming, but the emergence of an authentic-self that *is* defined by one's state of becoming is only possible if one profoundly expresses one's freedom as an agent.

What White proceeds to suggest is that participatory practitioners ('procedural authors') *manage* the risk perceived by the prospective participant to make them more susceptible to participating. This is done several ways, however the primary strategy for alleviating the audience's sensitivity to the risks of participatory involvement, is to define the boundaries of their participation. By making the frame of participation distinct, procedural authors (such as Gob Squad) form a *finite* spatial, temporal and exertive region for participants to operate in.

Gob Squad achieve this level of procedural management by first demonstrating the activity they wish participants to be engaged in (re-enactment of found footage) themselves. As each participant is selected, and they consent to joining the performers in the performance area, they are directed to a table far stage-left where technicians wait with seven pairs of headphones attached to wireless receiver packs housed in small gold-coloured satchels. Once all seven participants are furnished with wireless packs, the headphones are used to direct the participants in the re-enactment of 'the least watched video on the internet'. In the first instance, Gob Squad minimised the perceived risk by preserving the spectators' agency and establishing a clear frame of participation.

However, once the spectators accept the participatory invitation, their agency is diminished and the discrepancy between maintaining their agency and sustaining a fixed public identity is put under pressure.



Figure 16 Participant being fitted with wireless headphone pack. Gob Squad, *Western Society*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin (2013). Photograph from video footage documentation.

By using the wireless microphones dotted about the performance area the performers can speak through the wireless headphone system to either individual participants, groups of participants or all seven at once. Gob Squad describe the use of headphones (across multiple projects) to direct action or feed dialogue to participants as a strategy to strip the performing participant of their sense of individuality and identity through the mediation of the acts and speech:

I don't speak; rather things are spoken through me. Or rather, I am spoken and I initially carry neither the responsibility for what is said, nor can I establish direct and unmediated feelings towards what is said, because I don't know how the text I am hearing develops, nor can I influence it. In this way, lives, texts and narratives can be made audible free from any psychology and pathos and their essence and authorship cannot be accounted for. The technique of mediated speech takes the replacement and dissolution of individuality and identity [...] to extremes.

Gob Squad, 2010 p. 72

By submitting themselves to external direction, the participants in *Western Society* are partially blinding their own foresight; as they are fed direction and dialogue to execute immediately after it is received, the ability to form a focused and finite set of possibilities is curtailed by the much broader range of possibilities that comes as a result of the ambiguity of the situation. In the face of such a vast range of possibilities the participant looks to shift the responsibility of their overwhelming freedom on to the other – members of Gob Squad feeding them direction.

In doing so, the participants willingly surrender their agency but also run the risk of embarrassment and the fragmenting of their otherwise carefully constructed public personae. There is a displacement of agency and responsibility at the cost of constancy and stability in one's public-self. Authenticity is the alignment of one's existence founded in negation, the liminal negotiation of one's past facticity and future possibility, and the expression of this liminality in one's agency. Without all interlocking components, one flounders inauthentically.

VII. THE INFLUENCE OF THE OTHER ON THE (IN)AUTHENTIC-SELF

The choice to participate in general and the decision to follow the instructions being issued (via the wireless headphones) is still very much within the hands of the participants, even though the suggestion to act as a response to direction, unambiguously originates external to the participant. Therefore, the responsibility of the act (once carried out) is inauthentically thought of as resting with the agent(s) issuing the direction: the members of Gob Squad. As soon as any dissidence arises and participants resist the instructions being fed to them, the agency shifts towards the participant, at least from their perspective.

This is the psychological strategy that Gob Squad rely on to persuade participants to perform the suggested actions and put them at ease in what could be otherwise considered as a stressful and socially high-risk situation (White, 2013). A parallel to such a set up could be found in situations analogous to this and indeed *all* ontologically fathomable situations, like Sartre and Heidegger placing all responsibility on the *individual*, as a result of the freedom manifest in their ambiguous Being-non-Being-becoming. In everyday situations, one is fundamentally responsible for one's choices and actions on an ontological level. By introducing an external entity (like biological predispositions, social norms, dominant political ideologies, etc.) to take on the responsibility for one's decisions and actions one can alleviate the burden one might feel as a result of one's freedom. Gob Squad take on the role of scapegoat by making the participant think the responsibility for their actions has been displaced onto the individual(s) feeding them instructions. To make a participant believe that the responsibility is shifted away from them to an external entity (in this case the performers who feed the participant direction and dialogue)

is to explicitly allow the participant to act in bad faith.

The primary example both Heidegger and Sartre draw upon, concerning external entities (that can act as scapegoats for one's freedom and responsibility) are other conscious beings. The continental phenomenological tradition that Heidegger and Sartre sat atop largely adopted the position established by Edmund Husserl who suggested by experiencing the world of objects, one inevitably experiences the Other and in turn the Other experiences one amongst the world of objects. Similarly, Heidegger did not necessarily make any differentiation between the world and those other conscious beings that inhabit it. The problem of other (conscious) minds had already been approached in the writing of John Stuart Mill (1865) where the main explanation is that of the 'analogical inference'. The analogic inference suggests that we believe that other beings have minds like our own because they display behaviour that we can observe in ourselves. The assumption is that these behaviours are a criterial consequence of a variety of mental states. This approach has a few issues, in that it is entirely uncheckable and is based on a behaviourist hypothesis, whereby externally observable behaviour in other beings is a product of an inner life of conscious awareness (Skinner, 1974).

With regards to theorising performance (participatory or otherwise) and particularly in the critical analysis of social media and its use in contemporary western society the concept of one's self is important to highlight, because it proposes the expression of one's conscious Being that makes one discrete from the rest of the world from the perspective of *other conscious beings*. The issue of multiple conscious beings and their relationship with one another is important in negotiating how one constitutes and perceives one's self (as authentic or inauthentic), but also in the theorisation of performance.

In this context I employ the term 'the Other' as an umbrella term to describe a few different ontological relationships, however I always endeavour to specify in what capacity I am using the term. Fundamentally, 'the Other' describes any subject that is other than oneself (external to one's embodied subjectivity) that one also considers to be conscious (a subject) in the same way one is. In the phenomenological tradition that Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre established and developed, otherness was conceived of almost entirely at this fundamentally ontological level. The Other and Otherness have also been constituted and considered across a range of increasingly complex psychological, socio-political and cultural situations. For instance, Jacques Lacan (1953) introduced the concept of the Other to signify what he terms 'the symbolic order', which is one's awareness of anonymous authoritative "trans-individual socio-linguistic structures." (Johnston, 2018) The symbolic order is arguably at work as one is engaged in a number of different situations including social media (Hardy, 2013),

Lacan operated primarily within the discourses of psychology, where I would like to remain conceptually in the realm of existentialism.

The discourse surrounding otherness and alterity in theories concerned with postcolonialism (Said, 1978), race (Fanon, 1952) and gender (Beauvoir, 1949)⁸¹ (to name but a few) take the essential framework developed by the existentialists to apply to their respective areas (Zimmermann, 2016). The models of otherness that emerge retain Heideggerian and Sartrean intersubjectivity at their root and build from it to problematise the complex relations between psychologically, socio-politically and culturally diverse peoples.

The existentially ontological and phenomenological application of ‘The Other’ building on the theoretical frames introduced by Heidegger and Sartre can be used to describe *individual* subjects (other than oneself) within the range of one’s sensory apparatus. Here ‘the Other’ can refer to a specific individual that one may engage in a one-to-one relationship or interaction with. For instance, I may refer to a participating audience member as the subject (and the self that they express) and the other participants, audience members or performers as the Other respectively.

‘The Other’ can also describe both individual and multiple subjects (of indeterminate quantity) that are *not* physically present or within the range of one’s sensory apparatus. Yet, one would only refer to such entities as ‘the Other’ if these other subjects still have some influence over the way one reflects on subjectivity or impacts the way that one constitutes or perceives one’s self, despite their physical absence. This situation is particularly relevant to the study of how individual subjects are faced with other (multiple) digitally mediated subjects as users of social media software and interfaces.

Sartre proposes that one can immediately recognise the Other through what he calls ‘the Look’ (1943). He suggests that when one experiences the *sensation* of being looked at, by what one supposes to be another conscious being, one encounters their subjectivity (or capacity for negation founded in the for-itself) in the acute and explicit awareness of one’s own objectivity (our bodily Being-in-itself). This perceived objectivity promotes bad faith because one considers oneself an object. If one considers oneself an object then one does not recognise one’s own freedom and therefore one does not act upon the world as an agent but is rather acted upon as an object by other agents. By pushing the responsibility of one’s agency on the Other, one is inauthentically expressing one’s choice by appropriating the free will of the Other.

⁸¹ I am aware that the fields of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, postcolonial theory and gender theory reach far beyond the examples given here, but these are significant works and act as representatives for each respective field.

The sensation of the Look does not necessarily need to be accompanied by the physical presence of the Other, but rather simply the feeling of being watched. This comprehension of the Other, as beyond the immediate and proximal, unifies Heidegger and Sartre's conception of the Other as an ontological prerequisite of human existence. Heidegger suggests that one is fundamentally a being-in-the-world-with-others. The Other's omnipresence is such that Heidegger goes as far as to state that:

The phenomenological statement that *Dasein* in itself is essentially being-with has an existential-ontological meaning. It does not intend to ascertain ontically that I am factually not objectively present alone, rather that others of my kind also are [*vorkommen*]. If the statement that the being-in-the-world of *Dasein* is essentially constituted by being-with meant something like this, being-with would not be an existential attribute that belongs to *Dasein* itself on the basis of its kind of being, but something which occurs at times on the basis of the existence of others. Being-with existentially determines *Dasein* even when an other is not factually present and perceived.

Heidegger, 1927 pp. 156-57

Having established the ontological predicate of 'being-with', Heidegger also goes on to state that *Dasein* cannot know itself authentically until it has made itself discrete from the rest of the world and therefore stands apart from the homogenous mass of other people (the 'they' or '*Das Man*') that inhabit it (1927). Therefore, one is always susceptible to falling into the inauthentic mode of falling into the they and discharging one's agency onto the Other.

With the ubiquity of the Other firmly established by both Heidegger and Sartre (as both being-with and manifest in 'the Look' respectively), the Other can be conceived of as more than individual conscious beings and begin to take on a more abstract and conceptual significance. Not only can the Other be considered in terms of the immediate phenomenal presence of other conscious beings, but the presence of the Other can manifest itself in one's broader comprehension of being-in-the-world-with-others. The primary difference between the Other that concerns Heidegger and Sartre, and a disembodied conceptual Other is that the former is embodied and the latter is virtual and entirely expressed through digitally mediated and representational means.

The implication of augmenting the embodied Other with the virtual Other is one can never be certain if and when the Other is present or when one's being-with is manifest in the Look. One can never truly know if one is being watched. This ambiguity implies that if one can never know when one is alone, then one is somehow always subject to the Look. Therefore, one feels one's being-with and the influence of the Other persistently and far more acutely. If one cannot negotiate the space to negate the Other, then one will struggle to constitute oneself

relative to the Other. One's choices and identity will always be for-others. This type of submission to the Other (on any level) is indicative of the inauthentic-self.

This tension between embodied and virtual otherness is addressed to some extent in all five instances of performance hitherto discussed. In *World Without Us*, Ontroerend Goed consider how consciously generated meaning and significance subsist beyond the existence of the embodied beings (the self and the Other). Ontroerend Goed do what they can to make this incomprehensible situation intelligible for an audience, however it becomes clear that without the fundamental relationship between conscious beings (self and Other), there is no guarantee of meaning that is impervious to the inevitability of entropy and return to unadulterated Being-in-itself.

I Wish I Was Lonely (although not as extreme or abstract as *World Without Us*) considers this relationship between embodied and virtual otherness manifest in the tension between one's immediate phenomenal social interactions and the anonymous horde of one's digital social audience, looming in the form of unread notifications (real or impending) on one's mobile internet device. Mobile social digital notifications evoke a very real feeling of being-with without the presence of the embodied Other.

Blast Theory's *Karen* also adopts the mode of mobile notifications during the two-week encounter as a reflection of social media notifications. The heterogenous virtual Other manifest in them is distilled into an embodied (albeit temporally and spatially mediated) Other, in the form of Karen. This complicates one's relationship with the Other further. Participants may be savvy to the fact that the interaction between them and Karen is not live (spatio-temporally synchronous), but the simulation of liveness in the embodied/virtual Other generates the same sensation of being Looked at.

Such a tension is also shown through the bodily presence/absence of performers in *A Game of You* as the embodied reflections of the visitors' physical acts are juxtaposed with clandestinely recorded footage of the visitor, played back to them. In this case, the virtual Other is represented by the impersonal and disembodied gaze of technology, which when compared to the imitation performed by the embodied Other (performer/avatar) poses far less of a threat in terms of how one's self is apprehended and exploited.

Finally, Gob Squad present a very similar dichotomy of live embodied spectator/Other and anonymous spectral online Other in *Western Society*. By uploading the participant-featured re-enactment to YouTube after the live performance, Gob Squad transform the embodied Other into the virtual. This transformation can be felt most keenly if one visits the Gob Squad YouTube channel. One is faced with over 70 uploaded re-enactment videos across different performances.

Spectators one may have sat next to in an auditorium or fellow participants that one performed across are transformed from an embodied Other in the flesh to pixels on a screen. One may have felt the visceral Look of the embodied Other in the performance encounter, however when this person is translated into online digital content, they augment the ubiquitous mass of the virtual Other. At least when one is faced with the embodied Other, there are opportunities to evade or escape their Look and carve out one's own space to develop authentically. With the ubiquity of online and social media technology, comes the omnipresence of the Look of the virtual Other. Under this constant gaze, one can habitually express oneself inauthentically.

As these aesthetic interpretations demonstrate, both conceptions of the Other are complicated by the contemporary mode of sociality as it is manifest online through social media. This is not simply symptomatic of the spatio-temporal distancing that occurs between individual users, but it is also because one's operation within this mode of being-with forces participants to interact with one another through a limited set of communicative apparatus⁸². The limitation of communicative modes also engenders a homogeneity that (when combined with the sheer number of users engaged in social media activity) does little to prevent one from being dissolved into the 'they', in the process that Heidegger refers to as 'falling' (1927).

Despite the influence the Other may have on the way one conducts oneself, or in the way one negotiates one's facticity, there is no way of appropriating the subjectivity (or unique mode of negation) specific to the Other. The way one is perceived by others is what Sartre calls one's 'being-for-others'. If one is driven to act (and constitute one's identity) by the perception of one's self in the minds of the Other, then one can be said to be existing in the mode of being-for-others. One can try to act in a way in an attempt to affect the Other's perception of oneself, but there is no certainty in the efficacy of this endeavour. As Sartre succinctly puts it, "I am responsible for my being-for-others, but I am not the foundation of it." (1943, p. 386) Excessive investment in one's attempt to control the Look of the Other results only in an alienation of one's own freedom and agency and further submission to the will of the Other, which is once again an explicit manifestation of bad faith.

Ontroerend Goed's *Internal* (2007) can be considered an interrogation of intimacy, trust and betrayal between strangers (Trueman, 2009). However, it is equally a demonstration of how participatory strategies in performance can manipulate participants into operating in the mode of being-for-others. Such a manipulation can be considered an attempt to increase audience awareness of their everyday mode of being-for-others. In the 25-minute performance, groups of five participants are ushered into individual cubicles and engaged in intimate

⁸² Please see Chapter V for deeper analysis of social media mediatization.

conversation by one of five performers⁸³ in a scenario that draws upon both “the speed dating and group therapy templates.” (Sawers, 2009). Both situations explicitly prioritise one’s being-for-others because the underlying approach to these encounters is to become mindful of how one is perceived by others. Ontroerend Goed adopt these frameworks and so produce situations that necessitate a heightened being-for-others. The performers ask the participants questions such as, “how old are you?”, “what do you do for a living?”, “what’s your first impression of me?”, “are you in a relationship?”, “do you like me?” and in most instances the participants are asked to close their eyes, imagine a place, imagine that they are there with the performer and are then asked what they are doing in that place.

Each performer uses a different approach to intimately draw information out about their respective participant, ranging from what the participant finds attractive, through to how the participant honestly feels or what they think about the performer. Some performers flirt, others adopt an apathetic attitude, others are friendly, and one communicates almost purely through physicality. In three out of the five secluded performance encounters, the performers attempt to elicit a kiss from the participant.

When the five performers and five participants reconvene in the shared space (outside the cubicles), the performers reveal the information that they collected from their respective participants to the rest of the performance party. To begin with, the information is largely positive and the performers state how they and their participant share various features or opinions. The next round reveals something more intimate about the private encounter. The performers use the relationships forged between them and their participants to excuse negative judgements and information. The performers then begin to stretch the answers given and start adding to the facticity of the actual answers given in private.

Both phases of the performance (the privately intimate and publicly exposed) find participants faced with intense relationships with the embodied Other. Whilst in one-to-one conversation with their designated performer, participants are asked questions about their personal beliefs, behaviours and desires. Through this line of questioning, the performers manoeuvre the participants into a psychological position whereby they become significantly more aware of how they are perceived socially, politically, romantically or sexually by others, specifically the embodied Other manifest in the performer.

⁸³ The five performers adopt one of the following roles: ‘The Negative One’, ‘The Silent One’, ‘The Critical One’, ‘The Female Seducer’ and ‘The Male Seducer’. These roles were originally divided amongst Alexander Devriendt, Joeri Smet, Aurélie Lannoy, Sophie De Somere and Nicolaas Leten.

Matt Trueman likened *Internal* to a “hall of mirrors that reflects with a warped honesty.” (2009) The metaphor of reflection is not only prevalent across several of the show’s reviews, but it is also evocative of how the performers provoke the participants into bringing fragments of their facticity to the forefront of their consciousness by answering their carefully targeted questions. The intimacy of the one-to-one conversations seduce participants into exhuming their past (facticity) and bring it rushing into the present. Participants are faced with the reflection of their facticity through the eyes of the embodied Other. This can induce a state of mindfulness about how one expresses one’s self and one’s past deeds to the Other. One’s being-for-others is not explicitly exposed and made plain until one’s answers are fed back in the presence of 9 more embodied Others.

As the exposure of elicited facts shifts into supposition and fabrication the extent of the participants’ being-for-others is intensified. As the performers reveal the information that one disclosed to them in private, they are presenting one’s self from outside one’s embodied consciousness. It is confirmation of how one is perceived by the Other. As the accurate information gives way to conjecture, one’s self moves further from one’s deeds and conscious intentions and towards an image of oneself entirely constituted by the Other.

It was this warped exposure of one’s confidentially disclosed facticity to the other performers and participants that yielded such extreme reactions from participants, especially when it was performed in the United Kingdom (Needham, 2013). The betrayal participants felt was rooted in the explicit declaration of their facticity. Where before, the reflection of one’s “least favourite features” (Trueman, 2009) was only implied and on a private one-to-one basis, the unambiguous public expression and construal of one’s private facticity is a clear indication of how one is perceived and constituted in the minds of the Other. Not only is one’s being-for-others reinforced by one’s corresponding performer, but as one is publicly exposed, this awareness of and urge to control how one is perceived by the Other is multiplied as other performers and participants become privy to one’s disclosed fragments of facticity.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this chapter was to clearly outline and rigorously develop a model of (in)authentic action that pertains to the constitution and presentation of the authentic or inauthentic self. I have interrogated the different factors that Heidegger and Sartre intimated were influential in the establishment and identification of the authentic and indeed inauthentic self. Having done so, one can interpret the phenomena of contemporary participatory performance practice and neoliberal social media participation through several lenses

to determine how they could be influencing and affecting one's disposition towards (in)authenticity.

I have explored fundamental human ontology (according to Heidegger and Sartre), one's situation, and how one negotiates existing *qua* time. I have considered the way one constitutes one's self, the way one engages with one's agency, and one's fluctuating relationship with the Other. I have proposed that by establishing a liminal balance between the extremes of these conditions, one can feasibly express oneself authentically.

Each instrumental constituent (ontological negation, facticity, *durée*, selfhood, agency and the Other) is somehow manifest in contemporary western society. The phenomena of social media technology and one's orientation towards it reveals a fundamental exploitation of the ontological mechanisms that determine one's (in)authenticity. Neoliberal capitalism and consumer culture promote and operate under the pretense that one can fill the void at the heart of conscious existence with material commodities. By assuming the role of online prosumer, one is immersed in one's situation and becomes indistinguishable from one's online facticity: based in what one consumes. One's online trace is a constant reminder of one's past and encourages a far more constrictive spatial perception of how one temporalises one's Being. Consequently, the stasis of one's online deeds constitutes a static self which conflicts with one's engagement in a mode of becoming. The static online self is further fortified as an inauthentic expression of one's Being as it is reflected in the subjectivity of the manifold and digitally augmented virtual Other.

Furthermore, there are examples of how contemporary performance practice respectively addresses each aspect of both the underlying ontological influences, and contemporary socio-political and economic manifestations of (in)authenticity. The works of Ontroerend Goed, Gob Squad, Walker and Thorpe, Michael Landy, and Blast Theory all employ participation in some way to engage in interrogations of one or more of the issues that contribute to the generation of the (in)authentic self in contemporary western society.

CHAPTER IV:
INAUTHENTIC SOCIAL MEDIA(TION)
&
Accepting the Participatory Invitation

The reason that participatory performance practice has re-emerged since the mid-2000s is causally connected to the way that sociality has moved *online*, and has more recently migrated onto social media platforms. Having probed the mode of existential (in)authenticity (that these performances seem to be responding to), I must now tackle the question of how and why specifically participatory strategies have (re)emerged in *contemporary* performance. The shift of sociality into the digital realm in and of itself might not necessarily be the sole concern of contemporary practice, nor is it the impetus for employing and developing intentionally participatory modes of engagement. Social media itself is not inauthentic. Rather, contemporary participatory performance practice is a response to an intensely inauthentic orientation and engagement with social media technology. This recent development of technological intervention into sociality is changing the way people ‘present the self’ (Goffman, 1959) and how they interact with the Other.

Social media technology has the potential to be an instrument of authentic expression. However, one’s orientation towards such a technology is influenced by the context in which the technology was established and is operated within (Heidegger, 1954). The context in which social media technology has been developed is immersed in the ideology of neoliberal capitalism (Fuchs, 2017). Therefore, the inauthentic modes of participation (that participatory practice is responding to) are a manifestation of a neoliberal orientation towards social media technology as previously explored. Participatory performance practice employs technologies associated with social media participation, not only to reflect and highlight one’s inauthentic neoliberal orientation towards it, but also to reveal the potential that same technology has as an authentic mode of ‘bringing-forth’ sociality and self-expression (Heidegger, 1954).

I. HEIDEGGER, ‘MODERN’ TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

One's orientation towards technology was considered at length by Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954). Although in 1954, Heidegger may not have anticipated the *precise* advancements made in communications technology, which over the next sixty years paved the way for social media, his thought concerning the way humans orient themselves towards (what he considered) 'modern' technology can be applied directly to the mode in which one engages with social media platforms. In 1949, when Heidegger first presented his ideas concerning technology in a series of lectures at the Bremen Club, the industrialisation of mass slaughter and mobilisation of destructive technologies were still fresh in the minds of many Europeans. In the aftermath of the WW2 however, some of the most enduring and pervading technologies were those that contributed towards "collapsing distance and levelling the once mysterious, massive, and, at times, recalcitrant earth to a quite manageable global village." (O'Brien, 2004) The exportation of mass media like film, radio and television across the globe and increasing permeation of telecommunications networks were likely to be the instigator for Heidegger's concern about technology.

