

## Lecture Four



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#### Lecture Four Outline

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Not everyone can be famous more than everyone can be excellent – but everyone has 'fame' in the older sense of repute or reputation

Your fame is the character attributed to you by the world – something you cannot completely control, but which you may earnestly wish to influence

... social media, the fraction of chains and links dangling from every single search term. Type your name into a search engine or social media search box, and off you go: hunting the microscopic intricacies of your standing

(Chatfield, 2016)



Privacy is fast becoming a relative concept. From corporations to governments to cyber stalkers, snooping on and collating snatches of other's lives is standard practice.

To be invisible, unspoken, is to arouse the most suspicion of all

Mostly, we seem to like it that way

In a digital age, courtesy of the ever-connected devices lurking in every pocket, we are our own full-time publicists, social secretaries, brand consultants, travel agents, researchers, ambassadors, and apologists.

Appearances can be deceiving of course. That is the nature of appearances

(