For Heidegger, technology itself and its developments were not the immediate issue; he often cites the 'essence' (*Wesen*) of technology. Heidegger was searching for a primal explanation of humanity's *orientation* towards technology and in turn how it affects one's orientation towards and comprehension of the world, rather than proposing an essentialist understanding of technology as a being in the world. So, where Heidegger spoke of the 'essence' of technology, what is really under scrutiny is one's relationship with, use of and 'orientation' towards it, as an instrument in one's project⁸⁴.

The development of social media platform software, mobile internet and smart phone technology, in isolation do not pose a threat to one's authentic expression of self. The issues surrounding social media that I have addressed so far (and those issues that I am yet to address) come because of how and why *users* (conscious human beings) *engage* with social media. Like Heidegger, what my inquiry is concerned with is the primal relationship one has with technology, how one's orientation towards technology is affecting how one comes to negotiate one's being-in-the-world, and more explicitly one's being-in-the-world-with-others, as it can be come to be understood in the pursuit of the authentic-self.

⁸⁴ 'Project' is a Heideggerian (1927) term which refers to the way that *Dasein* is always either projected towards something (in its intentionality) or that it is always projecting forwards into the future. *Dasein*'s possibility and very Being is defined as a project. One's life is a project because it is always directed at something beyond itself.

Since Heidegger published his main works between the 1920s and 1950s, clearly the technology he was referring to was not digital, nor was it predicated on any form of the internet (let alone web 2.0) one might recognise today. When he refers to ‘technology’, he does so in two general ways: technology as the fundamental means of instrumental production and manipulation of raw materials – often referred to as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand – *and* (in contrast) “modern machine-powered technology.” (Heidegger, 1954 p. 6) The latter still falls under the umbrella of ‘technology’ that the former does, but it is significantly different in both the way humans are orientated towards it and how it affects one’s orientation towards (and relationship with) the world that one finds oneself thrown into. In the former, Heidegger identifies a process of *revealing* through craftsmanship and the realisation of the potentiality of the beings in the world. He calls this mode of revealing ‘bringing-forth’ (*poiēsis*).

It is within the Heideggerian frames of ‘enframing’, ‘challenging-forth’, ‘standing-reserve’ and ‘bringing-forth’, that I will reveal users’ contemporary orientation towards social media as an instance of a ‘modern’ and consequently inauthentic mode of technological engagement. The same terminology that Heidegger used to describe and evaluate *Dasein*’s functional relationship with technology also directly maps onto the lexicon of neoliberal capitalism and will be discussed in further detail below. Between the equivalences that connect Heidegger’s modern technology with social media and neoliberal ideology, I identify contemporary participatory performance practice as the means for providing the circumstances conducive for bringing-forth and an authentic response to social media and neoliberalism.

To explore these claims, I shall be briefly investigating the potential of social media as a tool for expressing the authentic-self by comparing the ideals of participatory culture and participatory democracy with Heidegger’s mode of bringing-forth. Then I shall be investigating how neoliberal instrumentalism is manifest in both the pretence of community on social media, and in the participatory practice characterised by Bishop’s ‘social turn’. Finally, how the current orientation towards social media technology conforms to Heidegger’s modes of enframing, challenging-forth and standing-reserve will be demonstrated. In doing so, I will also be presenting instances of how contemporary participatory performance practice is reflecting and responding to this orientation.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA'S AUTHENTIC POTENTIAL

If an individual engages in social media through purely mediated and representational forms like those explored in the previous chapter, then they are not simply presenting a fixed static self, although there is a considerable danger of this occurring. Posting, responding and generally engaging in social media or social networking sites (SNS) *can* plausibly engage in the process of becoming. The separation between one's embodied self and one's online actions could be considered a digital manifestation of the condition of negation necessary for one's presence-to-self. Each new post is an opportunity to reinvent and reconstitute the online-self.

Having such explicit and persistent access to the private lives (made public/semi-public by their engagement in social media) of others makes slipping on to one of the pathways trodden by them that much more seductive than if one were only aware of one's being-in-the-world-with-others to a more casual extent. With greater access to the Other comes greater awareness of their objectifying gaze. Consequently, a yielding to the will (and the projects) of the (primarily virtual) Other can occur, as one more closely associates one's self (and one's being) with the objectifying gaze of the Other.

By explicitly operating in the mode of being-for-others one can quite easily become ready-to-hand tools or equipment in the project(s) of the Other. Because one identifies oneself with the objectifying gaze of the Other (as a social media prosumer), one is more likely to give oneself over to be exploited in the same way that ready-to-hand objects in the world are exploited as tools in the projects of *Dasein*, in the modes of enframing, challenging-forth and standing-reserve.

One's engagement or orientation towards social media is not inauthentic because it is considered so, relative to an authentic mode of sociality in traditionally social or corporeal situations⁸⁵. It is important to discuss social media as inauthentic because in its current form, it intensifies all the things that make every day face-to-face sociality inauthentic, by prioritising the perspective of the Other over one's potential becoming in presenting a globally consistent self and compounding the alienating layers of representational communication in digital media.

What intensifies the inauthenticity of social engagement on social media is that at the root of the social media project, is the belief that social media *resolves* the issues of sociality that one might associate with expressions of the inauthentic-self. For example, one might believe that if one is not subject to the gaze of the

⁸⁵ In fact, Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1943) both suggest that inauthenticity is our everyday, normative mode of existence, regardless of our orientation towards technology.

embodied Other, then one cannot feel objectified by it. One might think that if one is physically and temporally alienated from the Other, then their influence on the choices that one makes is lessened.

A common instance of this conceit is when one might come to express an unpopular, antithetical, controversial or even simply honest opinion. In an everyday face-to-face situation, one is less likely to express an opinion in public that one considers to be in the minority or that one thinks might cause confrontation with those strangers present. Behind the protective shield of digital representation and spatio-temporal separation, users feel as though they can communicate these opinions or beliefs more freely, without the direct embodied influence of the Look of the Other and maybe even without real-world consequence. This liberation from the embodied Look of the Other can have a positive effect on one's ability to establish and develop one's political identity and dynamic online-self, however it can also lead to internet 'trolling' and the brazen abuse of other users. Alternatively, one may have faith in the digital freedom afforded by the culture of user generated content on social media, and that it will reinforce one's sense of agency. The neoliberal framework that social media is built upon however misappropriates the modes of mediated sociality, directing one's participation towards one's explicit and inauthentic being-for-others. If users tend towards expressing their controversial but authentic opinions online, it is either absorbed into the online echo-chamber (Krasodomski-Jones, 2016) that they position themselves or is stripped of nuance by growing digital tribalism (Wheeler, 2009).

Just like in the context of participatory performance practice, there are two principal modes of engaging with social media, one can be described as passive and one as active. Firstly, one can be a 'spectator'; one can browse, observe and scrutinise the content generated by other users that appears in one's news feed or on other users' profile pages, without necessarily contributing any deliberate⁸⁶ content (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Secondly, one can be an active participant by responding to the content generated or disseminated⁸⁷ by others (liking, sharing, retweeting, commenting, etc.).

Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff propose four different categories of active participant: 'joiners', who "participate in or maintain profiles on a social networking site like Facebook". 'Collectors' who collect and aggregate online content. 'Critics' "react to other content online, posting comments on blogs or online forums, posting ratings or reviews, or editing wikis" and 'conversationalists' "participate in the frequent back-and-forth

⁸⁶ As opposed to unintentionally and idly generating data from the online links that one clicks, the sites one visits and the content that one views.

⁸⁷ Not all content posted by users is generated by that user, but rather it is appropriated and disseminated by that user. E.g. articles, videos, internet memes, etc.

dialogue that's characteristic of status updates on Facebook and Twitter.” (2011, pp. 44-45) Or finally, one can generate content oneself, like Li and Bernoff's 'creators'. One is never restricted to just one mode of engagement on social media platforms and much like one's offline existence “my [online] existence is not simply my awareness of a world but is also my appearance in the world.” (Webber, 2010 p. 188) The reciprocity inherent in and fluidity between these different forms of engagement is fundamental to the model implemented by social media providers that attempts to simulate and augment the offline interactions of conscious beings (users) and replicate this sociality online.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and Mudlark Productions' collaborative re-imagining of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet: Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010), can be considered as an attempt to re-orient spectators' and participants' relationship with both theatre and social media. Over a five-week period (15th April – 12th May 2010), individual Twitter accounts were set up for the six primary characters of *Romeo and Juliet* and were operated by six RSC actors who posted in character, following a story grid formulated by Bethan Marlow and Tim Wright.

The narrative and plot of the 'transmedial' (Myers, et al., 2016) performance was fundamentally predetermined, however *Such Tweet Sorrow* was intended to be, and operated as “a kind riff on that story.” (Hunter, 2014) Charles Hunter (co-founder and managing director of Mudlark) justifies this tactic by suggesting that “Twitter is a kind of riff on everything, because with 140 characters you kind of riff on the big story of the day.” (2014) The employment of Twitter was “an attempt to see how new media could be creatively harnessed by theatre, as well as a way of attracting younger audiences.” (Adams, 2010) The actors were allowed a regulated amount of creative input, dictated by the limits of the story grid. Furthermore, online spectators of the unfolding performance could interact with the actors and post content directly linked to the production, as it was happening. Some 'audience-followers' (Myers, et al., 2016) tweeted content in character (such as Romeo_mon and BenVoli0) as additions and alternatives to the content posted by the RSC actors. The latter (BenVoli0) was in fact a “staged plant” (2016, p. 91), whose intentional involvement (orchestrated by the RSC and Mudlark) encouraged other audience-followers to participate and interact with the narrative and online actors.

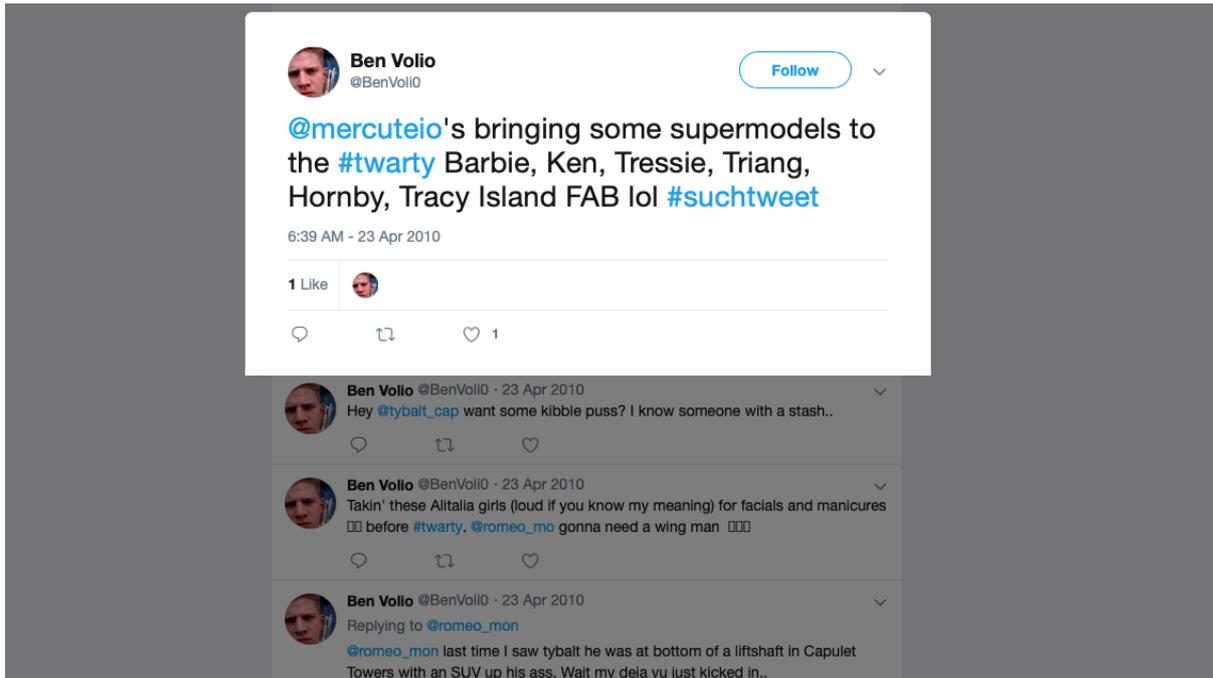


Figure 9 Tweets by @BenVoli0, Royal Shakespeare Company and Mudlark Productions, *Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010).

It soon became unclear who was a performer and who was a participant. Users such as BenVoli0 were freely interacting with established characters, affecting the narrative and implying that they were not a member of the cast, when they in fact were. Whereas, users like Romeo_mon were encouraged to intervene in the narrative in meaningful ways although they were not cast members. The benefit of the social media scenography in this instance was that the digital mask of anonymity meant any participant could pose as a cast member and cast members could pretend to be audience-followers eager to participate.

The delineation between who was a performer and who was a spectator became unintentionally confused (Hunter, 2014). Through this ambiguity, performers and spectators alike were able to realize the full range of potential modes of social media participation outlined by Li and Bernoff. One could simply watch the narrative unfurl, including all the interventions made by other users. One could ‘like’ or leave a comment on tweets intermittently. One could establish a dialogue with online actors or other audience-followers. Or one could generate one’s own online persona and intervene in the narrative in a more meaningful or disruptive way.

The ambiguity between performers and participants also meant that audience-followers could constitute a temporary⁸⁸ online self that could operate somewhere between the concretely determined roles of actor and

⁸⁸ For the length of the five-week performance.

audience-follower. This level of liminality goes beyond even that of participation in performances founded in live and spatio-temporally co-present encounters. In face-to-face participatory performance encounters stooges may be employed to pose as spectators that go on to participate. If an audience member began posing as a member of the cast, it would soon become clear to the rest of the audience they were not a cast member unless the cast were prepared or receptive to such an improvisational phenomenon. In this instance, the mediation facilitated by the technology of social media allows for greater ambiguity and in this case liminality.

Not only did audience-followers not necessarily know who a performer and a spectator was, but it became unclear to the audience whether the performers could discern between those following the predetermined script and those attempting to deviate from it. The online acts of those participating were still for others, however the intention behind those acts were more inclined towards experimenting with and discovering new and hitherto unexplored aspects of such an established narrative. Participating audience-followers of *Such Tweet Sorrow* were not content to simply watch the narrative march towards its inevitable completion and follow an encoded pathway; participants were engaged in using the instrument of social media to broaden the horizon of possibility and nudge the narrative towards an alternative possibility.

User-participants were ultimately unsuccessful and the narrative was corrected by the performers to end as it always has. Despite this conclusion, the potential of this form of interaction began to emerge. Reviewer Jake Orr (2010) stated that “the cast don’t actively join in conversations with the outside world – it all takes place within the insular world they are conducting on Twitter.” Blogger Hannah Nicklin (2010) also proposed that if the cast were not going to interact with the audience-followers in a way that capitalised on the fundamentally interactive principle behind Twitter, then they could have at least conformed to “the old playwright’s adage: show, don’t tell.” She suggests an injection of video into the stream of text to make the encounter more dynamic for user-spectators. Despite the efforts of those few rogue audience-followers, the restrictiveness of the narrative is augmented by the unresponsive cast, and what had the potential to be a dynamic riff on a well-worn tale squandered the medium it chose to employ.

Such Tweet Sorrow can be considered a minor, but nonetheless significant expression of how participatory practitioners attempt to employ social media and/or the technologies associated with social media to reveal a potential that transcends its neoliberal precondition. Heidegger makes a distinction between what he calls ‘bringing-forth’ and ‘challenging-forth’, which are both modes of revealing. Michael Zimmerman articulates the distinction between the two modes of unconcealment thusly, “to be capable of transforming a forest into packaging for cheeseburgers, man must see the forest not as a display of the miracle of life, but as raw material, pure and

simple.” (1977, p. 79) Bringing-forth is the process of bringing the meaning of Being in any given entity from “concealment forth into unconcealment.” (Heidegger, 1954, p. 5) This revealing is grounded in a type of equality whereby the one doing the revealing does not exercise any dominion over the entity being brought-forth. Challenging-forth, however, is the means of exerting control over an entity.

This difference is crucial, not only to understanding the inauthentic orientation towards a modern technology like social media, but also in comprehending the causal relationship between social media and participatory performance practice. According to Heidegger, the artistic study and expression of an entity constitutes a revealing and bringing-forth of the world, whereas modern technology *challenges* the unconcealing of the world by trying to spatialise and quantify it in the mode of enframing. There is a slippage between the natural revealing of the world (that is beyond human control) and the drive to reveal the world categorically and with certainty. The contemporary orientation towards social media technology is predicated on the thickening of the ambiguities of sociality, and a grasp of a static and measurable social reality.

This slippage is only possible if both technology *and* art are considered modes of revealing; although modern technology challenges-forth, it is still attempting to reveal the world – albeit in a hurried fluster. Heidegger submits that “because the essence of technology is nothing technological,” but rather an issue of orientation and disclosure, “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art.” (1954 p. 19) Therefore, by responding to the procedure of challenging-forth stimulated by social media, participatory performance practice is engaging in an analogous process of revealing by seizing the very *technē*⁸⁹ that Heidegger expresses as fundamentally present in both technology *and* the arts.

Ontroerend Goed’s Alexander Devriendt has stated that “I only use technology in my performances when it’s part of normal life. Where you accept it as part of reality on stage, which is also the same reality as in the audience and in your life.” (2015) As a result, there is no impatient challenging-forth, however the technology that is employed by Ontroerend Goed is functioning as an instrument of revealing the relationship audiences might have with that very technology in their everyday lives, albeit through the mode of performance aesthetics.

Similarly, in another FAQ video on their website Gob Squad’s Sean Patten explains their use of technology as a way to express on stage the paradox of the alienation (and the sensation of feeling removed) and the intimacy (or closeness) that technology (especially video technology) can achieve (n.d.). The contemporary

⁸⁹ A Greek term which Heidegger (1954) uses to describe technique or skill and expertise or “know-how”.

reality of sociality is it is largely mediated by technology. Therefore, to effectively reveal the truth of this reality, technology is implemented.

By appropriating and subverting social media methodologies, neoliberal structures and attempting to produce conditions conducive to authentic action (rather than the many instances of bad faith typical of social media), participatory practitioners are reinstating a harmonious synthesis between our orientation towards sociality and how it is primally and intuitively revealed to us.

John David Zuern states (in response to Heidegger) “the poet looks at the world in order to understand it, certainly, but its reflection does not seek to make the world into a standing-reserve.” (1998) Likewise, the likes of Gob Squad, Ontroerend Goed or Blast Theory (to name a few) do not invite audience members to participate in their performances because sociality is an itemised commodity to be stockpiled and eked out for profit⁹⁰, but rather, the participatory experience is the ground for an intensified encounter with others that has the potential to jolt the participant into realising the reality of their exploitation and embracing their own freedom.

Heidegger warns that “the will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.” (1954 p. 2) Heidegger conjures the image of technology hurtling ahead with mankind fumbling in its wake, attempting to grasp hold of what they have set in motion, only for it to slip further and further beyond their reach. By doing so, Heidegger illustrates the disparity between the accelerated challenging-forth typical of the enframing orientation, exercised by mankind in its use of modern technology, and the ‘poietic’ bringing-forth unique to the instrumental, conscientious and somewhat nostalgic practices of craftsmen and artists.

Heidegger could foresee humanity facing a choice: either continue with the enframing relationship with the world by means of modern technology, whereby humans too would become standing-reserve, or realise one’s own becoming as synchronous with the *gradual* revealing of the world in symbiosis with technology that brings-forth the world. Participatory performance reacquaints (or *returns*) audiences with (to) the fluid, ambiguous and fundamentally immeasurable risk one is faced with in the primal bringing-forth of sociality and allocates a situation for the liminality fundamental to the authentic relationship between self and Other.

Realising the potential of social media as an instrument of bringing-forth authentic sociality is an ideal bound up in the concept of ‘participatory culture’. As the modes of social media engagement (spectatorship, active engagement and content generation) suggest, the technology and platforms developed by social media providers

⁹⁰ It would be naïve to ignore the potential financial gains that these artists could be benefitting from.

(and other affiliated organisations⁹¹) are primarily intended for those users who are likely to participate in some way and take advantage of the user-centricity and the culture of user-generated content intrinsic to the web 2.0 model.

This culture of online participation has become so prevalent that across six different publications⁹², Henry Jenkins claimed we live in an increasingly ‘participatory culture’. Initially⁹³, Jenkins was merely “contrasting participation with spectatorship” (Jenkins, et al., 2015, p. 1) and although this is an important distinction to make, it is simply the starting point to understanding what participation could be if engaged with *authentically*. As internet technology has advanced and Web 2.0 models of internet usage became more popular, Jenkins’ claim (and his definition of participatory culture) seemed to describe the experience of users of social media, amongst many others living in the contemporary digital age:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another.

(Jenkins, et al., 2015, p. 4)

Jenkins’ definition is primarily concerned with one’s creative and social engagement, through mediums like social media. One could consider the fundamental definition of participation as one’s involvement in any activity or process. During said activity, the value of one’s contribution could be considered proportional to the benefits one (and others) enjoy as a result. If this is the case, then a truly participatory culture could only be considered one whereby *all* individuals are involved (or have equal opportunity to be involved) in the decision making, production, maintenance and therefore responsibility and ownership of said culture or society. Equally,

⁹¹ Such as Facebook, Google and Twitter.

⁹² *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (2006), *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (2009), *Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture* (2013), *Reading in a Participatory Culture: Remixing Moby-Dick for the English Literature Classroom* (2013), *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics* (2015).

⁹³ In 1992’s *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

the public and authentic expression of one's inner-most beliefs, in the face of opposition are the cornerstone of a healthy and authentic democratic process (Guignon, 2004).

An authentic form of participation as the one described above is defined by Staughton Lynd (1965), Carole Pateman (1970) and C.B. Macpherson (1977) respectively as 'participatory democracy'. For these writers, participatory democracy represents a transcendence of the political system of representative democracy by involving citizen-subjects more holistically in political decision making, rather than simply electing a representative to speak and act on their behalf. Where representative democracy has become ubiquitous across many governments the world over, participatory democracy represents an alternative of an authentically democratic form of participation that has potential applications in realms and systems beyond politics, such as economics and culture.

It is based on participatory democracy (applied as part of a critique of political economy) that Christian Fuchs critically evaluates Jenkins' position relative to users' participation in social media and the neoliberal culture it perpetuates. Fuchs argues that Jenkins' view of social media, the participatory mode of user engagement and the democratic possibilities of social media are optimistic at best, or at worst naïve (Fuchs, 2017). This critical interpretation of participatory culture (and participation in social media) is based around Fuchs' suggestion that the idealised participatory culture proposed by Jenkins, neglects to consider the *exploitation* of internet users by privately owned internet corporations. Organisations, whose goal of profit accumulation – as part of a generally capitalist and explicitly neoliberal system – is manifest in the surveillance, capture, commodification and sale of users' data⁹⁴ to advertisers. As a result, one internet 'actor'⁹⁵ has dominion over another, based on ownership and labour. Where there is neoliberal domination and exploitation, or indeed dominion of any kind, the democratic foundation that a holistic participatory culture is supported by is fundamentally undermined. In a situation of labour contribution and exploitation as described internet users are no longer purely participants; they are (manipulated and exploited) unpaid workers, generating income for profit-driven organisations, widening the divide between the most-wealthy minority and the impoverished majority (Fuchs, 2017) and perpetuating an inauthentic mode of participation.

⁹⁴ 'Data' here meaning both a user's online activity (what they search, where they click, what they type, pages they visit) and the content that they generate through these interactions.

⁹⁵ Fuchs uses the term 'actor' to refer to any individual, organisation or party involved or engaged in activity on the internet.

III. NEOLIBERAL INSTRUMENTALISM OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

The inauthenticity of social media participation is not necessarily inherent in the use of technology to augment sociality itself. Fuchs suggests social media technology and the foundation of web 2.0 internet systems are grounded in, inextricably bound to, and therefore a product of neoliberal capitalism. He states that “web 2.0 and social media were [...] born in the situation of capitalist crisis as ideologies aimed at overcoming the crisis and establishing new spheres and models of capital accumulation for the corporate Internet economy.” (2017, p. 35) Therefore, rather than the benevolent and progressive rhetoric of global connectedness and online sociality, the driving force behind the foundation and development of social media was the bursting of the ‘dot-com bubble’ in the early 2000s and the efforts of internet software/platform developers “aimed at attracting novel capital investments.” (p. 35) As such, the modes of participation that one engages in on social media suffer from the same paradox of finite freedom (and therefore intensified inauthenticity) that neoliberalism does. By drawing attention to the primary capitalist motivation behind the web 2.0 model that fuels social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, I draw comparisons between the inauthentic instrumentalism employed by neoliberal governmentality and modes of participation on social media.

Neoliberalism openly champions liberty and individual freedom as its fundamental virtues, however these characteristics only describe neoliberal policy and processes within the confines of a supporting framework built around *capital*. Helene Shugart describes this nuanced contradiction in detail:

Neoliberalism ascribes virtually all responsibility for personal and social welfare to the individual, which is further articulated as crucial to individual liberty under the auspices of choice. [...] This individual choice is tightly linked with consumption to the extent that individuals are expected to choose with their dollars. [...] The theoretical role of government within a neoliberal framework is to ensure that individual choices and desires, which are satisfied by the market in the form of goods and services, as well as advice and expertise, may be sought out, procured and implemented by the individual at his or her discretion. Thus, under this framework, the practical role of government is to facilitate the market; moreover, government intervention at any level—in the form of social services, for instance, or with respect to regulation of industry—is represented as cultivating or enabling dependence.

(Shugart, 2016, p. 10)

In a neoliberal society, one can and should *freely* choose and therefore exercise one’s individual freedom and agency, if one has the *capital* to support these choices. Under these conditions, one’s participation in the cycle of capitalism (labour for a wage, use wage to consume, etc.) is assumed; without it, one cannot expect to survive long without external (governmental) intervention to provide an injection of capital, to once again propel one back

into the neoliberal rat race⁹⁶. One can easily feel trapped by this system that exploits workers and consumers, whilst simultaneously collapsing any alternative means (the welfare state) of maintaining a basic standard of living (Shugart, 2016).

The ‘liberalism’ implied within *neoliberalism* – if understood as being comparable to the existential conception of liberation and freedom⁹⁷ – is *misappropriated* and distorted (in the minds of the working and consuming individual) as an attempt to promote the fiction of authentic participation. The mode of participation is voluntary⁹⁸, but the conditions of neoliberalism (outlined above), as they apply to the individual, provide the ideal *scapegoat* for the choice to remain in a fixed position of exploitation and continue inauthentically participating on a pathway dictated by the political and economic Other.

If one does not have the means (economic/financial capital) to express the “choice” afforded by neoliberalism, and forge ahead with one’s individual project within this framework, then to avoid facing one’s own infinite freedom and responsibility, one must try to negotiate it in a different way. Rancière (1999) proposes that in societies where increased deregulation and privatisation (typical of neoliberalism) is widespread, the need for political representation is theoretically negated. If applied to current western neoliberal societies, not only are individuals participating in social media to represent *themselves*, but in doing so they are exhibiting an online *commodity* through the process of self-promotion to increase their social capital⁹⁹ (Fuchs, 2017).

It is this commodification of the online self that fuels Fuchs’ critique, which identifies social media as an extension of a neoliberal agenda, taking advantage of a technological medium. Corporate social media actors exploit modes of digital mediation that capture and congeal (as a necessary process of global connectivity), to commodify the fluid and transitory qualities of sociality, and the fluctuating relationship between one’s self and the Other. As part of the process of this online commodification, users have become naturalised to operating exclusively in the mediated and static mode of being-for-others.

Ontroerend Goed’s *£¥€\$ (LIES)* (2017) investigates the simulacra of contemporary finance and economy, but in doing so also interrogates the paradox of agency (discussed above) that resides at the heart of

⁹⁶ Government intervention, which under neoliberalism, is steadily and increasingly devalued and diminished.

⁹⁷ Whereby *every individual* is faced with *infinite possibilities* that they can *freely choose* from in *every situation*.

⁹⁸ Please see Chapter IV for consideration of some of the different situations where one’s participation in neoliberal capitalism may be subject to different socio-economic pressures.

⁹⁹ Understood in relation to Bourdieu’s classifications of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital.

neoliberalism. Upon entering the performance space of *£¥€\$ (LIES)*, one is directed to one of six tables¹⁰⁰ where one sits with six other people (separated from anyone one may have arrived with) and greeted by a ‘croupier’. One is cast in the role of the financial elite, “the well-to-do, the 1%, the super-rich, the ones who pull the strings, the faces we never get to see.” (Ontroerend Goed, 2017) Each table represents a fictitious nation, and each individual participant is a bank of that nation. Over the course of the two-hour session, one (literally) rolls the dice, and makes choices on what to invest in and how much to invest. There are multiple layers of agency that one can engage in and numerous stimuli that may affect one’s engagement in one’s agency, or influence one’s decisions and actions. This strata of agency is reflective of the manifold strata of representation and mediation that one operates within as a participant in *£¥€\$ (LIES)* and in neoliberal capitalism.

In the programme notes for the show, artistic director Alexander Devriendt reflects on the mutual trust necessary for capital, finance and economy to function. He states that “humanity’s strength has always been to let imaginary things have real impact.” (2018, p. 1) The imaginary value of capital is founded entirely in the mutual trust between those trading goods and/or services for it (Keen, 2015).



Figure 10 Participants and croupiers at tables, Ontroerend Goed, *£¥€\$ (LIES)*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2017). Photograph by Ontroerend Goed.

¹⁰⁰ The number of tables is dependent upon the size of the venue hosting the performance.

At the start of *£¥€\$ (LIES)*, one is asked to invest some real money¹⁰¹. The representational article of legal tender is replaced by gaming chips as one's first choice is made: to participate and hand over one's money, not relinquish any cash, or not participate¹⁰². In the same way that one is cast in the imaginary role of bank, the performance operates within a framework of casino-style dice gambling (not too dissimilar to craps); as well as representing a fictitious bank in an imaginary country, one is also playing the part of gambler/investor. In the adoption of three different identities, one operates on three levels of representation: one is a participant in a performance, another a gambler in a casino, and finally investment banker in the international market.

Each of these frameworks present boundaries one can exercise one's agency within. One can only express choice through how much one invests, what it is that one invests¹⁰³ and through the way that one rolls the dice. Beyond these immediate limitations there are less explicit and more furtive influences that could potentially restrict one's agency. For example, at the centre of the space is a four-sided board that displays the 'rating' of each country based on their corresponding wealth. The desire to attain an 'A' grade is augmented by the reinforcement of one's croupier, who issues congratulations if one's table-nation is graded highly and encourages consideration of bold investments if one is graded poorly.

As the game-performance progresses, it is revealed that those (imaginary) countries with poor grades (or low wealth and creditworthiness) are on the verge of financial collapse. This crisis had been building through the sale of foreign bonds between table-nations, and the success of sale and purchase based on the value of said bonds. Elected representatives from each table-nation are called to vote on which of the table-nations (that "don't have enough credit to guarantee their own government bonds" (Ontroerend Goed, 2017)) should be bailed out and saved from crashing¹⁰⁴. What follows is a panicked flurry of activity whereby croupiers from poorly rated table-nations attempt to sell their bonds and wealthy table-nations unsuccessfully try to cash in their bonds while they are still worth something. Croupiers shout across the room and dash between tables, frantically waving bond cards at participants, imploring them to buy them.

¹⁰¹ No less than £1 and no more than £20.

¹⁰² One is not required to provide any cash to participate in the performance; one is simply merged with another player as the other bank takes over one's bank.

¹⁰³ The options for investment capital become more varied as the performance develops. Where one starts with one's initial cash investment, not before long one is able to invest and gamble with the debt of other players, various assets, bonds (both domestic and foreign) and short sales.

¹⁰⁴ Although Ontroerend Goed do not explicitly state that *£¥€\$ (LIES)* draws heavily from the global financial crisis of 2008 (primarily the Eurozone crisis), it would be naïve to think that it is not at least implicating it in the performance.

The frenzy of chaos, confusion and loss that swirls around (even those not on the verge of collapse) evokes a fundamental loss of control, even though one is convinced that one's limited choices are an expression of one's own intent. One cannot help but shoulder responsibility. Theatre critic Su Carroll wrote that "we can feel the damage done and we have no-one else to blame." (2017) Of course, this malestrom was inevitable. Ontroerend Goed were making a comment on how far the trust in capital and finance can be stretched before it finally breaks, as it did in the global financial crisis of 2008.

Subsequent inspection of the *£¥€\$ (LIES)* script (that all performers follow, even including responses to participants' questions), reveals no matter their actual accomplishments or stability, the lowest rated tables are selected to crash. One's agency, both real and imagined are manipulated as they oscillate between the pretence of control, total pandemonium and crushing responsibility. Ontroerend Goed cultivate a macrocosm of neoliberal freedom by establishing representational financial systems, and allowing participants to operate under the pretence of agency whilst guiding their trajectory towards a predetermined destination.

Although *£¥€\$ (LIES)* does not address social media directly, the issues it does engage with are implicated in the constitution of the inauthentic orientation towards social media technology. Ontroerend Goed could have produced a performance about the Eurozone crisis in the immediate aftermath, but they waited almost ten years to do so. One can only speculate as to why, but I would argue although the financial crash had a devastating effect on millions of people, the less immediate and longer lasting impact of the crisis was bound up in issues concerning mediation and agency manifest in a decline in the trust placed in capital and the institutions that handle it (Roth, 2009). The tension between mediation and agency is clearly an area of interest in *£¥€\$ (LIES)*. Artistic director Alexander Devrient cites the "pixels on a screen" to evoke the layered mediation of capital, but also suggests that "money is too important to be left to those who have it." (2018, p. 1)

One solution to this issue of trust was Bitcoin, which is a cryptocurrency introduced shortly after the crisis in 2009 (Chuen, 2015), although this system still operates within the global structure of representation and capital. Cryptocurrency operates on the basis that there is no centralised control of capital – like the bank that one represents in *£¥€\$ (LIES)* – but rather an encrypted distribution of control in what is known as a 'blockchain' (Nakamoto, 2008). Within this system, there is apparently no need for mutual trust because the information about the value of any transaction is freely available, but protected from manipulation by many layers of encryption. There are many more layers of mediation, yet one is rewarded with greater agency, however this agency is still very much enclosed by the larger structure of late capitalism.

Since 2010 the global penetration of social media has increased by 185% (Statista, 2019). The correlation between the steady growth of both social media and cryptocurrency is symbiotic (Rojas, 2018). As the layering of mediation of sociality accumulates on social media, so it does in finance. Where one is afforded more control over how one communicates with other users, one also has greater control over how, where and why one's capital is used. But one is still expected to trust in capital as the universal conduit for sustaining sociality and realising one's possibilities. Users of cryptocurrency and social media both fall under the illusion of a democratisation of power and labour, although they both certainly shift towards a socialist ideology of shared ownership and mutual benefit at the level of the user, this power and capital is still siphoned off by the top '1%' at the expense of users' agency.

Rather than blithely accepting the trade-off between mediation and agency, Ontroerend Goed problematise it in *£¥€\$ (LIES)*. They do so at a time when web 2.0 and the participatory culture of user generated content (like social media and cryptocurrency) promise users social and financial freedom through progressively more mediated interfaces that further entrench them in neoliberal ideology.

The awareness and insight that a performance like *£¥€\$ (LIES)* has the potential to generate provides tools to participants and users that help them to approach social media critically and see past any façade of socialist equality. The paradox of neoliberal participatory freedom is manifest as disingenuous optimism when combined with the authentic potential of social media. Mark Zuckerberg (founder and CEO of Facebook) issued a 5700-word Facebook post entitled *Building Global Community* (2017), which espouses the need for a global community that is 'supportive', 'safe', 'informed', 'civically-engaged' and 'inclusive'. However, with each statement that casts social media in a favourable and benign light (that has the potential as a system to cultivate the authentic-self), there is evidence that exposes the utopian propaganda and reveals the underlying neoliberal motives intrinsic to the inauthentic modes of participation particular to social media engagement.

For instance, Zuckerberg's post suggests the establishment of a 'supportive' global community begins with the homogenisation and sacrifice of smaller communities. Not only does this sacrifice perpetuate a perception of the online Other as anonymous, deindividualised and omnipresent, but it also stands at odds with the offline human cognitive capacity for stable sociality, theorised as 'Dunbar's number' (Dunbar, 1992).

Robin Dunbar suggests that human cognitive capacity (neocortex volume) only allows for one to comfortably maintain approximately 150 stable social relationships at any one time. With the demise of smaller social communities in favour of a monolithic global community – if one considers Dunbar's number an indicator of one's perception of the individualised Other and the way that one processes sociality – such a community

(proposed by Zuckerberg and aspired towards by other social media providers) is fundamentally unsustainable and threatens to overwhelm users¹⁰⁵. Any social connection with the online-Other that surpasses Dunbar's number dissolves into the they and contributes to the virtual Other that (although not subject to individuation) propagates one's own feeling of object-ness (as a social media user) in the mode of being-for-others.

A 'safe' online global community is predicated on intelligent surveillance software. Such surveillance¹⁰⁶, and one's increased awareness of it, intensifies both one's cognizance of both the symbolic and embodied Other and one's being-for-others. Zuckerberg later admits that an 'informed' online global community proves to be difficult to realise because (as a "short-form medium") social media "rewards simplicity and discourages nuance" which "oversimplifies important topics and pushes us towards extremes." (Zuckerberg, 2017) Such an adoption of extremes and binaries not only promotes an orientation of enframing, but it also negates the balance and moderation fundamental to authentic sociality and the establishment of the authentic-self.

A 'civically-engaged' community is predicated on "giving people a voice", however the way that social media and social networking sites (like Facebook) are structured means that they are predisposed to amplifying the voices of those already in power, only resulting in the powerful becoming even more influential. For example, Google search results are primarily based in the 'PageRank' algorithm which considers the number and quality of links to a given website (Brin & Page, 1998). The more links that appear on other websites that a website has, the higher in the list of results that the website will appear. The higher on the results list a website appears, the often it is clicked on and more links that are likely to be produced, which perpetuates the popularity of the site (Li & Liu, 2018).

Finally, Zuckerberg states that an 'inclusive' global community (rooted in Facebook) is predicated on a set of community standards which "try to reflect the cultural norms of our community". What this does not take into consideration is that the establishment of cultural norms of a global community is intrinsically fraught with contradiction and is likely to tend towards perpetuating potentially harmful cultural norms, dependent on who decides what is a norm. Such an ideology of community and the modes of participation inherent in it, gives the illusion of authenticity whilst actually engaging users in deeply inauthentic activity.

Zuckerberg's philosophy appears to value the characteristics fundamental to a participatory culture and participatory democracy. Social media has all the necessary components to facilitate these conceivably authentic

¹⁰⁵ Dunbar's number has since been applied to online social media communities and proven to still be an accurate gauge of one's quantifiable capacity for sociality (Gonçalves, et al., 2011).

¹⁰⁶ As discussed above and in the previous chapter in the context of the surveillance-industrial internet complex.

modes of political and social participation. However, processes of neoliberal governmentality orient participants towards social media in a way that corrupts the technology's authentic potential. One's social reality is distorted in its transfer onto online platforms and those aspects of sociality that may have been made less inauthentic by social media are appropriated, fed through a neoliberal ideology and made more inauthentic.

The instrumentalisation of participatory modes that characterises the web 2.0 model of social media interaction is not purely limited to digitised sociality. Claire Bishop's (2006/2012) analysis of participatory practice in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, suggests that aesthetic strategies that prioritise the inclusion of spectators had been employed as an instrument of social engineering in the context of neoliberal governmentality. She terms this shift towards participatory engagement in UK publicly funded arts 'the social turn'. Writing that since the early 1990s there has been a growing expectation and pressure on art, artists and artistic processes to "[prioritize] social effect over considerations of artistic quality" (2006 p. 180), Bishop proposes that "the UK government between 1997 and 2010 rendered the Arts Council explicitly beholden to social engineering, using culture to reinforce policies of social inclusion." (2012 p. 175)

As a form of affirmative action to counter social exclusion¹⁰⁷, the agenda of social inclusion aimed to build and restore amenable communities with individuals that function as productive members of society. A productive member of society manifest within a neoliberal political economic culture however, is one that continues to participate (labour and consume) within a capitalist framework. David Hesmondhalg et al (2014) suggest that "New Labour's cultural policy was informed by a version of the long-standing attempt to use art to form good citizens, but now inflected by neo-liberal notions of the citizen-subject as ideally entrepreneurial, self-reliant and self-creating." (p. 110) Cultural policies such as those exercised by the British New Labour government in the 1990s (as an instrument of social inclusion), steered publicly supported art practice towards collaborative and participatory strategies, with the agenda of socially engineering socially self-helping, politically docile and cooperative communities (Harvie, 2013). The state was not only pursuing a neoliberal economic policy, but also promoting policy predicated and driven by social engagement and inclusion (Bishop, 2012). It would seem this

¹⁰⁷ Defined as "the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole." (Levitas, et al., 2007)

the strategy, adopted by New Labour, was intended to promote political inclusion and complicity, by encouraging *all citizens* to participate in the procedures of free market capitalism.

The foundation of the artistic practice, that Bishop categorises under the rubric of the social turn, is predicated on the establishment of a fictive reality participants operate within. By engaging audience members in an active mode of participation during a performance, they are more likely to participate in the normative habits of society. Augusto Boal (1974) and Bertolt Brecht's (1964) readings of Aristotle's principle of *katharsis* – often inscribed as 'catharsis' (Aristotle, 1998 (335 BC)) – may provide some insight as to the placative political power of representational theatrical systems. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis state that "in its common modern use, 'cathartic' can mean a therapeutic discharge of strong emotion." (Shepherd & Wallis, 2004, p. 175) Stephen Halliwell offers a word of caution in the debate surrounding Aristotle's original meaning of the term:

It had better be said at once that we do not really know what [Aristotle] meant in this context by *katharsis*. We can be moderately confident only that it offers a response to the Platonic view that tragedy arouses emotions which ought, for the sake of general psychological and moral well-being, to be kept in check.

(Halliwell, 1987, pp. 89-90)

Both interpretations, in combination with the original mention of the term in Aristotle's *Poetics*, point toward a purgation of the emotions generated by experiencing and engaging with dramatic art. Boal and Brecht interpreted this "therapeutic discharge" of "emotions which ought [...] to be kept in check" as a type of cultural safety valve, whereby socially, politically or culturally undesirable emotions (such as pity, fear, discontent or unrest) are exorcised in the safe space afforded by the fictive frame of artistic activity (Boal, 1974).

This expulsion of emotion (according to Boal and Brecht) also commonly (if not categorically) extends to politically pathological thoughts and associated emotions. In a neoliberal context, politically pathological thoughts and emotions are manifest in attempts to exclude oneself from the cycle of presumption and taking responsibility for the well-being of the many and not just the privileged few. Brecht argued that the process of catharsis was simply a way to placate and pacify the public (Brecht, 1964). By witnessing tragic (albeit *fictive*) events onstage, audiences could safely purge feelings of pity, fear or revolution, thereby removing these "problematic" emotions from everyday society and the interactions therein. If the public are exorcising these "undesirable" thoughts and/or emotions in a situation (as a spectator of theatre) with no direct socio-political

consequence (as they operate within a fictive bubble), then social and political harmony could potentially be achieved *even if* the socio-political structures and systems were not beneficial to those citizens.

Brecht's (1936) counter-approach to catharsis was to suspend the fictive frame as often as possible, distance or alienate the audience from the emotional content and engage them critically and intellectually by utilising a set of dramaturgical strategies known as '*verfremdungseffekt*'. Boal's (1974) response to cathartic performance was to exploit it. By maintaining the safety of the theatrical frame, 'spect-actors' could intervene in the action of a scene and suggest alternative ways of solving the problem that the actors had presented. Rather than purging the audience of revolutionary thoughts and desires, Boal's 'forum theatre' actively rehearsed them before unleashing them on the world.

Bishop's analysis of neoliberally sponsored participatory performance could begin to explain how and why performance scholars such as Alexandra Kolb (2013) concluded that interactive performance and audience participation augments inauthenticity, rather than draw attention to and attempt to neutralise it. In her discussion of participatory practice, Kolb invokes Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) to critically reflect on the intent and effect of participatory dramaturgies. Debord discusses how the institutional structures that represent the individual have hammered a wedge between the self and Other. The two are split apart through mediation and representation, leaving only a chasm of 'spectacle' between them. Debord's criticism is primarily focused on political and economic institutions: political *representatives* (senators, MP's, presidents, prime ministers) elected to communicate and act upon the will of the people, on behalf of the people. It is also equally levelled at the economic structures and processes that establish the numbers on a screen, bill or coin that *represent* an individual's financial worth or capital. This alienation, caused by excessively *representational* forms of interaction between individuals as an everyday social operation, is the driving force behind the inauthenticity that defines neoliberal culture on social media.

With a Debordian reading of audience participation, Kolb asserts that participatory art is engaged in a process of "mirroring rather than challenging accepted features of business, political, and social life." (2013, p. 48) Such a mirroring is indicative of representational and cathartic forms. Kolb argues that precisely because of this mirroring, not all participatory performance practice is liberatory. She suggests that it simply subscribes to a trend in contemporary performance is influenced by the socially engaged performance of the social turn. As a result, the art falls into the political and economic structures it claims to resist. She concludes that participatory practice generated under the conditions described by Bishop produce a *pseudo-authentic* experience rather than engendering opportunities for authentic encounters or expressions of the self. Practice that is considered part of

the social turn should be thought of as employing processes that commoditised potentially “real” encounters, to *serve* as an alternative to the everyday Debordian (1967) spectacle, whilst actually *replicating* and *compounding* it.

I propose that contemporary forms of participatory practice (like those that I have already discussed and those I discuss below) draw more from Brechtian and Boalian dramaturgies that subvert modes of representation and catharsis to make audiences more aware of the issues they are engaging with. They are still operating within a neoliberal context, but unlike the practice of the social turn they tend to not have as much direct input from governments that could try and exploit them for neoliberal instrumental value. Contemporary practitioners seem to draw from the surrounding context of spectacle, but rather than perpetuate it they are intent on making audiences aware of it as an issue that needs resolution. Participatory performances are not guaranteed to provide solutions for the inauthenticity inherent in the compounding of representational modes of interaction necessitated by manifestations of governmentality. Contemporary modes of participatory dramaturgy are employed to problematise the ways that interaction between the self and the Other have altered.

IV. CONTEMPORARY PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE: RESPONSE AND REFLECTION

The line between problematising the inauthentic modes of participation and alienating processes of mediation, and perpetuating these same problems is blurry and often subject to individual interpretation. The artistic intention behind participatory practice, although often benign, is still susceptible to neoliberal governmentality where it exists and operates, infiltrating and saturating contemporary western psyches. Therefore, Kolb’s assertions are justified, to the extent that participatory practitioners’ strategies of representing inauthentic modes of participation employ representation in the same way that systems of neoliberalism and social media harness Debordian spectacle.

By demonstrating and intensifying audience awareness of their communal engagement in neoliberal social media practice, participatory performance makers present an explicit *juxtaposition* at the moment of subversion – which typically coincides with the moment the spectator accepts the invitation to participate – that underscores the discrepancy between these two fundamentally participatory practices. As has been indicated already here, rather than problematising the technology itself, contemporary participatory performance practice seeks to call attention to the ways that users orient themselves towards technologies such as social media as participants in a system of neoliberal governmentality. If and when users spectate, participate in or generate

content online, the mediated form of the internet and social media ensnares this data like a fly caught in a spider's web. Users are driven to create representational digital content about their lives and everyday encounters to realize themselves as individuals in the world with the validation of others (Clerck, 2016). This system and the resulting orientation towards social media can be explored within the frame of Heidegger's modes of enframing, challenging-forth and standing-reserve.

V. ENFRAMING THE SELF AND THE OTHER

Heidegger explains 'enframing' in terms of the human impulse to put the world into boxes and enclosing all of one's experiences within categories of understanding that one can control. One cannot control the natural world, nor the conscious beings who inhabit it. One can only manipulate one's orientation towards it. The impulse to enframe stems from the human drive for a precise and scientific knowledge of the world. This was more apparent to Heidegger given the prevalent methods of modern scientific discovery dominant at the time that he was formulating his question concerning technology¹⁰⁸. Empirical methods¹⁰⁹ dictate that objects and phenomena in the world come into existence and the sphere of human comprehension only insofar as they can be measured. Such an approach epitomises the human orientation of enframing.

The way users employ the tools of social media quantifies the conventionally ambiguous and fluid aspects of sociality. For example, Facebook responses (likes, views, shares, comments, etc.) create a binary between online 'friends' who 'like' the user-generated (created, shared, posted) content and those who do not. As a result, we can reduce the positive and negative responses to our online activity down to a counting exercise. Within this social media context, the concept of enframing is not only theoretically and metaphorically realised (in the quantification of sociality), but it also takes on a far more literal meaning.

The physical boundedness of the social media form and its content is a mode of interaction that epitomises the orientation of enframing. For example, the spatially bounded frame of a digital photograph, the character limit on social media sites (such as Twitter), the temporally bounded frame of a Snapchat post, or the overall process of dividing life encounters, experiences, events and sociality into small and discrete social media posts or updates. Such approaches of division and compartmentalisation not only commit the temporal fallacy

¹⁰⁸ Most significantly, the advent of nuclear physics transpiring in the 1940s.

¹⁰⁹ Most notably codified by A.D. de Groot as the empirical cycle in his monograph *Methodology: Foundations of Inference and Research in the Behavioural Sciences* (1969) which comprise the steps of observation, induction, deduction, testing and evaluation in the process of effective scientific data collection and analysis.

(that Bergson, Heidegger and Sartre all warn against) of making one's encounters and experience of conscious being-in-the-world discrete, homogenous and spatial, but they also fall prey to an orientation founded in enframing.

Social media is predicated on the engagement of multiple (often countless) users. Social media providers¹¹⁰ urge users to "connect with [others] and the world around" them (Facebook, 2017). By collapsing barriers of geographical space - and therefore the necessary time for social contact to be made - and blurring the distinction between one's public and private lives, social media engagement promises social interaction and the ability to present one's-self *unmediated* by time, space and traditional social and cultural conventions. The caveat to this public-private online environment is the disembodied and exclusively representational mode of communication and presentation of the self. The only way to currently reduce great spatial distances and instantaneously transmit information from one side of the globe to the other is to do so in a way that eradicates the corporeal presence of the individual. Social media replaces the embodied object, action or person with text, static image, recorded audio, two-dimensional moving image, and various combinations of all the above.

It seems that for social media platforms to function in a way that amplifies connectedness and augments sociality, a certain physical alienation must take place. Such a form of estrangement could be considered an echo of the paradox of neoliberal capitalism alluded to above and in the previous chapter. The success of any neoliberal system is predicated on mass participation and the establishment of a sizeable community all following the pattern of labour, commodification and consumption. The business models of social media providers similarly tend towards connectedness and therefore commodification on a global scale. Both neoliberal capitalism and social media platforms connect large groups of individuals together across the globe but keep them alienated from one another by promoting cultures of self-interest and isolation through forms of representational mediation like capital, consumption and/or digital media. In doing so these systems control prosumers by bringing them all beneath one ideological socio-economic umbrella and controlling its laws.

The contradiction between immediacy and mediacy is manifest in social media as the collapse of the spatial and temporal expanse between globally connected users. Social media reduces the perceived gap between people, although they are still physically isolated from one another. This gap is a necessary buffer to allow the individual geographical and temporal space to discover one's own self (as presence-to-self), understand oneself as discrete from the other bodies and objects in the world and to avoid falling exclusively into the they-self in the

¹¹⁰ Such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat.

mode of being-for-others. Rather, the giving over of the self (by means of textual, imagistic and videographic posts: representational modes of communication) is consumed by the collected Other (made up of friends, followers, viewers, etc.) as a static representation of the individual's potential agency.

This static representation (social media content) is primarily transmitted through the mediums of digitised photographs and videos, textual posts or status updates, GIFs (Graphics Interchangeable Format), image macros, emoticons, internet 'memes', 'likes' or responses and comments. All of these forms can be uploaded or shared on social media platforms or social networking sites in the form of 'posts', 'status updates' or 'tweets' and most sites allow users to 'share' or 'retweet' this content to further disseminate it. The framework that this content is generally displayed in is either called a 'feed', 'timeline' or 'story'. The content is generated by other users connected to you as either 'friends' or 'followers' and if one of these users engage in social media (and generate content) in any of the ways then users receive 'notifications' that this has happened.

The quantification and boundedness of the public and social self, typical of social media is an explicit expression of the commodification of one's public self, or rather the self encountered by the online Other. Under the umbrella of neoliberal individualism and in the interest of "selling" oneself to keep pace in the rat race of free market capitalism, a quantifiable, bounded and fundamentally *fixed* product (the self) is desirable for the sake of efficiency and unambiguous bookkeeping – both in metaphorical terms, but also literal terms in the case of social media statistics (monetised views, shares or likes). Fuchs proposes that "Facebook and Google collect and store vast amounts of data. They capture and hold all the information they can get about their users, because they are interested in commodifying it so that monetary profits can be derived." (2017, pp. 53-54) To do so, they both (and many other service providers) harness the power of what is known as 'big data'¹¹¹, which refers to:

The major expansion in the contemporary era of the quantities of digital data that are generated as the products of users' transactions with and content generation via digital media technologies, as well as digital surveillance technologies such as CCTV cameras, RFID chips, traffic monitors and sensors monitoring the natural environment.

(Lupton, 2015, p. 94)

Big data is first and foremost a substantial development in the capacity of data processing, storage and retrieval. Its applications, however, are far from purely academic and not in the slightest immune from the political

¹¹¹ Originally coined by John Mashey in the mid-1990s (Lohr, 2013).

economy and governmentality of neoliberal capitalism. For processes of big data to operate at optimal efficiency (and therefore maximum profit), it must conform to forms of 'structured data' (Sagiroglu & Sinanc, 2013) that are fundamentally bounded and quantifiable as opposed to 'semi-structured' and 'unstructured' data which do "not conform to fixed fields" and are therefore "difficult to analyse." (2013, p. 43) The extent to which social media providers encourage this regulated approach to online self-expression and digital interaction for the sake of data collection, analysis and commodification can be considered so much so that Fuchs asserts that "Facebook and Google are not communications companies. They do not sell access to communications, they sell big data for advertising purposes. They are the world's largest advertising agencies that operate as big data collection and commodification machines." (2017, p. 54) What one might consider the self or the Other in everyday life, social media providers and social media users increasingly consider as big data. Therefore, the boundedness of social media content as an expression of one's online commodifiable self should be considered an explicit instance of the Heideggerian notion of enframing as a human orientation towards modern technology.

The disassociation of individual selves from users is a product of a neoliberal orientation towards the mediation typical of internet-based digital technology. The mirroring of Debordian spectacle that Kolb identified in contemporary dramaturgies of participation can be found across several Gob Squad's performances¹¹². Gob Squad¹¹³ often employ a physical 'fourth wall' rather than the traditional dramatic imagined dividing line between performer/character and audience a strategy of intensification and problematisation. Gob Squad make use of two-way mirrors, projection screens and monitors displaying live video feeds to evoke the screens employed in everyday digital entertainment and sociality, but also to critically disrupt physical audience-performer co-presence. These modes of presentation also necessitate the need for purely representational and mediated modes of communication between performers and audience members. It would be this necessity and the way that it is mobilised to entertain spectators that Kolb may consider pseudo-authentic, if not entirely inauthentic.

¹¹² Including (but not limited to) *Close Enough to Kiss* (1997), *Calling Laika* (1998), *What Are You Looking At?* (1998), *Super Night Shot* (2003), *Room Service* (2003), *Kitchen* (2007), *Are You with Us* (2010) and *Western Society* (2013).

¹¹³ Sean Patten, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Simon Will, Bastian Trost and Johanna Freiburg.



Figure 11 Large projection screen, separating main performance area from audience. *Gob Squad, Western Society*, Skirball Centre, New York (2015). Photograph by Sarah Krulwich.

Rather than a device of pure entertainment however, the permanent members of the collective communally write about this disruption in *Gob Squad and the Impossible Attempt to Make Sense of it All* (2010) to highlight “the difficult task of making [...] moments of contact or togetherness possible.” (Gob Squad, 2010 p. 67) Gob Squad’s choice to use ‘barriers, windows and screens’ is not simply a means of further separating the already separate performers and spectators, but rather aims to sensitise the audience to the struggle of existing in the world with other people by physicalising the struggle. By confronting an audience with a situation that shields them from the Other – who would otherwise cast their objectifying gaze upon them – spectators are made aware (and left to question) how they come to interact with the Other in everyday face-to-face and online social media situations. Gob Squad are not unfamiliar with the process of making an audience sensitive to a media technology only to then disrupt it (Govan, et al., 2007). Across their body of work, Gob Squad have engaged with developing technologies that have proliferated mainstream culture (live video feeds, multi-camera projection, internet streaming, etc.) as part of a strategy to destabilise and “deconstruct the discourse of contemporary media.” (ibid. p. 185)

For example, in *Close Enough To Kiss* (1997), the six Gob Squad performers encase themselves in an 8-metre-long 2-way mirrored Perspex corridor. When light is shone through the Perspex, the audience (outside the

corridor) can see the performers through the Perspex, but the performers can only see the reflections of themselves dancing, running on the spot, and posing. In *Calling Laika* (1998), the audience are seated in one of thirty cars parked in a circle facing inwards towards the performance area. All the action is encountered through the cars' windscreens and radios, tuned into the performance's radio station. In *What Are You Looking At?* (1998), Gob Squad revisit the two-way mirrored Perspex box, however this time for a durational performance lasting anywhere from 4-6 hours. During this time the performers amuse themselves with "food, drinks, records, slide shows, porn, video and party games, [...] it's hard to tell what's planned and what isn't, what's real and what's performed, if they're really drunk or just acting it." (Gob Squad, 2015) The ambiguity operates on two levels here: not only do the audience never truly know what is real or faked, but the performers can never truly know whether they are being watched or not; the audience can come and go as they please.

In their project titled *Room Service: Help Me Make It Through The Night* (2003), Gob Squad collaborated with performance/video artist Elyce Semeneć, sound designers Sebastian Bark and Jeff McGrory and video artists Miles Chalcraft and Leif Alexis to digitise the barriers and screens they had been employing hitherto. Video is streamed from four hotel rooms with performers inside each room to screens in a board room occupied by an audience who are invited to interact with the performers via a telephone placed before them. In *Gob Squad's Kitchen: You've Never Had It So Good* (2007), a projection screen on stage shows the performers in a separate room where they re-construct Andy Warhol's *Kitchen* (1966). As performers occasionally leave the room and audience members are invited into it (to help lend the re-enactment authenticity), it soon becomes apparent that the room had been constructed directly behind the projection screen. In *Western Society* (2013), Gob Squad recycle the use of projection screens and live camera feeds from the performance space behind the screen. Where *Gob Squad's Kitchen* enclosed the space behind the screen to generate a more profound separation between performers and spectators, in *Western Society* the audience and performers are divided but the division does not seem as permanent as the structure in *Kitchen*. The screen used in *Western Society* does not start on stage, it is wheeled on approximately five minutes into the performance. Not only does this physical barrier substitute for the bounded material media portal of computer and mobile phone screens that frame the phenomenal and social world, but it also represents the translation of phenomenological, kinaesthetic and spatio-temporal co-presence into the compressed, two-dimensional image made of thousands of pixels that transmit shapes and colours that approximate a representation of the corporeal situation.

Gob Squad's construction of a literal fourth wall has become an increasingly pertinent manifestation of their intensified response to the ubiquity of screens in western society and increasingly what James Miller (2014)

proposes “is often called the fourth screen, coming historically after cinema, television, and computers.” (p. 210) The fourth screen is the term given to mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. Gob Squad propose that “in a culture where most of us spend our time in front of screens, be they mobile phone, computer screens or TVs”, screens are “the most natural vocabulary to use.” (2010 p. 67) These screens have become ubiquitous in western society¹¹⁴ and represent an unprecedented penetration of media, increase in mediatisation, and amplified likelihood of social alienation and/or isolation.

On some occasions, spectators are invited to cross the threshold that Gob Squad construct in their performances. As part of this participatory leap from spectator to participant, individuals can to some extent get a feeling or experience of exercising the agency and authenticity hitherto denied to them. The alienated¹¹⁵ spectators had been made acutely aware of their distance and separation from the performers (evocative of the collective Other). When given the opportunity to engage with them without the physical obstruction, the act of accepting the invitation is made authentic by the intentional act of grasping one’s own possibilities and rushing up to face the Other in defiance.

When participants choose to accept the invitation to participate in *Western Society* and circumvent the mediating screen that separates them from the performers, they are in some way choosing to face the gaze of the Other (as a physical manifestation of Sartre’s ‘Look’) head on. This choice to participate subverts their everyday mode of digital interaction that operates based on being physically hidden or obscured by the representational modes of mediating technology. Participatory performance practice operates to subvert widespread socio-political and cultural phenomena that obscure or misappropriate one’s fundamental relationship with the world and with others. I would argue that this form of bad faith is most pervasive in the reciprocal activities and projects of users engaged in social media.

The bounded screen, that is so synonymous with online social engagement and the technological orientation of enframing, is transcended by spectators upon their invitation into *Western Society* as participants. Audience members that accept the invitation to participate in the performance do so by circumventing and negating the mediating screen. Users engaging in social media reduce the richness and complexity of authentic and corporeal sociality to the confines of a computer or smartphone screen, where their ontological relationship

¹¹⁴ With 5.135 billion global mobile internet users and 2.958 billion global mobile social media users in 2018 (Kemp, 2018).

¹¹⁵ Not necessarily used here in the strictly Brechtian sense, however this manner of distancing *is* largely implemented to incite an awareness, albeit not entirely intellectual nor emotion, but rather ontological.

with the Other is approximated through representational means, but ultimately decayed and ‘degraded’ (Debord, 1967). Those participating in *Western Society* are accepting the opportunity to establish a relationship with the Other built upon choice, moderation and directness.

VI. CHALLENGING-FORTH SOCIALITY

Despite the enframing orientation that modern technology (such as social media) necessitates, the primal and erstwhile processes of revealing (bringing-forth) maintain their pace separate from the digital frontier, in the opening of the world to human consciousness. However, it maintains a much slower pace, compared to the accelerated and impatient ‘challenging-forth’ generated by enframing. This slowdown causes a slippage between the way that the world reveals itself and the technological means humanity engages in to understand and reveal the world. This slippage has become broader with the advent of digital technologies, especially the internet, as knowledge is shared globally in an instant. Furthermore, mobile access to social media and instant messaging accelerates the epistemological qualities of interacting with other conscious beings in the mode of sociality. The same dichotomy is manifest in the gulf between one-to-one face-to-face bodily social interaction and big data.

In the challenging-forth of the world and its natural resources, the enframing orientation of modern technology ceases any further potential revealing. Social media does not realise the subtlety, nuance and potentiality of sociality, but rather it attempts to replicate it by (mis)appropriating the ambiguity of the human social encounter, producing the illusion of relief, safety and security from any perceived negative aspects of offline, face-to-face interaction¹¹⁶.

This tension between the natural bringing-forth of sociality and the forced acceleration of its challenging-forth by social media and mobile internet technology is the same tension described by Walker and Thorpe in *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013) that was discussed earlier in this thesis. Their suggestion for how to resolve this conflict and (at least partially) reconcile this growing slippage is to uncover not only our reliance on social media, but also social media’s dependence (as both platform and corporate instrument) on our sociality. By making this symbiotic relationship plain, the “duty” one may have once felt towards the world of unchecked notifications (that Walker

¹¹⁶ One could argue however, that every form of communication technology that has emerged in human history has been a challenging-forth of some variety. Consider smoke signals, the written word, the printing press, the postal service, telegram, telephone, radio, television, mobile phones, texting, the internet and world wide web, email, instant messaging or video calling and conferencing, etc.

and Thorpe associate with ubiquitous smart phone technology) is alleviated to a certain degree and an attitude of moderation is encouraged.

One way that this challenging-forth of sociality is manifest through one's participation on social media is the establishment and reinforcement of a consistent and largely static online-self. Despite the latent fluid capabilities of social media for facilitating the self in the dynamic mode of becoming, the orientation of enframing reinforces the pressure social media users feel to maintain a consistent and largely unchanging online self.

This is one of many examples of how the model of social media *can* accommodate and actively promote the expression of one's authentic-self and yet reinforces a fixed, consistent and inauthentic presentation of the self, typical of the appropriation of our being-for-others. The fixity of one's self online is built into the interface of many social media platforms, in part to make the mining of one's data more efficient. The challenging-forth of sociality is a direct result of the enframing of one's online-self. This is not a process that one enters under duress. It can be argued that one of the fundamental drivers, that enhance the schism between one's offline mode of bringing-forth and one's online mode of challenging-forth, is the desire for sociality without risk.

Tanja Staehler suggests that "social networks are so appealing because they fulfil both our desires for sociality (given that others are the most interesting thing in the world) and our desire to be protected [...] (given that others affect us most)." (2014 p. 239) The basic premise of social media engagement is the promise that the user will benefit from all the positives of being-in-the-world-with-others (that is revealed in the mode of bringing-forth), without having to confront any of the negatives; the 'Look' of the Other and the constant grappling with one's being-for-others.

Authenticity is fundamentally liminal. By advocating the absolute ontological seclusion and segregation of the conscious individual from the Other, this mode of engagement with social media is in direct conflict with our fundamental being-in-the-world-with-others. Heidegger and Sartre promote the conception of authenticity as an "*existentiell modification of the "they"*" (Heidegger, 1927 p. 247), as a subversion of socio-political, economic and cultural pressures, or "a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted." (Sartre, 1943 p. 94) There is no authentic-self without having traversed the pitfalls of inauthenticity instigated by one's interactions with the Other.

It is evident from these two evaluations of the authentic mode, that authenticity (or any authentic act) is directly relative to and contingent on the modes and acts of bad faith and inauthenticity that they are subverting. Likewise, authentic acts are contingent upon destabilising (but not destroying) the commonly fixed and static relationships and interactions that we have with the Other in the mode of the 'they'. As such, authentic acts occupy

the ontological gully that segregates human facticity and transcendence, the objectifying Look of the Other and human agency and our being and not-being in the persistent mode of becoming.

Through the neoliberal orientation of enframing and challenging-forth sociality through social media, one cannot be engaged in an ontologically liminal capacity, to cultivate the conditions necessary for authenticity to emerge. The social media model operates optimally when users assume fixed roles within the given online social structure. These roles may not necessarily be the archetypal social pathways or positions destabilised by early existentialists such as organised Christianity or dogmatic class structures dictated by material wealth, but social media structures organize and identify users in terms of their quantifiable social data, e.g. received and transmitted likes, comments, shares, etc.

One could even argue that the inauthentic pathways social media users are nudged into are redefinitions or updates to those problematised by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Active social media celebrities like Logan Paul (who is famous exclusively for his social media activity) have multiple Facebook fan groups and sub-groups, Twitter hashtag threads, substantial Reddit communities and almost 19 million YouTube subscribers. These groups and sub-groups are comprised of users that are notified when Logan Paul uploads content across the different platforms and flock to consume, rate and discuss it. These fans may not be socially obliged to continue to follow his online activity, but it is rare for social media users to not be aware of him and if an active social media user is aware of him, they are expected to have an opinion on him. For as many online fan groups or communities, there are just as many groups (if not more) that engage in outspoken criticism and loathing. I am not suggesting that Logan Paul is a Christ-like figure in the context of social media, however the organised structures of adoration or detestation that surround his online social media presence verge on the religious. His wealth online is not material; it is manifest in the number of views, clicks, likes, subscriptions, etc. This online wealth has also translated into financial capital through the monetisation of his social media status based primarily in advertising.

The class structures that concerned Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have evolved and the neoliberal structure that props up social media means that when one has exposure, popularity and power online, one can enjoy upper-class privilege and power offline. Popularity and exposure on social media can translate to more than purely financial wealth. Donald Trump had significant wealth before his engagement with social media and presidential campaign, but his increased and ubiquitous use of Twitter and its popularity during the United States 2016 presidential election helped translate the capital of likes, followers and retweets into a position of unquestionable political power (Hollinger, 2017).

‘Positive reinforcement’ (Skinner, 1938) for a particular social media act or pattern of behavior (post/update) will encourage that behavior, making it more likely in the future, narrowing that user’s field of possibility and making them more consistent as a fixed self. For example, if a typically politically inactive individual shows their support for a particular political party, manifesto or policy by generating some form of social media content and this act is met with positive feedback from their online social community (through the means of likes, comments or shares), they are likely to continue posting, responding and/or engaging in a consistent manner until the positive reinforcement dwindles or backfires¹¹⁷.

This type of politically charged social feedback is frequently amplified by the political ‘echo chamber’ (Krasodonski-Jones, 2016) that social media and social network platforms foster. Social networks are established by identifying and connecting with others with similar interests, beliefs, history or tastes. Users converse with other users online who share their opinions and reinforce their attitudes. Alex Krasodonski-Jones (2016) proposes that “this kind of confirmation bias is causing the balkanization of political discussion, a strengthening of existing biases and political prejudices, and a narrowing of political, cultural and social awareness.” (p. 6) The tribalism and inauthentic pathways I mentioned combine online in a way that makes users think that they are freely expressing their political beliefs and exercising their agency, but they are often reinforcing their static position. Authenticity is not defined as categorically contrary or deliberately contradictory, rather authentic acts should remain ambiguous and liminal by perpetuating the mode of existential becoming. One’s beliefs and political position is externally influenced, however the intentional acts of an individual that are motivated by these beliefs should ultimately defer to the ontological fact of one’s freedom, born from one’s own ontologically ambiguous, liminal and paradoxical existence.

The public and private regions Goffman theorises have also been appropriated to investigate and problematise “the presentation of self in the age of social media” (Hogan, 2010, p. 1). Goffman’s original model defines social regions as structures that facilitate and dictate the presentation of a different self, depending on the specific audience. This regional model also allowed for social respite; where one’s actions are not directly perceived and objectified by the other. These distinctions are blurred if not entirely omitted when one engages in social media. There is the option to filter who in your friends/followers list can see or respond to posts, updates or social media engagements. However, in the main all our activity is visible and subject to the objectifying gaze of our entire combined friends list or set of followers.

¹¹⁷ This was in fact my experience in the 2017 UK general election.

Hogan clarifies the situation: “As sites expand to encompass more individuals from one’s off-line life, with no clear distinction between them it also collapses all of the partially overlapping social circles of modern life [...] into a single list” (ibid. p.383) This means that our posts and updates have to reflect a consistent self that can be identified and verified by all of the other people in our online social network. Hogan terms this phenomenon the ‘lowest common denominator culture’. Being incessantly subject to such a large audience, as one is engaging in social media and having to present a consistent fixed self, is a situation unique to social media. Therefore, the model of the lowest common denominator (in terms of the self being presented online) represents a ubiquitous social pressure that influences individuals to present a fixed consistent self to a large public audience. Upon engaging in social media, the user immediately feels the objectifying ‘Look’ of the virtual Other.

Rimini Protokoll’s series of *Home Visit* (2015) performances can be considered an exploration of public, national and cultural identity. It also probes participants’ private beliefs and past actions in a public forum, dissolving the boundaries between performer, participant and spectator, and between public and private expressions of selfhood. By instigating questions and concerns around European identity¹¹⁸, Rimini Protokoll evoke the effect of the lowest common denominator on how one considers oneself and expresses oneself in a global context.

Home Visit is a performance that takes place in the home of a participant. The host-participant invites a few friends to take part, but strangers can also buy tickets and arrive at the host’s home to participate. The host must transition between and across their private identity and multiple iterations of their public identity. Upon his own visit to a stranger’s home, theatre reviewer Nikolaus Stenitzer notes that “it is not unlike other performances in the public realm. But here, the stage is not a public place, but a private space.” (2015) Hosts must adapt from having no audience, to facing an audience of friends (which dictates one or more distinct identities) and strangers, which requires another subtly different persona.

There is only one representative from Rimini Protokoll that is present and this in an administrative capacity; they do not perform. Rather the host and their fourteen guests are provided with instructions and a small machine that generates questions and further instructions. Sat around the host’s dining table, participants take turns pressing a green button on the machine, which prints out a set of questions or instructions that participants read aloud. The machine asks questions such as: “Who has participated in a physical conflict?”, “What was the last political issue you had a debate about at this table?”, “Has anyone been a member of a political party?”, “Who

¹¹⁸ In the European version of the performance: *Home Visit Europe*.

feels more European than a member of their own country?”¹¹⁹ Later into the performance, participants are asked to nominate other participants to answer questions. Each round of questions has a time limit indicated either by written instructions or sounds emitted by the machine.

The hosts cross multiple thresholds that divide their public-self from their private-self throughout the performance by inviting friends and strangers into their home and answering penetrating questions about their identity as a national and international citizen. With all these different audiences in one (private) space, the different selves they express to discrete groups or individuals are conflated out of necessity and the perceived need for consistency. Not only are they faced with presenting a self for both friends and strangers, but they are doing so in their own home, which is arguably the environment where they are most able to truly express their private/authentic-self. The discrepancies between these different identities come under more pressure to assimilate and merge to form the lowest common denominator for an audience of friends and strangers alike.



Figure 12 Machine that generates/prints questions and instructions. Rimini Protokoll, *Home Visit*, Participant's home, Prague (2015). Photo by Rimini Protokoll.

¹¹⁹ *Home Visit's* primary questions are concerned with how citizens conceptualise their geographical home and far one identifies with one's nationality: "what is [insert country/region] actually? Is it a geographic border or a cultural identity? How much [insert country/region] is in us all?" (Rimini Protokoll, 2015)

It is not only the host that has to contend with the homogenisation and consistency of one's public-self or identity. In answering the prescribed questions (generated by the machine), the other participants are quickly subject to the expectation to express their opinions and beliefs in a bounded way¹²⁰ that is immediately receptive to positive or negative reinforcement¹²¹. As a participant in *Home Visit*, one is encouraged to reflect not only on the consistency of one's answers, as an expression of one's self in the presence of physically present strangers, but also on the consistency of one's answers relative to the answers given by others. Theatre and performance reviewer Hilde Elisabeth Bjørk affirms that these "questions confront us with our ability to evaluate ourselves, the relation between who you think you are and who you actually are." (2015)

Similarly, to Ontroerend Goed's *£¥€\$ (LIES)*, *Home Visit* is not a project that explicitly engages with social media. Rather it is inflected and influenced by the effect that social media has on one's international, national, public and private identities. The concept of European identity is aroused in the minds of the participants by not only asking questions explicitly about how they reconcile their international and national identities, but by structuring the performance-game in a way that corresponds to five "significant periods in the integration of the European Union." (Bellon, 2015)

The awareness of one's identity on a national or international scale has been enhanced and compounded considerably by the growth and penetration of social media use. The virtual global community that Zuckerberg (2017) aspires to is founded in the establishment of one's identity that transcends geographical and cultural borders. It is also predicated on the dissolution of any identity-based compartmentalisation and the maintenance of an online global identity based on the lowest common denominator. *Home Visit* may take its cues about global and national identity from international politics, however its urgency in addressing these issues is prompted by the effect of social media on the constitution of the self as a form of challenging-forth.

VII. PLACING USERS IN STANDING-RESERVE

¹²⁰ Raising hands or answering verbally within a given time-limit.

¹²¹ Other participants agreeing or disagreeing.

The enframing orientation towards modern technology is the first phase in a challenging-forth of the world into a standing-reserve. In this framework, the way that neoliberal governmentality orients users towards social media is by enframing sociality. This makes the ambiguities and nuances of sociality more manageable and calculable. Once enframed, online sociality represents a challenging of the offline modes of social engagement. Where offline sociality has more of a chance to unfold and reveal itself intuitively and in its own time, the enhanced rate of processing challenges sociality to reveal itself quicker and in a way that is easy to break down into digits and algorithms. The challenging-forth of sociality is a means to suspend sociality in standing-reserve.

The Heideggerian essence of instrumentality and understanding the human orientation towards modern technology (and by extension social media) lies in the maxim that nothing is good in itself, but only good *for* something. In his reading of *The Question Concerning Technology*, John David Zuern suggests that “in the grip of technology, things no longer get to arrive.” (1998) Rather, they are in a constant state of awaiting or ‘standing-reserve’.

Consequently, the digital apparatus that constitute social media are without value in itself. Likewise, social media users are perpetually primed and waiting to be socially activated by other users. The general intention of the ‘Web 2.0’ model of user-generated content is the technological interface is engaged with by a user and used in an instrumental fashion; it is therefore given value in its expediency to users who wish to express themselves online. If an individual engages in social media (as a dominant specimen of web 2.0) in isolation however, the platform would cease to be definable as *social* media, but rather an online depository or simply: *media*. This is sometimes the case when users increase the privacy settings of their profiles and content, so that they believe that only they can access their uploaded content. The value of social media as a technology that reveals something about the world is entirely dependent on the engagement of multiple users.

The value of social media is as a mediator between individuals. This could be interpreted both as a means of bringing people closer together socially (where they may be far apart geographically) or as a means of separating, distancing or alienating people, where the option to socialise physically or face-to-face exists. Just as the forester (depicted by Heidegger) made to be in standing-reserve, being at the mercy of the demand of the paper industry, so too are social media users at the mercy of other users, hanging on every ‘like’ or ‘comment’, incessantly checking for updates or responses. One’s value as a social media commodity is also stockpiled and eked out as and when social media providers require data to sell to advertisers.

If one took a photograph, in the context of social media usage and ubiquity, that photograph is placed in standing-reserve to be uploaded to a social media platform at some point in the future. Likewise, individuals may “reserve” themselves or put themselves on social standby until they are ready for social media exposure. As habitual social media users, we place ourselves in standing-reserve, waiting for the next opportunity to reveal our (carefully composed) selves online. This time and energy spent dedicating ourselves to the next social media post or update, diverts time, energy, attention and intention from our individual projects. Subsequently, when one does choose to express oneself online, one’s enframed online manifestation is captured and stored for future trade.

Charlotte Spencer’s *Is this a Waste Land?* (2017) can not only be considered an instance of participatory performance that problematises the pervasion of social media in everyday life, but it is also illustrative of how participatory practitioners employ headphones to place participants in what is arguably an intensified state of being placed in standing-reserve. The issuing of headphones as a contemporary performance trope has escalated dramatically over the last decade (Trueman, 2009). There are a range of events and performances that approach the use of headphones in performance differently; David Rosenberg’s *Contains Violence* (2008), Analogue Theatre’s *Re-enactments* (2012), Gob Squad’s *Western Society* (2013) and Complicité’s *The Encounter* (2015), to name but a few. Those performances that employ headphones as a means of delivering instructions to participants rely on participants not only following the instructions, but also waiting patiently in reserve in between instructions.

Is this a Waste Land? employs wireless headphones to feed one of five instructional narratives to participants visiting the site-specific performance: the waste land. Before the event officially begins, participants are asked to sign a disclaimer that outlines the artists’ participatory intentions and absolves them of responsibility of participants’ actions: “by signing this you are accepting that: you are responsible for your own actions and that all instructions should be seen as **invitations** for you to follow in a way that you feel comfortable with.” (Charlotte Spencer Projects, 2017) By doing so, the performance makers¹²² set up the choice that participants will make to accept or decline the invitation to participate (and subvert their agency) well in advance.

¹²² Charlotte Spencer, James Keane, Tom Spencer, Kirsty Arnold, Ben Ash, Ben McEwan, Thomas McKeon, Petra Söör, Louise Tanoto, Jennifer-Lynn Crawford, Ruth Little, Keren Kossow, Samantha Bennellick-Jones, Gian Paolo Cottino, Emily Jenkins, Kip Johnson and Neil Callaghan (all listed in production credits).



Figure 13 Participants awaiting next instruction having built a wall. Charlotte Spencer Projects, *Is this a Waste Land?* Pontoon Dock, London (2017). Photo by Pari Naderi.

Having established one's mode of agency, participants are instructed to construct walls and tall monolithic structures using the scattered detritus of the hinterland. From my experience as a participant, as one follows the verbal instructions and is alienated from the other participants by the ethereal soundscapes playing behind them, there is a tendency to focus almost exclusively on what one is being told to do and the tasks one is instructed to carry out. The piece has been described as "both a mindfulness exercise and task-based immersive performance." (Irvine, 2017) To this end, one's mindfulness is centred around these immersive tasks – so much so that any other participants/audience members physically present in the performance space begin to become indistinct from the rest of the visual noise on one's periphery.

As one's project ends or there is a brief respite in the flow of instructions, one's circle of attention widens to suddenly reveal others in the vicinity. In the context of *Is this a Waste land?* the submission to a calming disembodied voice may feel like it is contributing to something worthwhile and constructive. It is however analogous to the inauthentic deference to the pathways laid out by the Other that one follows in an erroneous attempt to escape from the objectifying Look of the Other by means of appropriation. The instructions issued to participants over the course of *Is this a Waste Land?* can be read as a simple iteration of the influence that one subscribes to as a user on social media. Users adopt social media as an increasingly core mode of sociality because

it seems easier and less ambiguous to interact with other people online and across a digital mediator. One is not directly affected by the embodied Look of the Other and one can express one's opinions and generate content freely. Social media platforms are built around a neoliberal structure that values digital capital based on exposure, recognition and quantifiable popularity. Even though users are not directly subject to the influential Look of the Other, their online actions are driven by their being-for-others. Even though participants in *Is this a Waste Land?* are not being directly looked at or told what to do by embodied performers, they still follow the instructions issued over the headphones.

As one set of instructions comes to an end and one waits for the next to begin, one automatically lingers, standing by for the next activity. In this moment, one has literally been placed in standing-reserve. Despite the disclaimer that one signed, taking ownership of one's actions, one is lulled into following the pathways established by the voice being fed wirelessly through the headphones. When the blueprint for that pathway dissipates, one is left without an immediate purpose, other than to watch the pathways that others are following, wondering whether one should be following that pathway instead.

As one waits, standing by for the next instruction that may never come, one is in a state of standing-reserve. Participants are placed in a space that is unused but waiting to be developed or built upon. They are set tasks and made useful, until there is a gap where each participant is no longer useful. Both the environment in which participants carry out tasks and their physicality and focus are suspended until again they are needed for a project conceived by others. The waste land is in standing-reserve; it is left to decay until it is mobilised in human endeavour. It is made into a resource to be exploited as and when it is needed. During their participation in *Is this a Waste Land?* a correlation emerges between the participants and the performance environment.

One is guided into a position where one may feel an affinity with the waste land as both are made into materials in standing-reserve. The sites that Charlotte Spencer locates her performances in are vacant and awaiting redevelopment (Spencer, 2017). By occupying them with performance of *Is this a Waste Land?* Spencer is briefly bringing these spaces out of standing-reserve and is encouraging a practice of bringing-forth by exploring and revealing the environment through artistic endeavour. Without changing it, or forcing it into a quantifiable commodity, participants become intimate with the waste land, bring it from concealment into unconcealment and leave it again relatively untouched.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Social media is a contemporary evolution of what Heidegger may have termed ‘modern technology’. There is no way he could have anticipated social media as it exists today. However, the type of relationship that he proposed that one may have had with a hydroelectric dam or any other mechanised technology resonates in the relationship that one has with social media. Or rather, the relationship that one has with social media in the context of the governmentality of neoliberal capitalism, can be likened to the orientation that one has towards modern technology.

This orientation is characterised by the way that one engages with social media technology, in a manner that reduces sociality into bounded, algorithmically expressible and commodifiable units. The way that sociality is revealed to users, through this enframed mode of online social mediation, conflicts with a potentially authentic offline revealing of the relationship between conscious beings. By enframing sociality online, its primal revealing is challenged and accelerated to the extent it is reduced and misappropriated. The combination of the mode of enframing and the discrepancy in the modes of online and offline revealing feeds into the commodification of the social media user. By participating in social media, one is put into standing-reserve as a prosumer whose contribution is only as valuable as the ‘likes’ it receives or the advertising space that it justifies.

The Royal Shakespeare Company and Mudlark productions’ *Such Tweet Sorrow* demonstrates an alternative orientation towards social media. By inviting spectators to intervene in unexpected ways, the traditionally static narrative was explored more organically, revealing hitherto unconsidered facets and realising the idealistic potential of social media as a manifestation of participatory culture. This very authentic potential is what makes the neoliberal orientation towards social media so intensely inauthentic.

The contradiction at the heart of neoliberal ideology aligns with and exploits the latent potential of social media technology. Ontroerend Goed’s *£¥€\$ (LIES)* not only captures this paradox of freedom within the limits of capitalism but does so across multiple levels of representation. Hence, their layering of performance, casino gambling, and international finance reflects the layers of mediation intrinsic to both neoliberal capitalism and the way that it emerges on social media.

The same inauthentic orientation users bring to social media can also be detected in earlier forms of participatory performance practice. Neoliberal instrumentalism (typical during New Labour’s agenda of social inclusion) is a model case of governmentality and devolution (Bishop, 2012). Within the bounds of the ‘cultural

industries' (Harvie, 2013), attainment of a pseudo-authentic conciliation was achieved primarily through cathartic means, whilst integrating and indoctrinating audiences into the neoliberal culture.

Far from following this tradition, contemporary participatory performance practice attempts to make spectators and participants alert to the inauthentic orientation commonly adopted towards social media in western society. Gob Squad's persistent use of screens and barriers in their participatory work reflects the ubiquitous fourth screen (mobile phones and tablets) that binds sociality in an enclosed frame. Rimini Protokoll's *Home Visit* draws stark distinctions between one's private and public self, only to then blur these boundaries by cultivating a situation that promotes the lowest common denominator version of one's identity. Finally, Charlotte Spencer's *Is this a Waste Land?* emphasises one's agency as a participant, only to lead one through a series of immersive tasks and put one in a state of standing-reserve until one is activated by the next task.

These examples of contemporary participatory performance practice all employ components of the social media experience. Where some may scrutinise the inauthentic ways that one's self is expressed as a result of a neoliberal orientation towards social media, others attempt to make one mindful of the potential that social media has as a mode of authentic self-expression. In both approaches is not only a reflection of neoliberal instrumentality, but a nuanced subversion of it that emerges as a result of a mode of bringing-forth.



CHAPTER V:
problematizing
PARTICIPATION

Thus far I have critically engaged with contemporary modes of participatory performance practice and explored the ways in which it responds to current manifestations of existential concerns; the latter contribute towards the development and emergence of (in)authenticity. I have also considered the different approaches employed by participatory practitioners to reflect and problematise issues surrounding a widely adopted inauthentic neoliberal orientation towards social media.

I suggest not only is contemporary participatory performance sensitive to socio-political, economic and cultural expressions of (in)authenticity, but it is fundamentally engaged in the problematisation of *participation*, as it is manifest in contemporary western society. Within my investigation, the concept and act of participation is not reserved exclusively for descriptions of contemporary dramaturgy. In everyday life, one's willing involvement in socio-political, economic, and cultural systems like neoliberal capitalism or social media is a form of participation. The way that one is oriented towards social media technology is predicated on one's participation in social media as an exploited prosumer, in the devolution of neoliberal governmentality, and the fundamentally inauthentic and unbalanced mode of sociality established between the self and the Other.

There is a significant amount of contemporary participatory performance practice that problematises the inauthentic, exploitative and decentralised modes of participation in the way it is manifest as the fundamental mode of engagement for the social media user. The data and content of the online prosumer (generated as a result of their participation) is exploited by social media corporations for profit. Participation is also a politically sponsored/subsidised (neoliberal) aesthetic strategy to placate and distract a public, unsupported by the state and shepherded back into the exploitative capitalist machine. In exploring and problematising each of these socio-politically entangled modes of participation, each practitioner occupies an often ambiguous position on the continuum established by Chrissie Tiller. I believe performance works by Gob Squad, An Xiao, Walker and Thorpe, Ontroerend Goed and Tim Crouch are significant because they not only foster opportunities for socio-political efficacy through collaboration, but also cultivate and employ the disruptive potentials of participatory art. The exclusive authorship of the work within this sample of participatory practice is never explicitly claimed, nor knowingly bequeathed. By toeing the line between the binaries of inventive/collaborative participation proper and nominal/manipulative participation, the following practitioners (and others discussed) avoid the problematic

issues surrounding the ethics and legalities of aesthetic ownership and exploitation of labour within their own work that may arise under the pretence of audience agency and empowerment. These practitioners hold these complications at arm's length and use participatory strategies to comment on the practices of neoliberal capitalism, the internet model of web 2.0 and social media, which use the façade of empowerment and user agency to generate commodifiable content.

What I hope emerges is how many overlapping subcategories of interactive artistic practice are motivated by a fundamental shift in the way individuals interact with one another in contemporary western society under the pretence of 'participatory culture' (Jenkins, et al., 2015). At the core of art that disrupts the fixed and physically alienated artist-observer relationship and strikes up dialogue between the two (the participatory art that I have been discussing) is a singular fundamental project.

I propose contemporary performance practice engaged with participation is primarily concerned with individual and collective (in)authenticity in a socially digitised and commodified world that (all too easily) embraces (or endorses) individual and collective decision making (and acts), that are *not* conducive to the realisation of unique and ontologically free beings. Whether the creator of any project acknowledges their artistic decisions in these specific terms is a different matter. Preferring to negotiate the facets of the current 'techno-capitalist' (Suarez-Villa, 2009) phenomenon by exploring it in terms of realness, choice, responsibility, presence or manipulation and exploitation, contemporary participatory practitioners are still always in orbit of the prevailing inauthentic reality and marginalised authentic ideal once considered by Heidegger and Sartre.

Nevertheless, the varied instances of performance practice that engage with participation or participatory aesthetic strategy¹²³, seem to achieve (or attempt to achieve) one of the following two (fundamentally existential) objectives: first, enhancing mindfulness of inauthentic modes of participation *and* then providing the opportunity to glimpse authentic participatory alternatives.

I. MINDFULNESS AND INAUTHENTICITY

¹²³ That I have narrowed down to Gob Squad's *Western Society*, An Xiao's *The Artist is Kinda Present*, Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe's *I Wish I Was Lonely*, Tim Crouch's *The Author* and Ontroerend Goed's *Audience* in this chapter.

One of the approaches that contemporary participatory practitioners may be employing involves making audiences aware of the inauthentic modes of participation fundamental to neoliberalism and social media. Therefore, one's mutual 'falling'¹²⁴ away (Heidegger, 1927) from authenticity is revealed. As is the expression of one's 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943) towards an engagement with one's own freedom. Both one's bad faith and one's latent expression of authenticity are largely dependent on one's relationships and interactions with others, through the language and convention of theatrical performance at one's disposal.



Figure 14 Sean Patten (far left), Berit Stumpf (centre, holding microphone) and Sarah Thom (behind/on projection screen, holding media device), Gob Squad, *Western Society*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin (2013). Photograph from video footage documentation.

I consider Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2013) to be an example of participatory performance practice that stresses the inauthenticity of one's participatory engagement in digitised culture. This is primarily due to their extended use of digital technology as a tool of participation. Approximately five minutes into the performance,

¹²⁴ In avoidance of one's own most possibility.

Sarah Thom¹²⁵ plays a video on a mobile media device (iPod Touch) that Gob Squad¹²⁶ refer to as ‘the least watched video on the internet’. This is a video uploaded to YouTube by an anonymous Californian family. Thom is sat on a sofa, in front of a video camera, but behind a large projection screen that reflects the projected images, fed live from the camera (see Figure 14).

The various processes of digital documentation, transmission and exhibition (recording, uploading, streaming, filming, transmitting, projecting, reflecting) however, have stripped the “low resolution” (Affenzeller, 2013) footage of any detail that may help spectators to identify or recognise individual faces¹²⁷. The people in the video can only be identified as such, through the combination of vague shapes, colors and movement. There is also no sound in the video (as it is presented to the audience during the performance of *Western Society*), that could be used to distinguish between individuals. The iPod (that is playing the video) could be hooked up to a speaker system, so the audience could hear what is going on in the video, but Gob Squad leave the video muted. This may pragmatically allow the other members to verbally discuss the video as it is playing, without generating too much of a confusing cacophony of voices, sounds and music. The lack of sound may leave the creative potential open to Gob Squad so that they can decide what music, sound and dialogue to use in their imminent re-enactment.

Compared to the performers (Sean Patten and Berit Stumpf) standing in front of the projection screen (unmediated by technology), and even the performer (Sarah Thom) sitting behind it – visible to the audience by means of live video transmission from a camera, also situated behind the screen, fed to a front-of-house projector, projecting onto the screen – the figures depicted in the video are more akin to clockwork curiosities: automated components in a fragment of forgotten social media. Hence, the individuals in the ‘least watched video’ become the faceless and nameless ‘they’, an expression of otherness not bound to a single conscious subject, but rather all those that one considers similar to oneself, but fundamentally different from one’s unique self (Heidegger, 1927).

The people depicted, will more than likely never come face to face with, nor come to know the spectators in the audience of any given performance of Gob Squad’s *Western Society* in any kind of meaningful way. Nor are the audience encouraged to encounter or comprehend these individuals in any way beyond their discernable actions: each person is given a name by the onstage members of Gob Squad based on their perceivable acts within

¹²⁵ Member of Gob Squad and original cast member of *Western Society*.

¹²⁶ The collected members on stage: Sean Patten, Berit Stumpf and Sarah Thom.

¹²⁷ This deterioration of the mediated video document is ironically further aggravated by the process of taking a screenshot of the live performance video documentation and inserting it into this thesis document.

the confines of the video e.g. Cake Lady (who eats cake), Girl with Phone (who uses their mobile phone) or Dances with Granny (who dances with another individual called “Granny”), etc.

The detachment, between the audience members of *Western Society* and the people in ‘the least watched video on the internet’, is geographically, temporally, and socially profound. Yet, Gob Squad’s inclusion and precise mode of presentation of this example of social media within a live performance situation could have complicated the audiences’ grasp of what and who can be considered present, absent or co-present.

Through this presentational layering of mediated and un-mediated articles (performers, projection and video), a juxtaposition is established between the spatiotemporal co-presence of the live embodied performers (Fischer-Lichte, 2008) and the physically absent but nonetheless perceivable figures, depicted in the ‘least watched video’. By forming such a disparity of co-presence, a heightened awareness of the mediation or absence¹²⁸ of other conscious beings can be said to be induced in the audience.

Reviewer Gareth K. Vile commented that “filtering the live action through the projections adds an intangibility to the cast’s movements and words: they become like ghosts, wandering through each other’s lives but failing to make a connection.” (Vile, 2015) The alienating effect (that Vile describes) of the digital mediation of this social media is amplified through Gob Squad’s choice to display ‘the least watched video’ on a large projection screen that obscures 70% of the stage area, being fed from a live camera, zoomed in on a mobile media device, and held by a performer (Sarah Thom).

Gob Squad diagnostically consider this experimentation with audience-performer separation in the written analysis of their own work. They recognise the use of “Barriers, Windows and Screens” (Gob Squad, 2010 p. 66), as a means of physically separating the performers and spectators, that runs throughout their practice¹²⁹. The reasons for using barriers to separate performers and audience vary from project to project.

In *Super Night Shot* (2003) Gob Squad screen a film, they had shot and edited in the hour immediately preceding the performance, in an attempt to bring the urban environment into the performance space. By imposing the limitation of less than an hour’s editing time, Gob Squad eliminates an overly-long gestation period and invites a sense of immediacy to the film. They capture the urban environment the audience would have just passed

¹²⁸ Physical and temporal absence of the individuals depicted in the YouTube video, in comparison to the physical and temporal presence of the performers on stage and other audience members sat in the auditorium.

¹²⁹ Please also see *Work* (1995), *Close Enough to Kiss* (1997) *Calling Laika* (1998), *What Are You Looking At?* (1998), *Super Night Shot* (2003), *Room Service (Help Me Make It Through The Night)* (2003), *Prater Saga 3 (In This Neighbourhood The Devil is a Goldmine)* (2004), *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good)* (2007), *Revolution Now!* (2010), *Are You With Us?* (2010), *Before Your Very Eyes* (2011), *War and Peace* (2016) and *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* (2018).

through to get to the theatre and thereby forge an unambiguous connection to the world beyond the stage and auditorium. Furthermore, in *Revolution Now!* (2010) the performers and audience communicate with the world outside the performance space/venue through cameras and screens, attempting to instigate a revolution.

This same utilisation of screens, and its representation of the spatiotemporal distancing that occurs between social media users, is compounded through the three-fold¹³⁰ technological mediation that separates the individuals depicted in the video, the performers presenting the video and the audience of *Western Society*. The people depicted in the ‘least watched video’ and the other users that one encounters online are *physically* absent. However, the binary distinction between present (as a phenomenally perceivable and haptically potent physical body) and absent (physically and temporally mediated and represented through exclusively technological means), becomes unclear when considered in terms of how one (audience member or social media user) encounters ‘the Other’ and feels their technologically mediated ‘Look’ (Sartre, 1943).

By evoking figures in motion, the video induces a recognition in the audience of other conscious human beings. This recognition is reinforced by Patten and Stumpf (Gob Squad members and performers, see Figure 14), allocating act-based names (e.g. ‘Dances with Granny’) to the figures in the video that associates identifiable and relatable acts and intentions with the abstract shapes. If the audience are able to perceive the figures on the screen (also situated behind a projection screen) not as digitally generated imagery, but as human: existing and acting entities (albeit in the reconstitution of the original, temporally and geographically distant, situation), then the way the audience must encounter them as present or absent cannot be reduced to the simple binary of one or the other, but rather has to be considered in terms of indivisible intensive magnitudes¹³¹ of presence. The perceived presence and/or absence of the technologically mediated figures (people in ‘the least watched video’) is on an interpenetrative continuum.

One can intuit the figures in the video are in fact absent, but the perception and recognition of these moving shapes and colours as human and conscious, evokes the presence of the Other and therefore the negation of one’s absolute subjectivity in the world, in the form of the Look. Recognition of the figures in the video as the Other (another conscious being) negates their physical absence because one is confronted with the existence of other conscious subjects and feels something like the Look of the Other. Not only do the performers and other

¹³⁰ 1. The filmed and uploaded ‘least watched video’ 2. The playback on a mobile internet device 3. Feed from camera to projection screen.

¹³¹ In the same way that Bergson (1889) took on the Kantian (1781) idea of ‘intensive magnitudes’ to describe the human perception of duration, later taken up by Deleuze (1968) as ‘intensity’ to describe the phenomenal and cognitive encounter.

audience members embody the immediate Look of the physically and temporally present Other, but by introducing the technologically present Other, the effect of the Look (on one's comprehension of one's own being as both object and subject) becomes *complicated*.

The technological presence of the Other makes the relationship between physically present conscious beings (performers, spectators and figures in the video) that much more complex. This is largely because not all agents (video people) are physically *or* temporally present and therefore unable to make an intentional fix of their ocular faculties (eyes) on those other conscious entities (the performers or audience members), that one would typically associate with being "looked" at. Be that as it may (as I have explored before) both Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1943) suggest that one *does not have to be* in direct physical, visual, auditory or olfactory proximity to another person to feel their ontological presence relative to one's own existence and subjectivity. Sartre states that the ontological presence of the Other is intensified when it is founded phenomenologically: if one can actually see or hear (or in some other way firmly intuit) the physically embodied Other. Conversely, even when one *believes* another person to be physically present, one sees oneself through the Look of the Other, in much the same way as when the Other is *actually* and perceivably present. One's distinct perception of presence and absence becomes ambiguous because the way one feels the Look of the Other is not a simple binary. One's awareness of the existence of other conscious beings is amplified exponentially by participation in online social media. The Look is the sensation of the Other's influence on one's own subjectivity. If one is made to feel like less of a subject and more of an object, then the agency that comes with subjectivity is also diminished.

Social media users and the audience members of *Western Society* do not believe that the digitally transmitted and mediated Other is in any way physically present – in any kind of haptic sense. But if Sartre can suggest that when faced with (what one believes to be) the Look, "it is possible that I am mistaken; perhaps the objects of the world which I took for eyes were not eyes; perhaps it was only the wind which shook the bush behind me" (1943, p. 276), then there is more evidence of the Other in the apparatus and interfaces of social media than in a rustling bush. It is nonetheless a reminder of one's constant being-in-the-world-with-others that transcends physical and temporal co-presence; emphasized more by the virtually rendered presence of the Other inherent in social media technology. In a bygone age, without the technological means to interact with the Other over great distance, or store and view life-like representations of the Other, one may have been able to temporarily escape the Other's Look. Now so more than ever does the technology facilitating social media present a constant reminder of one's being-in-the-world-with-others. Social media academic, Alice Tiara (Tiara, 2013) states that "social media creates a context in which people are constantly monitoring themselves against the expectations of

others.” Social media and the dramaturgical use of multiple screens, that depict both physically present and absent others complicate the distinction between presence and absence to the extent that the Other can be perceived as being ever-present, even if they are mediated multiple times and in many different ways.

Western Society overstates this ambiguity and the entanglement of both embodied and virtual presence. In doing so, Gob Squad manage to reveal the amplified effect of the Other on one’s behavior as one negotiates online digitised sociality. If one is unsure if one is subject to the Look of the embodied Other because one is faced with the virtual Other, one is more likely to assume that one is still subject to the Look. The development of media and communications technology negates the prerequisite of embodied presence because one is far more cognizant of one’s being-in-the-world-with-others.

If one feels subject to the Look of the embodied and virtual Other, then one is more frequently affected by the Look’s objectification. If one considers oneself an object or commodity for others on a more frequent basis then one is more susceptible to negating one’s own agency in favor of the subjectivity and agency of the Other. Any circumventing or rejection of one’s agency should be considered inauthentic. Displacement of one’s agency into the hands of the Other is especially inauthentic.

The complication of presence (physical, temporal or technologically mediated) is also made explicit (albeit in a different way than *Western Society*) in *The Artist is Kinda Present* (2010), a performance piece by American artist, writer and researcher, An “An Xiao” Mina. Xiao describes the performance as “a response piece to Marina Abramović’s *The Artist Is Present*, which was ongoing at MoMA at the time.” (Xiao, 2010) As such, the setup of the installation (see Figure 15) is an intentional mirroring of Abramovic’s installation. However, where Abramovic attempts to create an environment free of distractions “allowing the “presence” of the artist to dominate” (Meledandri, 2010), Xiao inverts the artifice of this situation. Xiao is sat before the participant, amongst a tangle of cables, and behind an assortment of devices and a sign that reads:

Sit down with the artist.
Find a comfortable position.

Be present with the artist in any of the following ways:
A text message to: [PHONE NUMBER]
A tweet to @anxiaostudio.
The artist will respond in kind.
When you have reached a satisfactory connection, or you simply grow bored,
you may leave.

An Xiao, *The Artist is Kinda Present* (2010)



Figure 15 An Xiao (sat to left, wearing sunglasses and black clothes) and participant, An Xiao, *The Artist is Kinda Present*, New York Zen Centre, New York (2010). Photograph by James Wagner.

An Xiao is physically and temporally present, but she wears sunglasses and only communicates through the technologies of mediation afforded by the internet, social media and mobile phone communication. She hides the most recognisable instrument of her embodied Look: her eyes and only moves very slightly to input data into a device to communicate digitally. The presence and therefore the immediate Look of An Xiao, as the spatiotemporally present but digitally mediated Other, is distorted by the restrictions that she imposes on interaction between her and participants. The presence of another conscious being is evidenced more so through the exchange of text or tweet than it is by the actual person sat across from the participant.

Internet blogger Nina Meledandri put forward “even though we are technically separated, Xiao’s warmth and humour immediately breaks through the virtual barrier and eliminates any preconception of this being a sterile or emotionless interaction.” (2010) She later writes that the encounter left her “wanting even more human connection”, though this was not necessarily due to the “limitations of technology-based contact”, but rather because she felt Xiao’s presence so intensely *despite* the technological mediation.

Xiao’s problematisation of presence is given further clarity if considered as a direct response to the piece by Abramović. *The Artist is Present* does not simply imply the presence of any artist; the encounter with

Abramović evokes the accumulation of her previous work (the central performance is surrounded by a retrospective of her work) and her reputation as an artist who has mobilised presence as an aesthetic tool. Participants were not expecting to simply exchange eye contact with a person, but a “persona.” (Taylor, 2010) By surrounding the event with her previous work, Abramović generates a mythos around the encounter. In lieu of this accumulated reputation and history, Xiao surrounds herself with a mystique founded in technology. Both artists however, still manage to establish a profound sense of presence in their work despite these mediating factors. Where Abramović relies on her history and reputation to instigate the initial response from participants, Xiao looks to digital communications technology. By subverting the unadulterated gaze of Abramović, Xiao’s choice could be considered a recognition that the presence generated in *The Artist is Present* is more about the celebrity of Abramović as a public figure than people achieving a genuine connection, when a similar bond can be stimulated through the mediating lens of technology.

As the spatiotemporal, phenomenological and social contact between spectator and the performer is *altered* and *distorted*, one’s awareness and conception of the Other is augmented. One’s perception of how one exists relative to other beings-in-the-world is fundamentally changed because one is endlessly confronted with it, whilst actually being alienated from the embodied Other. What performances such as *Western Society* and *The Artist is Kinda Present* demonstrate, is that as a result of these distortions, it becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate one’s own authentic-self relative to others. The Other and their Look (although physically and temporally distant or absent) may feel more present, owing to the ambiguity generated by online communication technologies, the specific three-fold situation of shifting co-presence presented by Gob Squad, and inversion of spatiotemporal co-presence with the technologically rendered Look of An Xiao.

The modes of participation in contemporary performance practice respond to social media¹³² by presenting audiences with the extremes of how it is affecting sociality. They produce an intensified reflection of how the online mediation of sociality tampers with binary interpretations of presence and absence, especially in the context of how one is affected by the Look of the Other. Consequently, one may feel more subject to the influences and pressures of conformity manifest in facing the existence and agency of the Other, that one cannot necessarily see or point to, but still feel the impact of their ubiquitous presence.

That is not to say that one is categorically forced, compelled or obliged to submit to the projects, pathways or will of the Other, through any kind of overly coercive or manipulative means – although, depending

¹³² As a manifestation of an increasingly inauthentic modification of contemporary sociality.

on the situation, this may still be the case. For the most part the strategies employed by contemporary performance practitioners (like Gob Squad and An Xiao, amongst others yet to be discussed) are exercised to increase the spectators' mindfulness of the complicated digital and/or embodied presence of the Other, in contemporary western society. Increased cognizance of this complex relationship with the Other can also reveal to the spectator/participant how this ambiguity (surrounding the presence or Look of the Other) can act as a scapegoat for choosing to disengage with the consequences and responsibility implicit within one's absolute (and often terrifying) freedom.

In *Western Society*, the mediation of both the individuals depicted in 'the least watched video' and the performers re-enacting it behind the projection screen, can lead one to question not only which is more present, but also which has more potential to influence one's choice and neutralise one's agency. Similarly, when faced with both the physical and technologically mediated presence of An Xiao, it becomes unclear which mode of sociality to engage in. Thus, the Look of the Other is intensified and made more omnipresent because it is transmitted through more channels than the simply physical or ocular.

It would be too simplistic and reductive to state that users of social media feel as though they are perpetually subject to the Look of the Other. There are those that participate in social media by uploading, storing and collecting online media without necessarily making it visible to others (Li & Bernoff, 2011). However, one could argue although these users are employing social media platforms, the media that they engage with is not social. This type of online activity negates the sociality of social media and employs the internet as a "static archive of documents", rather than "a network of users engaging with one another." (Bercovici, 2010) Also, all their online (and increasingly offline¹³³) activity is recorded, stored and disseminated by social media corporations and state governments (Greenwald & MacAskill, 2013). Even if a user does not intend to engage socially on social media, they are still subject to surveillance and therefore the Look.

The mode in which one encounters the Other and is subject to their Look is certainly affected by the processes of mediation employed by social media. This encounter is also radically compounded/inverted in the way this mode is represented by Gob Squad/An Xiao in the manner the user or spectator relates to the Other on the levels of ontology and sociality. By participating in these performances, spectators are invited to draw comparisons between the mode and effects of performance participation and participation in social media.

¹³³ The data from mobile phone, laptop, tablet and connected devices' microphones and cameras being recorded and stored without the user's express knowledge (Panzarino, 2015) (Curran, 2018).

II. AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATORY ALTERNATIVES

Compounded (Gob Squad) or inverted (An Xiao) instances of spatiotemporal or digital presence alter and distort the Look of the Other. Evidently, inauthentic participatory practices that are problematised and expressed through performance offer one way of engaging with (in)authenticity. Alternatively, practitioners may implement or consider authentic participatory strategies to bring us (the audience) collectively back from the inauthenticity of everyday digitally/economically mediated life and to a situation where the conditions conducive for the emergence of the authentic-self are more likely to emerge.

There are eight instances in *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013)¹³⁴ where audience members are unambiguously invited to participate, in an otherwise tightly structured performance. In the final section of *I Wish I Was Lonely*, Walker and Thorpe facilitate a situation whereby audience members are paired up and are asked to spend two minutes, establishing and maintaining eye contact in silence.



Figure 16 Audience members (sitting on chairs scattered around performance space), Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, *I Wish I Was Lonely*, Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Leith (2013). Photograph by Jemima Yong.

¹³⁴ Written and performed by performance poet, Hannah Jane Walker and performance artist and dramaturg, Chris Thorpe.

This request arises after the other 7 instances of participatory involvement, which largely revolved around audience members using their mobile devices/phones to communicate with one another and the performers – despite sitting on chairs less than a few feet away from one another (see Figure 16). These instances of participation (including the prolonged eye-contact), and the performance as a whole considers the *choice to be alone* as its central problem, within the context of contemporary systems of communication, specifically mobile phone technology. By encouraging audience members to not only disclose their mobile telephone numbers, but also send and receive text messages and phone calls from one another *and* the two performers, Walker and Thorpe problematise one’s everyday use, orientation towards, and reliance on mobile phone technology.

Compared to both the complicated ambiguity of co-presence in *Western Society* and the deliberate inversion of spatiotemporal and technologically-mediated presence in *The Artist is Kinda Present*, the simplicity of establishing and maintaining eye contact with another physically present and proximally immediate conscious being in Walker and Thorpe’s performance is deceptive. Not only are the participants directly subject to the Look of the Other, but this Look is equally reciprocated. In this act of making and sustaining eye contact, there is a prolonged duration and reciprocity of conscious and free agents encountering one another without the obfuscating mediation of technology, or even language. Walker stresses that the eye contact should be made “in silence” and “without speaking” (Walker & Thorpe, 2013). It is in this encounter that participants are confronted, not only with the unambiguous existence and intentional agency of the embodied Other, but also with the power of their own objectifying gaze and the agency they wield in a world of others, which is in fact equivalent to the power exerted by the Other on them.

The combination of the reciprocity of the Look between conscious beings and the strangeness of the sustained and intense period of the encounter is what makes this (outwardly ordinary) situation so impactful and memorable for the audience-participants of *I Wish I Was Lonely*. In Astrid Breel’s article, which is concerned with the construction of a working methodology to analyse participatory performance, her survey of an audience of *I Wish I Was Lonely* identified the extended period of eye contact as (on average) one of the most “meaningful” and “memorable” moments of participation in the performance (Breel, 2015). The interpretation of what is meant by the qualifier, “meaningful” is unclear, however this assessment could indicate the emergence of a profound clarity in the participants. A clarity brought about by coming (literally) face-to-face with the fundamental instigator of one’s compulsion to act outside one’s unique project and therefore, fountain of inauthentic choices and acts: the Other. This encounter is enriched as, in the mutual looking at and being looked at, participants recognise the reciprocity of their own influence over the subjectivity and agency of the Other. Rather than bearing

the surge of shame that Sartre associates with encountering oneself as an object under the gaze of the Other (1943, p. 222), one can come to comprehend the parity of freedom and agency between two conscious beings, implicit within the intimate act of sharing the Look.

The mutual looking at and being looked at, gives a literal dimension to the Look of the Other for both parties involved. When plainly faced with the existence of the Other, and the complex sensation of both being made to feel objectified *and* acutely aware of one another's subjectivity (in the realisation of the Other's corporeality and agency), the ambiguity and liminality of one's being emerges at the forefront of one's comprehension of being-in-the-world-with-others. This recognition of the Other as fluid self (in the mode of becoming) – igniting a kinship between self and Other based in heterogeneous commonality – opens the door to one's own vast horizon of possibility and potential to exist in a state of becoming, without the perceived burden of manipulation or pressure from external sources.

Yet, this insight can only come as a result of participants' initial encounter with unambiguously inauthentic approaches to participation. Thorpe considers the two minutes of sustained and intense eye contact, in the final moments of *I Wish I Was Lonely* to be “a genuine version of the fake offer [of authentic participation] that social media makes.” (Thorpe, 2017) Therefore, in some cases practitioners like Walker and Thorpe adopt strategies that wield and explore *both* inauthentic and authentic acts, producing a situation whereby the two binaries give one another the weight of meaning that only juxtaposition can.

In both the examples mentioned above (*Western Society* and *I Wish I Was Lonely*), there are attempts at constructing explicitly inauthentic *or* authentic situations. These are manifest in situations both familiar and unfamiliar to us in everyday life, permeated by mediation, exploitation and stasis. By generating conditions that are conducive to the unambiguous comprehension of one's relationship relative to the Other, both authentic and inauthentic acts can emerge. They can only be comprehended as conflicting or discrete from one another when placed in direct temporal contrast to situations that endeavour to stimulate the dialectically opposing phenomenon.

Such a phenomenon can also be found in *Western Society*. Having introduced ‘the least watched video on the internet’ to the audience, Smith, Stumpf, Thom and Patten (or whichever members of Gob Squad are performing in that performance¹³⁵) adopt the roles¹³⁶ they already identified in the ‘least watched video’. White,

¹³⁵ This could be a combination of any four of the following Gob Squad members: Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Damian Rebgetz, Tatiana Saphir, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost, Simon Will. Dependent on scheduling and availability.

¹³⁶ Granny (upstage centre), Girl with phone (midstage centre, on stage left of sofa), Cake lady (downstage left), Remote control man (upstage right), Next to remote (upstage right), Dances with Granny (upstage left), White cap boy (midstage right, on stage right of sofa) and Karaoke singer (centre stage).

person shaped silhouettes appear on the projection screen, representing the physical shapes of each individual identified in the “least watched video”. The performers move into the set behind the screen and try to physically match the outlines. They begin a cycle of actions that replicates the actions of the individuals in the video. Each cycle lasts two minutes and 55 seconds (the same length as the video) and the performers ask one another “what are we doing here?” As they run through each cycle for each different role of the “re-enactment”, they describe what they are doing and what their role may be thinking or feeling. These cycles are repeated for as long as it takes to introduce each role: four performers playing seven roles, swapping and looping.

Sharon Smith and Sarah Thom come to an impasse whereby they state that they cannot continue the performance without the help of members of the audience; there are not enough performers to fill all seven video roles simultaneously. To select participants from the auditorium they throw seven stuffed animals or “cuddly toys” one by one into the audience, one per participating audience member (see Figure 17). They invite spectators to cross the threshold between the bank of audience seating and the primary performance area (where Thom sat to display the video), that had hitherto been obscured from direct (unmediated) view by the large projection screen.



Figure 17 Sharon Smith (holding stuffed toy animal), Gob Squad, *Western Society*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin (2013). Photograph from video footage documentation.

After the ambiguity of co-presence the audience had been subject to – further developed by the performers entirely retreating behind the projection screen to re-enact the “least watched video” – the opportunity

to confront the unmediated Other (uncomplicated and unequivocally present) is a radical contrast to the spectatorial encounter thus far. Although not as intense, the potential for confronting the Other as part of a reciprocal embodied Look, generates a similar effect (destabilisation of the hierarchy of the Look) to that experienced by participants in *I Wish I Was Lonely* during their episode of protracted eye contact.

Gob Squad may not conceptualise their work as problematising contemporary (in)authenticity, however they do consider their participatory practice as a pursuit for the ‘real’. In the Gob Squad reader, *Gob Squad and the Impossible Attempt to Make Sense of it All* (2010), Gob Squad’s collective voice (built from past critical excerpts and interviews) describes an incident involving an internally mirrored, but externally transparent Perspex box (a Gob Squad set¹³⁷) and a theatre cleaner vacuum cleaning its interior. Oblivious to the cast of Gob Squad “utterly transfixed” by “the drama which was unfolding”, Gob Squad describe the scene as “in stark contrast to all of our own actions in the set, it had nothing to do with pretence, artifice, metaphor or design. It just simply was.” (2010, pp. 30-31). From this point on Gob Squad claim to have “sought to place the ‘real’ at the heart of [their] work.” (2010, p. 31)

The potency of the sequence of intentional acts, bound up in the moment of invitation and the acceptance of it to participate in *Western Society*, resides in the very transition of the participants’ awareness of the presence and Look of the Other: from ambiguous and paranoid, to explicit, reciprocal and non-hierarchical. Gob Squad temporarily strip the participants’ perception of and interaction with the performers and other participants back to what they consider to be real, unmediated and authentic.

This shift from a feeling of ambiguity concerning the presence and therefore influence of the Other begins with the spectator catching the cuddly toy (or allowing it to rest in their lap) without flinging it away or thrusting it upon another member of the audience¹³⁸. It continues as the audience member rises from their seat in the auditorium, moves past other uninvited spectators on their way to the performance area and concludes in crossing the boundary (both actual and imagined) between auditorium and performance area. There is a symbolic and literal confronting of the Other, in this burgeoning act of accepting the invitation, to transcend both the role of spectator (engaging with one’s agency) and mode of inauthentic involvement implicit within digitally mediated interactions and sociality.

Like any episode of authenticity, the liminal state inhabited by participating spectators is a fundamentally

¹³⁷ For their performance of *Close Enough to Kiss* (1997).

¹³⁸ Which very tellingly, is what I did on the occasion that the stuffed toy animal landed in my lap at a performance of *Western Society* in Paris, 2014. The opportunity has not since arisen.

temporary one. Not only did Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1943) both stress the elusiveness of both establishing and maintaining an authentic expression of one's self, but Sartre specifically outlines one's self as being constituted by one's heterogeneous deeds. Therefore, if one can engage in one's freedom, whilst establishing a balance between motivations from within and influences from without, then this authentic expression of one's self, is bound to one or few of one's discrete acts.

The revelation of crossing the technological barrier (established by Gob Squad) and occupying the privileged position of participant, is a bounded incident. Despite one's preceding activity and ensuing exploits bleeding into one another¹³⁹, one can reliably identify the time spent as a participant in the performance of *Western Society* as finite; having a certain (albeit non-positional) beginning and end. One is initially presented with a situation representative of one's mediated participation in social media; however, the choice to accept the invitation to participate and the act of traversing the liminal threshold do not make one authentic. Rather, the acceptance of the invitation to participate in *Western Society* is an expression of the spectators' subverting of the modes of social media participation and their choice to adopt an alternative mode of participation. As a participant in *Western Society*, one initially consumes the mediated content both presented and generated by Gob Squad. By participating and breaching the mediating barrier, one subverts the previous deeply inauthentic form of participation in favor of a form of participation that directly juxtaposes the inauthenticity of the former.

By the same token, all invitations to participate in *I Wish I Was Lonely*, before the invitation to initiate and sustain eye contact, involved spectators interacting with one another exclusively through the medium of their mobile phones, or in ways that refer to mobile communication. The potency of the clarity available to the participant in the final participatory act is contingent upon the dissimilarity of those that come before it.

The first invitation to participate comes prior to the audience's entrance into the performance space and before the performance has formally begun and when the audience has yet to encounter any performers. Whilst still waiting in the foyer, the venue staff distribute blank postcards and pens which the audience are encouraged to write their mobile phone number on. In the event that any particular audience member does not have a mobile phone or a mobile phone number¹⁴⁰, the text dictates that "*they write 'no mobile' and their initials.*" This also allows for individuals who *do have* a mobile phone, but do not wish to disclose their number to keep this information private.

¹³⁹ As one's past, present and future form an interpenetrative continuum of heterogeneous conscious states (Bergson, 1889).

¹⁴⁰ These two situations are not necessarily mutually inclusive.

Even before the audience encountered the performers and before they have any immediate information about the performance or what it entails¹⁴¹, they are asked to divulge personal information: their mobile phone number. A mobile phone number is simply an assigned set of digits that initially only corresponds to the country of origin and phone network, however it begs the question of how one's mobile phone number is definable as a piece of *personal* or *private* information. Yet, a contact detail (such as one's mobile phone number) is considered an instance of personal information, even under the Data Protection Act (1998).

The question of the categorisation of one's mobile phone number as private or personal information is fundamentally bound up in the ability of one individual to interact with another. If one person has another's mobile phone number, they can communicate with that person. Clearly, the individual in question (bearer of said number) has the *choice* to reciprocate the communication¹⁴², but the situation of having to *choose* is imposed on the individual when another person has that information. Whether the distribution of the mobile phone number was an earlier choice, or whether the information was acquired without the individual's permission or knowledge is the primary factor in the consequent choice of reciprocating the call to interact.

The dichotomy of the private and the public self (and the presence of the Other to perceive it) is at the very root of questioning contemporary authenticity. Walker and Thorpe's investigation into mobile phone technology and how it pervades everyday life is predicated on how we act in public, how we operate in private and how both of these modes are perceived by the Other. The very title of the performance: *I Wish I Was Lonely* is a plea to regain some semblance of agency and choice regarding the separation between public and private selves and to be able to distinguish when one is an object for the Look of the Other, or rather when one is in fact (or at least one feels) alone.

Walker and Thorpe are nostalgic for the time before mobile phone technology, when one did not need to consider whether one was alone or not. Similarly, one did not have to make an extended conscious effort to choose whether one was acting in the mode of one's private self or public self. However, with the advent of mobile phone technology it becomes a definitive choice one has to make; it is often unclear what situation one is in: a public or private one. Even when made, the decision to be alone and operate exclusively in the mode of one's private-self, does not guarantee one is entirely alone and can act solely within the mode of the private-self.

¹⁴¹ Assuming they have not seen it before, read the text or a detailed review.

¹⁴² Answer the phone call, read and respond to a text, listen and reply to a voicemail, etc.



Figure 18 Audience with Chris Thorpe (laying on floor) and Hannah Jane Walker (sat top right in stripy top), Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, *I Wish I Was Lonely*, Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts, Lancaster (2015). Photograph by Richard Davenport.

As Walker and Thorpe open the doors to the performance space, the audience are faced with 40 chairs in a clear space, all placed at different angles (see Figure 16). The piece was conceived for an intimate studio space; the spatial proximity between participating audience members is reduced to a minimum. The intimacy of the space juxtaposes the initial participatory activities largely centred around use of mobile phones. In such a situation, the audience is encouraged to notice the irony of communicating through digital and mediated means, whilst sitting so close together.

Having no evidential footage of the performance, one can only speculate as to the quality, register and dynamics of the live delivery of the written text: as an extension of this mode of performance built around simplicity and openness. In a phone interview with Walker (2017) she stated that the show would “go wrong when Chris defaulted to performer mode.” She explained the negative effect of Thorpe’s overtly theatrical delivery of the text was predicated on the audience’s sense of *consequence*. If the audience interpreted their delivery as being indicative of a fictional performance ontology – as in the practice typical of the social turn, wielding catharsis as a tool for social inclusion – then the consequence of the language, delivery and several participatory strategies would be negated and the performance as a whole would not have a long-lasting effect, if it affected the audience

at all. As a result, one would deduce that the delivery of the largely poetic text was (at least striving for) a transparency or realness to give weight to the consequences of the performers' verbal communication and the actions of both audience and performer alike. Towards the end of the opening monologue the following exchange occurs:

H: – You are Responsible for anything you may

C: – Upload,

H: – Email,

C: – Vocalise

H: – or otherwise Transmit.

C: – You are Responsible.

H: – You are Entirely and Wholly Responsible.

C: – Reminding You Of This

BOTH: – Is Not Our Job.

The first overt invitation to participate issued by the performers occurs directly after this statement. Spectators are asked to call the number on their card (that they received after the cards with mobile numbers on had been shuffled and redistributed) and leave a voicemail: “my name is... I need my mobile because...”. Later in the performance, audience members are invited to send a text message to another randomly selected spectator's number: “the only time I will call you is if...”.

Later still, they are asked to establish and maintain eye contact with a neighbouring audience member for two minutes. Finally, spectators are encouraged to arrange to meet with the person they shared eye contact with, without swapping numbers or any other contact information. The rendezvous must be driven by the verbal promise made in the moment by the two individuals in physical and social proximity. These four examples are fundamentally concerned with forging connections between the audience members present at any given performance. To do this in a way that could have any kind of efficacy or lasting effect, Walker and Thorpe begin the process firmly within the (familiar, but indicatively inauthentic) mode of mobile phone communication that represents the dominant form of connection between individuals in contemporary society.

As the performance develops, so does the method of connection and communication. Rather than leaving voicemails or sending texts, audience members are urged to dispose of the tools that mediate their connection

with others and share in a social encounter founded in co-presence, that helps participants recognise the mutual subjectivity of both conscious (and fundamentally social) beings involved. This process is attenuated, through the interweaving of other participatory opportunities that complement and support the project of authentic communication, in a way that dissolves the two modes into one another and reflects the interpenetrative continuums of subject and object, self and other and authentic and inauthentic, rather than presenting a counterproductive and severe binary.

This approach promotes the moderate position between exclusive use of mobile phone technology (as a mediated form of interpersonal communication) and total abandonment of any technology complicating the spheres of public and private action and presentation. This moderation is emblematic, not only of the liminality experienced as a participant, but also the resistance to giving oneself entirely over to a system that routinely exploits the individual for their (private) data (made public), and the harmony one must strike between falling into the static placeholders and pathways typical of the they-self and operating in a mode of acute alienation to protect oneself from the Look of the Other.

III. INTEGRATED (IN)AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION

As these examples from Gob Squad and Walker and Thorpe demonstrate, the initially hyperbolic situations presented to audiences establish a certain 'horizon of expectation' (Jauss, 1982), fixed in cultural contexts of inauthentic participation (characterised by coercion, compliance and commodification), that both supports and is supported by models of social media founded in neoliberal governmentality (Fuchs, 2017). It is only when faced with the limitations distinctive to operating inauthentically (in one moment), that the invitation to participate and act authentically (in another moment) has any potency.

When given the opportunity to act and participate authentically, one is presented with a radical alternative to the previously inauthentic set of expectations and possibilities. In the temporal moment *after* accepting the invitation to participate, the participant profoundly expands their horizon of expectation and possibility, relative to their *previous* situation and choices made. Therefore, by crossing the mediating boundary, either by physically circumventing a projection screen or choosing to make sustained eye contact, the participant physically transcends the aesthetic expression of everyday inauthenticity and symbolically extends their horizon of possibility to their authentic potential.

Therefore, not only do these examples hold up a mirror to western European¹⁴³ society's addiction to social media (and the political/economic structures sustaining it) but they also present and cultivate *alternative* situations. Situations that allow the spectator to consider (through participation) a world, not devoid of social media, but rather one where social media does not exploit users, commodify their digital acts (data) (Fuchs, 2017) and dominate sociality by having such considerable influence over their day-to-day and fundamental interactions with others.

Like both the Heideggerian (1927) and Sartrean (1943) conceptions of (in)authenticity, contemporary performance practice that engages with the issues of participation (in political, social and aesthetic spheres) does so by identifying the dialectical binaries of any particular situation: Mine-self/They-self, Facticity/Transcendence, Wealth/Poverty, Connectivity/Isolation or Exploitation/Dominance. It is only once these extreme positions have been situated a third way of moderation, synthesis and authentic participation founded in liminality and the mode of becoming can be negotiated or generated.

One's orientation towards participating in social media is founded in a project to further entrench users in inauthentic patterns of behaviour. Whereas, contemporary participatory practitioners employ participation as a means of juxtaposing exaggerated instances of inauthenticity. In doing so, participatory practitioners can not only problematise participation as it is manifest in contemporary western culture and society, but also reveal participation as a possible alternative to inauthentic orientations towards contemporary media technology. Henry Jenkins' (2015) utopian outlook on participatory culture may not have been critical enough of the neoliberal influence on social media, but his optimism does not negate the potential a participatory approach to (in)authenticity may have.

The juxtapositioning between an inauthentic premise and authentic participatory encounter is also part of Ontroerend Goed's project (in their 2011 production, *Audience*) to problematise the experience of participating in social media as an exploited and manipulated user. They do so by not only realising the audience as a unified they-self, but by manipulating them and challenging their sense of responsibility as a being-in-the-world-with-others.

Once Maria Dafneros (one of the original cast of *Audience*) has extensively described the unwritten rules

¹⁴³ That is not to say that this phenomenon is limited to western European society, but for the sake of specificity and rigour, this thesis is limited to the aforementioned context.

and codes of behaviour in the theatre¹⁴⁴, the house lights are extinguished. Immediately, bright lights (behind the raked bank of seating) silhouette the audience as a camera (trained directly at them from the performance area) feeds images of the faceless crowd onto the projection screen behind it.

The camera zooms and pans across the audience. In a written description of this section of the performance, Ontroerend Goed¹⁴⁵ state that “[the audience] should feel safe and enjoy the beauty of an anonymous crowd.” (2014, p. 406) In feeding the audience the image of themselves as a faceless, nameless and anonymous mass, Ontroerend Goed evoke the ‘they’ or digitally ubiquitous virtual Other, in a strategy that parallels the evocation of the technologically mediated presence of the Other in Gob Squad’s *Western Society*. But where the spectators of *Western Society* were (initially only) presented with indistinct images of other people, the audience of *Audience* are faced with themselves (and those around them) in the mode of ‘they’.

¹⁴⁴ The performance will be in English. The audience should sit together in centre of the bank of seating. Spectators should turn off mobile phones (not just on vibrate). They should not go to the toilet in the middle of the show; theatre shows do not have breaks (if they are under two hours). They should not bring drinks into theatre, nor should they eat during performance. Silence is expected of the audience; the audience are allowed to laugh, but not talk or ask questions. Spectators should leave the theatre if they have a coughing fit and say “sorry” to those they have to pass on the way out and wait for correct time to re-enter. If an actor asks a spectator a question, spectators have the choice to answer, but most of the time spectators should not answer. Sleeping is allowed, but snoring is not. Photography is not permitted. Spectators should not be scared when the lights go out. Clap when the lights come back on. If the audience keep clapping, the performers will come back on stage. If a spectator did not like the performance, they can clap without making a sound. If the spectator really liked the show, they should stand up and clap.

¹⁴⁵ The writing of *All Work and No Plays: Blueprints for 9 Theatre Performances* by Ontroerend Goed (a text that describes and reflects on Ontroerend Goed’s theatrical work) is credited to Ontroerend Goed as a collective, rather than stating any individual author.



Figure 19 Audience and cameraman, Ontroerend Goed, *Audience*, STUK arts centre, Leuven (2011). Photograph from video footage documentation.

After having indulged in silent¹⁴⁶ anonymity for approximately six minutes, lights then slowly illuminate the audience from the front (see Figure 19) and the camera zooms into close-ups of individual spectator's hands, torsos and faces, which are still being fed to and enlarged on the projection screen. No longer an anonymous, homogenous unit, the audience members are individualised and brought face-to-face with their own corporeal appearance. By being confronted with one's own physical appearance, mediated through digital video and projection, the audience not only encounter themselves in the mode of they-self (faceless crowd), but they are also faced with their immediate and present 'facticity': the perceivable and concrete details of one's existence.

It is both the 'thrownness' (constituted through one's facticity) and 'fallenness' (in the recognition of the 'they') that Ontroerend Goed seem to draw the audience's attention to, as the camera¹⁴⁷ pans across the audience. It rests every now and again, momentarily on an individual spectator's face. As it does so "the performers use the

¹⁴⁶ Silent, in terms of no speech or movement on stage. The only sound is gentle droning music being played-back on the speakers.

¹⁴⁷ Operated by Aaron De Keyzer.

close-ups to phrase some potential audience thoughts.” (ibid, 2014 p. 407) The performers¹⁴⁸ take it in turns to speak different “audience thoughts” into a microphone that is amplified by speakers and synchronised with the images captured by the camera and projected onto the screen. By prescribing thoughts such as “I’m beginning to look more and more like my father” or “I’m the woman with the checked shirt and the curly hair in the second row” to individual audience members depicted on the screen, *Ontroerend Goed* are not only picking out and examining the audience’s *facticity*, but they are also problematising how facticity is negotiated through the lens of technology and social media sociality.

Pedro Manuel investigates how technology is used in contemporary performance to destabilise “a stable process of feedback loop between stage and audience, and troubling the argument of physical co-presence as a fundament of performance.” (Manuel, 2014, p. 69) He suggests that “*Audience* plays with the experience of its own self-image, making evident the fact that the seated audience is a fluid entity, subject to the mediation of the theatre company, whose actors can reframe and enplot the audience’s image and presence in a variety of agencies.” (2014, p. 73) Not only does the technological Look of the camera stress one’s facticity, but Manuel proposes that the components of one’s facticity can be manipulated by those controlling the technology.

In this case, it is the camera operator/vision mixer (Aaron De Keyzer), but in the wider context of social media, it is the corporations (e.g. Facebook, Google, etc.) operating and owning the digital platforms engaged with by users. The disembodied voices commenting on the perceivable aspects of one’s factual-self represent the digitally mediated Other. The Other in this situation could be the other social media users, but it could also be the larger corporate institutions who own and control the social media sites. Both forms of the Other, although not physically present can still affect the mode of participation that a user engages in on social media.

Sat in the audience of *Audience*, spectators are confronted with the technologically rendered Look of the Other. Both their own Look being exerted on the Other and the Other’s Look they feel subject to. They see all the objective and historically verifiable features of their Being the Other encounters, that can also be fixed, commodified and exploited. The audience “become the content” (WhatsOnStage, 2011), albeit represented in the form of a camera lens, projection screen and murky silhouette of a dimly lit camera operator by the anonymous and technologically mediated Other. The same Other one encounters as a social media user and the modified awareness of being-in-the-world-with-others that the digitally mediated situation generates.

¹⁴⁸ Original cast: Maria Dafneros, Matthieu Sys, Tiemen Van Haver, Joeri Smet and Aaron De Keyzer

Once made cognizant of the situation¹⁴⁹, tending towards the inauthentic, the audience's attention is carefully concentrated on a single female audience member in the front row of the seating bank. Matthieu Sys (one of the original cast members and creative collaborators of *Audience*) enters the space approximately half-way through the performance, introducing himself as 'the warm-up guy'. He invites the audience to participate in an activity, under the pretence that they need to practise their applause. He asks the audience to applaud while he directs the level of applause: from just using one finger at a time through to standing ovation.

By the end of this section, he can conduct the audience and their applause, with an almost immediate response between his hand gestures and the audience's applause. After bringing the audience into a standing ovation, he gestures for them to stop. The audience stop clapping instantly and retake their seats. The audience are trained, manipulated and willing to surrender their responsibility for their actions to this performer. Upon reflection in *All Work and No Plays*, Ontroerend Goed note that "almost without exception, the audience complies" (2014, p. 414), however Matthieu picks a girl on the front row to address directly:

*Isn't it amazing that we all just did the same thing?
I mean you all did a fantastic job.
Except for you.*

He points at the girl. The audience laugh.

*You weren't co-operative at all.
I mean, I saw you clapping your hands, just like them,
but that's not what I mean.
Because whatever you do, it's wrong.*

Matthieu Sys, *Audience*, 2011

It appears Matthieu isolates this particular audience member because they did not follow his instructions with as much enthusiasm as the others. With the benefit of hindsight and a critical distance from the events of the performance, one could argue that this girl¹⁵⁰ represents those who are not or refuse to be manipulated. Most of the audience (who follow Matthieu's instructions) could be seen as embodying the exploited they-self, uncritically

¹⁴⁹ Which up until this point has remained non-participatory. One could make the argument that without (at least) the physical presence of an audience in the bank of seating, Ontroerend Goed would be projecting the image of an empty bank of seating on to the screen and the intention of such an action would be made meaningless.

¹⁵⁰ Who is actually a member of audience pre-prepared by the company to be involved in such a manner (Ontroerend Goed, 2014).

following the will of the manipulative Other, and therefore engaged in inauthentic participation, despite their best intentions. The juxtaposition that Ontroerend Goed create, by segregating this lone individual (and her refusal to bend to the social pressure exerted on her¹⁵¹), throws this contrast between inauthentic and authentic participation into sharp relief.

Matthieu's tirade continues and he asks the girl to spread her legs. When faced with this situation – the precedent for their involvement in the performance already established and their submissive relationship with the girl's tormentor negotiated – the audience are presented with a unique opportunity to subvert their previous choices. They can choose to disrupt their past subservience, compliance and inauthenticity by stepping out in opposition to the established hierarchy and accepted situation. The invitation to participate authentically comes in the form of a challenge. By explicitly verbally abusing a fellow member of the audience, Matthieu is challenging the remaining spectators to respond and even revolt. This is made explicit when he announces that "I'm not going to stop. Unless somebody here stands up and tells me to stop." (Ontroerend Goed, 2011)

In this juxtaposition between presenting the audience with their anonymity and facticity, and directly issuing them a challenge to disrupt the exploitative relationship between facilitator and participant, Ontroerend Goed problematise the responsibility and the agency of their audience by creating a situation where one's responsibility for *other spectators* (representing an alternative to inauthentic participation) is in question. How does one act when an individual who has been identified as someone who ostensibly undermines the exploitation of the dominant Other is under threat of manipulation and mistreatment? In *All Work and No Plays: Blueprints for 9 Theatre Performances by Ontroerend Goed* (2014) the creators of *Audience*¹⁵² describe the performance as "a playful challenge [that] carries the scary warning that any crowd is susceptible to manipulation." (Ontroerend Goed, 2014 p. 395) It is only by making spectators acutely aware of this manipulation, that they can draw similarities with their everyday engagement with inauthentic structures (neoliberalism/social media). But they can also recognise the performance situation as an opportunity to disrupt these everyday patterns of inauthentic action¹⁵³. By choosing and acting in a way at odds with the everyday, participants can transcend their facticity and engage in the authentic mode of *becoming*.

¹⁵¹ Despite the fact that she is secretly told, before the show, not to spread her legs (as per Matthieu's request) under any circumstances (Ontroerend Goed, 2014).

¹⁵² *Audience* is officially credited to Alexander Devriendt (director) in collaboration with Joeri Smet alongside the original cast: Maria Dafneros, Tiemen Van Haver, Matthieu Sys and Aaron De Keyzer.

¹⁵³ Both Heidegger and Sartre were highly sceptical about how often one may act authentically; most of one's everyday acts would tend towards the inauthentic.

Ontroerend Goed are concerned with the individual *freedom* of audience members and their collective responsibility for their actions. By forcing the audience to take a position on the performed action, that affects *other* audience members, Ontroerend Goed are explicitly emphasising and engaging with our fundamental state of being-in-the-world-with-others and the consequences of our actions in this ontological mode.

Our being-in-the-world-with-others is defined by the complicated network of involvement and influence in one another's choices, acts and projects; to exist is to exist in the world, and to exist in the world is to exist alongside the Other. This fundamental ontological truth is complicated by (among other things) the inauthentic participation in neoliberalism as it is manifest digitally. The persistent neoliberal fiction (of beneficial participation) advocates independence and self-creation, even though the reality of operating within a neoliberal (political and economic) society is one where individuals are driven, coerced and oppressed by the processes, structures and systems of free market capitalism (Shugart, 2016).

This neoliberal model (followed by most social media organisations (Fuchs, 2017)) is a prime example of how users are manipulated into generating commodified data (as 'prosumers'¹⁵⁴) under the pretence of inauthentic participation. However, there *is* a precedent for online social media participation that conforms to the understanding of authentic participatory culture as outlined above¹⁵⁵.

Contemporary performance practitioners (such as Gob Squad, Walker and Thorpe, An Xiao, Tim Crouch and Ontroerend Goed) engage with the themes and issues that surround not only social media, but any system (proliferating contemporary culture) that misuses participation as a mode of engagement to disrupt or inauthentically modify the relationship between individual conscious and social beings. By doing so, they produce and apply strategies to *problematise participation*, making the distinction between inauthentic and authentic applications of both the term and mode of involvement.

For instance, the participatory strategies employed by writer, director and actor, Tim Crouch are expressions of the aforementioned inauthentic modes of participation (predicated in manipulation and exploitation), so much so that he does not consider his play *The Author* (2009) to be participatory¹⁵⁶ (Crouch,

¹⁵⁴ Producer-consumers.

¹⁵⁵ Fuchs is keen to include and emphasise the work of organisations such as Wikipedia and Diaspora* (among others) who do not conform to this neoliberal model of profit accumulation and exploitation, opting rather for a non-profit, publicly owned model, funded by donations.

¹⁵⁶ Pointing out the tightly and traditionally structured narrative form, typical of dramatic theatre, and more akin to 'nominal' (Helguera, 2011), 'receptive' or 'observational' (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2011) modes of participatory engagement.

2017). However, the aesthetic choices made: the unique performer-audience interface, physical melange of performer and spectator, and creative strategies devised to lay responsibility on the shoulders of the spectator, all place *The Author* in a privileged position to critically reflect on the consequences of participation (both in and out of a performance context) and how this affects one's responsibility as a spectator *and* user on the digital frontier.

For Crouch, the ease of access to and (re)production of violent images, afforded by developments in contemporary communication and media technology (such as social media), is indicative of a pattern of supply and demand uninhibited by the weight of responsibility. Such responsibility is central to the existential (particularly Sartrean) accounts of freedom (Sartre, 1943) that, when engaged with authentically, are the basis for creating oneself in an ongoing project of becoming.

Crouch suggests the production of violent images¹⁵⁷ is only sustained because it is still consumed; “it is only made because it is watched.” (Crouch, 2017) Without the demand, supply dries up, which implicates the spectators of such material, as being ultimately responsible for its production. Crouch believes “that we must be responsible for what we choose to look at. Legislation exists to enforce this belief – it is a criminal act to watch the abuse of children on the Internet. It is not illegal to watch a beheading.” (Crouch, 2011, p. 417)



Figure 20 Audience with Esther Smith (standing), Tim Crouch (sitting, top right, scowling), Vic Llewellyn (sitting, far right, hand covering face) and Adrian Howells (sitting, left, wearing glasses), Tim Crouch, *The Author*, Royal Court Theatre Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London (2009). Photograph by Stephen Cumminskey.

¹⁵⁷ Specifically citing acts of child abuse or filmed beheadings mediated and disseminated on the internet.

To investigate and problematise these issues of choice, responsibility, complicity and participation, *The*

Author:

tells [emphasis added] the story of another play: a violent, shocking and abusive play written by a playwright called Tim Crouch and performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. *The Author* charts the effect that play had on the two actors who acted in it, the playwright who wrote it and an audience member who watched it.

(Crouch, n.d.)

Seated amongst audience members in two banks of tiered seating facing one another (see Figure 20), Tim Crouch (actor, writer and character) delivers his lines. The carefully crafted formality of his delivery is interrupted when he pauses mid-sentence, amidst a rather dispassionate description of his desire for a young woman he met¹⁵⁸. The audience hang on the silence until he turns and addresses the audience member sat next to him and asks “is this okay?” Tim turns to another; “is it okay if I carry on?”, and another; “do you want me to stop?”, another, “do you?” and one more “do you?” All answer in a way that allows Tim to continue.

By engaging the audience in the basic procedure of choice, Crouch and the other performers¹⁵⁹ manoeuvre the spectators into the position of active and complicit participant. Every time a spectator says “yes”, when asked by a performer whether they should continue, a little bit of the autonomy of the performer rubs off onto the spectator. Likewise, Crouch states that once “the ring fence has been breached. The seal has been tampered with.” (2011, p. 419) Once the wall between performer and audience is ruptured, the spectators’ role is no longer to simply sit and allow the performance to wash over them.

It is important to note, however, that *The Author* is consistently referred to and intended as a play (Crouch, 2017). The structural narrative, although not necessarily entirely conforming to the traditional verbal exchanges of most of the British dramatic theatre, is largely fixed, and despite interaction with the audience, actors avoid deviating from the scripted text where possible. This may be a strategy to give the illusion of collaboration or agency, where in actuality, the play would press on regardless of the audiences’ responses. Nevertheless, this is an adroit and subtle way to establish a sense of agency in the audience members without giving them any control

¹⁵⁸ Whether this encounter is that of the character or performer is left ambiguous.

¹⁵⁹ Esther Smith, Vic Llewellyn and Adrian Howells.

over the situation. And once more, a form of manipulation that reflects and intensifies the inauthentic participation of social media, that also establishes the illusion of agency and control, whilst exploiting those participating.

Within this framework of inauthentic participation, a lot of the dialogue/monologue delivered throughout the performance is peppered with asides to the audience: asking if they are okay, if it is okay to continue, or if they can see well enough, if they understand what the performer is saying. All interactions encourage one-word (or very short), contained answers, so that the scripted dialogue can continue without too much interruption. Inclusion of these inquiries creates a *sense* of agency in the audience members asked. The performers would continue delivering the text (more or less as it was written) regardless of the audience's response to these concerned questions of consideration. However, they are positioned and delivered¹⁶⁰ in such a way that provoke the desired response: "yes, please continue." With each permission to continue granted, the impression of influence grows in the audience.

This agency does not end with those spectators being directly confronted by the performers' requests to persist in their dialogue; it also extends to those audience members who are still silently witnessing the emergence of the imminently obscene content. The sense of agency in those not directly addressed by performers is further intensified by a staged walk-out within the first ten minutes of the performance. This statement of action provides the audience with the prospect of exercising their agency, removing themselves from the situation and absolving themselves of the responsibility bound up in their collusion with the performers in the generation of violent and obscene imagery. If the audience remain seated, they are making a conscious decision not to exercise the opportunity to leave, to remove themselves from the situation and therefore from their complicity in the action. Although they may not have directly given the performers verbal permission to continue, their enduring presence and inaction represents an intention choice and a manifestation of their agency.

The responsibility that *The Author* gently and quietly lays upon the audience is inherently bound up in these seemingly incidental invitations scattered throughout the performance. Like the clicks of a mouse, words typed into a search bar, or transactions completed with one's economic capital, consistent complicity in these smaller and superficially inconsequential instances of participation culminate in the acceptance of a far more significant invitation to naively exercise one's agency and share in the responsibility for the generation of objectionable imagined content. The conjuring of violent or abhorrent images in the minds of the audience is not only a direct citation of mediated violence, but an extreme allusion to the surrender of one's agency to systems of

¹⁶⁰ There are passages later in the play that may receive a less accommodating response from the audience.

inauthentic participation. *The Author* closes with a monologue from Tim, which acts as the sobering culmination of the audiences' participation throughout the performance:

TIM: I pour a glass of malt whisky and go to my study. I check my emails and then sit in front of my screen and just meander, really, drift, not really thinking. Not thinking. I type in my password. I am tired but don't feel like going to bed. Images of flesh! I'm not proud, but we've all done it, haven't we? Haven't we? Finn is fast asleep in the travel cot by my side. It's a warm evening. I'm a bit drunk. I feel myself getting big. My throat is dry. I take myself out and just begin to gently fuck myself, you know. We've all done that, at the end of a long day. Haven't we? A couple of clicks.

A couple of clicks before bed!

I see a baby. This baby has a dummy in its mouth.

I have the choice to continue.

I have the choice to stop.

Everyone in the house is asleep apart from me. The baby's skin is damp with sweat from the Evening heat, presumably, in this strange house. The image is grainy. The sound of voices from outside, maybe, from the street. A television on somewhere. The room is cramped and untidy. I'm a little shocked with myself.

I turn down the volume.

I decide to continue. Just like that. In a second. Less than a second.

Click. Click.

The baby's dummy is removed and I look at the shadow cast on it. I watch the penis just gently being placed against the baby's mouth and then slowly being pushed in. Not violently, actually. Actually quite gently. Quite lovingly.

I decide to continue.

Everything is muted. My heart is racing. I pull harder. This baby stirs but does not wake. It does not wake. It has no idea what is going on. It has no idea. When I come, a small amount of cum goes on to the edge of my computer screen. I quickly wipe it off, wipe myself. And join Jules In bed, curling around her lovely warm body And kissing the back of her neck. I am asleep in seconds.

In my meanderings, I forget to log off, forget to Shut down, to Delete History.

Of course, when Esther wakes early because her Baby is crying. Crying in the box room.

(Crouch, 2009)

Inaction becomes *participation*, intellectual and emotional engagement with the performers becomes *complicity* and the problematic role of ‘passive spectator’ is subverted to the point where sitting quietly in the darkened auditorium is a participatory act of *collaboration* and *interaction*, as much as (if not more so than) electing to leave or verbally and physically engage with the performers. Such a subversion and destabilisation of what can be considered participatory is a response to the forms of participation that we engage in every day.

Modes of participation in the processes of neoliberalism and/or on social media are built around a lie, a deception, a fundamental case of inauthenticity. One eschews responsibility and rejects one’s freedom in favour of pathways laid out by the Other. In *The Author* however, “the audience are collaborators who are required to use their imaginations to conjure up images” and “become complicit in what is seen and unseen.” (Gardner, 2009)

In *The Author*, audiences are manipulated in precisely the same way that they are in their everyday complicity in social media and neoliberal capitalism. The primary differences between one’s everyday participation and the participation in *The Author* is the intentionally extreme nature of the content (intended to provoke a response) and the fictive frame of theatrical performance.

IV. CONCLUSION

These examples of contemporary performance practice (*Western Society*, *The Artist is Kinda Present*, *I Wish I Was Lonely*, *Audience* and *The Author*) all respond differently to the inauthentic procedures of participation, implicit within neoliberal modes of economics, digital communication and political interventions in cultural practice. Public engagement in neoliberalism and social media have both shaped Western politics, economics and contemporary culture (especially since the 1990s) into one where the individual is expected to participate, albeit in a manner that oppresses their authentic becoming.

This inauthentic participation is predicated on commodification and exploitation, result of our complex orientation to these political and economic systems, as well as to the digital and online manifestations of these power structures. It is on the fundamental level of how one encounters and perceives the Look of the Other – as spatiotemporally present, present through digital mediations or a complicated and often ambiguous permutation of both – and negotiates one's being-in-the-world-with-others that one either succumbs to the comforting will of others (knowingly or indeed unknowingly), or engages with one's freedom and own most possibility, whilst maintaining a balanced association with the Other.

By recognising and making audiences explicitly aware of the inauthentic pitfalls inherent in these systems, contemporary performance practice that experiments with the interactions between performers and spectators problematise participation. This in turn, opens a gap within which spectators have the opportunity to act authentically in a way that exercises their freedom, transcends their facticity and embraces the responsibility for the choice made, despite the existence and will of others. By destabilising the participatory norms that breed inauthenticity in everyday sociality (in the forms of neoliberalism and social media), participatory performance reveals the nuance required for authentic participation and subtle negotiation of our being-in-the-world-with-others.

Conclusion

I. FINDINGS

Participatory performance practice has (re)emerged over the last 20 years in western European culture (in part) because modes of interaction between conscious subjects (people) have dramatically shifted. This change is manifest in the rise of participation on social media platforms and the use of online and digital technologies to engender an inauthentic expression of one's self.

The factor differentiating an inauthentic orientation towards social media technology from an authentic one is whether one participates and expresses oneself liminally. The authentic-self is liminal and therefore ambiguous and transitory. However, it can be located between a number of different ontological predicates: facticity and possibility, past and future, Being and non-Being, object and subject, and the self and the Other. One is authentic if one acknowledges one's facticity but does not allow it to limit one's freedom or agency. This means that one's past actions can inform, but do not overrun one's decision-making as it pertains to one's future possibility. The past has happened, it exists unchangeable. The future, conversely, is yet to happen and does not yet exist, but in the mind of the conscious subject. One is an object that is in flux because one is also a subject that negates (and therefore perceives and projects). If one is to authentically devote oneself to this state of becoming then one must also confront the existence of other conscious beings. Other beings may (intentionally or unintentionally) influence one's beliefs concerning the endurance of one's facticity over one's possibility. They also may present further apparent limitations to one's engagement in one's agency and therefore agency.

These parameters manifest themselves on social media as the juxtapositioning between presence and absence, mediacy and immediacy, presentation and representation, and manipulation and agency. The expression of the authentic-self is problematic precisely because it is so profoundly difficult to realise. My own journey towards the expression of my authentic-self has demonstrated its exasperating proximity to futility. Currently, the ways that users participate in social media do not readily accommodate such liminality, but social media is not inauthentic in of itself. I have argued that participation in social media has the potential to encourage authentic patterns of behaviour. However, the contemporary orientation towards social media technology is so deeply inauthentic that the overwhelming improbability of the authentic-self (under previously non-digital circumstances) has become compounded to a point approaching impossibility. Inauthentic participation on social

media enframes and challenges-forth sociality by forcing it into commodifiable forms which puts users into a state of standing-reserve. With the establishment of a global online community, one's awareness of one's being-in-the-world-with-others is heightened, and one is compelled to present a consistent online self that represents the lowest common denominator of one's adaptable identity. In doing so, participation in social media propagates the contradiction at the heart of neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism promotes freedom and agency, but it does so within strict boundaries. One can present a new self with each social media post (in a continuous mode of becoming), but one must do so through the medium of commodifiable, mediated and representational digital text, images and audio.

The process of neoliberal governmentality that has helped to establish such an inauthentic orientation towards social media, exploits the original negation (for-itself) at the core of human existence by sustaining one's indoctrination in consumer capitalism. Such a neoliberal and capitalistic influence on users destabilises the fragile liminality of the authentic-self and tips one's self-perception towards objecthood (in-itself). This immersion in consumer culture is exacerbated by the incursion of consumerist space into the digital frontier of social media. Online social media prosumerism reinforces commodifiable online behaviour that contravenes any engagement in an authentic mode of liminal becoming.

Contemporary participatory performance practitioners have developed a range of dramaturgical approaches that foreground and subvert issues of participating in social media by mobilising and problematising participation as a mode of orientation. They have come to recognise the potential of the mediating digital technologies employed in social media and appropriate this technology. By mobilising the lexicon of social media mediation and digitality¹⁶¹ and employing dramaturgies of audience participation, they attempt to make audiences mindful of how they orient themselves towards social media and aware of the potential pitfalls that could lead to an inauthentic expression of oneself.

The very shift in identity (from spectator to participant) intrinsic to many dramaturgies of participation engender a juxtapositioning that is often manifest in the contrast between the mediated and unmediated presence of other embodied agents. Practitioners establish an exaggerated horizon of expectation founded in the inauthentic modes of participation that are prevalent in contemporary western society. They then offer an alternative which has the potential to incite a more authentic expression of selfhood. Participants are offered an opportunity to reorient their relationship with this technology. Participatory performances promote a moderate and liminal

¹⁶¹ They quite often initially reflect and magnify the inauthentic aspects of one's orientation towards social media.

position relative to social media. Rather than condemning social media as an inherently negative system, they highlight the issues and concerns around social media and promote a relationship with technology that is mindful of the hazards but celebrates its value as a tool for potential authentic expression. By employing the dramaturgical strategies of audience participation, participatory practice attempts to follow through on the promise that neoliberalism fails to keep: one can participate through a medium like social media and constitute one's own self by authentically engaging with one's freedom in a world of other conscious beings.

II. APPLICATION(S) AND IMPLICATION(S)

My understanding of the liminality of the authentic-self is founded in both Heideggerian and Sartrean ontologies, but also its application in performance studies. Charles Taylor, Charles Guignon, Somogy Varga and Daniel Schulze are some of the most notable contemporary academic figures writing about authenticity over the last twenty years. Their work does not however make the connection between authenticity and liminality. Taylor and Varga have drawn their models of authenticity from thinkers other than Heidegger and Sartre, such as Johann Herder (1763) or Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782), who propose that one's authenticity should be predicated on a direct negation of social influence in favour of the internal generation of the self. Charles Guignon employs the same continental tradition (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre amongst others) as I have drawn from to construct his model of authenticity. His project however shifts towards the psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud (1923) to describe one's pre-social inner-self, which also resists the intrinsic sociality of being human. These more introspective approaches leave little room for a liminal position between the self and society.

In his work that does discuss authenticity in contemporary theatre and performance, Schulze states "in a time marked by social media, global interconnection and an ever fast-moving media environment, authenticity has become a vital preoccupation for many." (2017, p. 6) His work represents a project that is materially closest to my own, however his approach towards authenticity is very much grounded in Wolfgang Funk's (2015) notion of the 'black box' of authenticity, which proposes one cannot ever understand the inner mechanics of the authentic-self, only its causes and effects. From this position he expresses a longing for a discussion around authenticity that can sensitively "handle essentialist concepts" (p. 54), which again assumes an innate inner-essence or inner-self that is fundamentally at odds with the existential mode of freedom on which liminal authenticity is based.

If a liminal model of (in)authenticity is added to this contemporary tradition, further study may be able to benefit from the liminal reconciliation between individual and society. Rather than mobilising any perceived societal ills (such as neoliberal capitalism or social media) as scapegoats for non-engagement with one's essential inner-self, a liminal approach to negotiating authenticity places the responsibility firmly in the hands of the individual to both engage with their agency, and in doing so have some efficacious influence on those systems and structures that cultivate inauthentic patterns of behaviour.

The political economy of social media and its surrounding mechanisms and frameworks have been carefully and rigorously explored by writers like Christian Fuchs¹⁶² (2017). Fuchs' model is primarily based in Marxian theory that prioritises the division of labour as a measure for exploitation in real economic terms. He certainly broke ground on revealing the fundamental neoliberal agenda at the foundation of social media. His approach, however, intimates moral and ethical agendas concerning manipulation and exploitation. It also considers the individual social media user primarily in terms of their capital value.

If one considers the political economy of social media in terms of (in)authenticity (based in Heideggerian and Sartrean phenomenological ontologies) instead, one is less likely to be ensnared by the obligation to make judgements about whether one is economically valuable or not. Authenticity may be something one strives for, but (in my reading of it) it should not be put on a moral pedestal. Nor in that case is inauthenticity an expression of selfhood that one should be berated for operating in. As a liminal state, authenticity is simply a balance of the many complex facets of human existence. Equally, the neoliberal interests that drive social media are not immoral, but rather a manifestation of leaning more one way (inauthentically) than the other (authentically). By reading the exploitation of social media users through the lens of (in)authenticity, one tends towards determining the value of agency and the interaction between the self and Other. One is still making a value judgement, but it is based in the fundamental ontological make-up of users and non-users, those exploiting and those being exploited alike.

Nonetheless, this thesis is not a direct oppositional response to Fuchs' work, rather an augmentation and potential enrichment of the groundwork already established. An approach to the political economy of social media grounded in (in)authenticity can build on the issues raised and recommendations made by Fuchs to make a case for a mutually beneficial model of social media going forward.

Through the analysis of their work, my aim was to increase scholarly awareness around the practice of participatory performance practitioners that are actively problematising modes of participation by both employing

¹⁶² Also others such as Luis Suarez-Villa (2009).

and subverting audience participation in performance events. Most (if not all) of the practitioners included in this investigation have been subject to academic exposure at some point, however it has generally been predicated on the assumption that a dramaturgy of participation is somehow a spectacular dismantling of the audience-performer relationship. While this relationship is important and participatory practice is a significant break from the traditional theatrical mode of distanced spectatorship, the employment and integration of participatory strategies reflects and interrogates the modes of participation that are ubiquitous in contemporary western neoliberal and digital society. The ways audience participation is employed as a dramaturgical device and how it is received by audiences in contemporary performance can give an insight into how people are participating in society and the ways that this participation may be problematic.

The resurgence of participatory practices in the last decade is indicative of some issues present in the way people participate in social media. If the conclusions of this investigation can contribute in any way towards the recent dialogue surrounding social media¹⁶³, then it will provide a window into an alternative performance-based forum for tackling the issues. If spectators and/or participants approach social media from the standpoint of fluidity and plasticity, they may be able to cultivate an online space of authenticity that breaks from the cycle of prosumerism. If users are not beholden to advertisers, social media could evolve past a neoliberal and inauthentic orientation. Participation in a social media that could encourage growth and agency would diminish the volume of inauthentic influences that one must contend with in contemporary western society.

III. LIMITATION(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

This inquiry has established a clear grounding in continental philosophy. It primarily revolves around the ontological models proposed by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre in the mid-20th century. By locating this investigation firmly in this philosophical area, I have formed a defined position concerning (in)authenticity and one's orientation towards technology. This concentrated focus on Heidegger and Sartre's work has not presented any conspicuous restrictions, however there were several philosophers working with and after the existentialists that could be explored further. The thought of Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty is folded into that of Heidegger and Sartre's, although further exploration could yield more

¹⁶³ Recent issues in the public consciousness surrounding social media include 'catfishing' (Peterson, 2013), the leak of NSA files by Edward Snowden (Macaskill & Dance, 2013), the Cambridge Analytica Facebook scandal (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018) and the negative effects of social media on mental health (Barr, 2018) to name but a few.

detailed analysis concerning the role of temporality, intentionality and embodiment on the negotiation of (in)authenticity. Furthermore, it has become clearer from the findings generated from analysis that inquiry could have benefitted from engaging further with structuralist and poststructuralist philosophers like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze.

Lacan's tripartite model of 'the Imaginary', 'the Symbolic' and 'the Real' (taking influence from Freudian psychoanalysis) could support the integration of my conceptions of the subject, the self and the Other more in a spectrum that separates but also links presence and absence. This could also unlock the potential to discuss the power dynamics of digital and virtual otherness in terms of the 'symbolic order' or the 'big Other'.

Foucault and Derrida's thought concerning the trace features briefly in the methodology chapter to nuance an approach of theatre/archaeology. Also, Foucault's theory of governmentality clarifies the inauthentic orientation towards technology, but they could both be pushed further. Foucault's (1975) principle of the 'panopticon' as a position of omniscience, combined with the fundamental connection that he made between knowledge and power could still serve as an interesting counterpoint to Fuchs' Marxian approach towards the exploitation of social media users' data. Derrida's (1972) process of 'deconstruction' could also lend another layer to the dialectical binary of Being and non-Being Sartre assigns to human existence. This may reinforce the primacy of the original negation and give greater significance to the fundamental incompleteness and therefore becoming of one's self. Correspondingly, the application of the Deleuzian (1968) concept of 'repetition' could frame not only the way that social media users reinforce their online-self, but also how one might break the cycle of stasis and consistency in the constitution of one's self.

These individuals helped conceptualise subjectivity, the self and the Other in continental philosophy post-existentialism and to assimilate their thought may make the project feel immediately (if not possibly superficially) more relevant in the wider-fields of philosophy, political economy and performance theory. Their inclusion in the project in its current form would have presented too many potential pathways to follow and would be best served in insulated texts that deal with each in detail.

The rigour, precision and clarity fundamental to the successful communication of abstract and concrete ideas and experiences through the written form are traditionally valuable in academia. Being engaged in performance studies and having trained in performance, I am however far more familiar with the spoken word, amidst intonation, pace, bodily gesture and the synthesis of proximity, haptics, geo-political context and immediate physical surroundings.

This medley of presentation and representation can become imprecise and often ambiguous. It can rely too heavily on a physiological, emotional or inexpressible phenomenon of intuitively “getting”, grasping or understanding what is being expressed or communicated. However, the rigour of academia can still emerge through dialogue¹⁶⁴, albeit in not such a regimented way as in written text. In my own recent practice as a teacher within the performing arts (in Further Education), there is emphasis on the precision of written analysis and evaluation. However, there is a greater importance placed on students providing evidence of their understanding across practical exploration, reflective documentation and verbal presentation, in addition to written evidence of research and analysis. If something is unclear, a question can be asked and ideally answered in a way that gives the original proposition more clarity and detail, and so on. Such a form also lends itself naturally to participatory forms of pedagogical and performance interaction.

The conducting and presenting of this research project within the framework of practice-as-research is an avenue I will consider for future explorations of specifically participatory performance practice. As a performing arts teacher in further education, I am advantageously positioned to work with young people (from age 16 and over¹⁶⁵) in a practical and creative way that prioritises dialogue. In my experience, good pedagogical practice is student-led and collaborative because it actively engages the students, giving them a sense of agency. Education is becoming increasingly participatory. Training in the performing arts is predicated on participation. These conditions of my practice accommodate the continued exploration of modes of participation. Furthermore, development of this investigation into a more immediate non-literary form and mobilising modes of participation with young people may also improve the results of dissemination. Although theatre and performance does not boast the same penetration as social media, it must have a broader reach than purely academic literature. If this work can be done with young people in a further education context, they can directly benefit through their participation; they are ground-zero for the current orientation towards social media technology.

¹⁶⁴ Not unlike Socratic dialogue.

¹⁶⁵ Although the majority of the students that I teach are aged between 16 and 18, studying on level 2 and 3 courses.

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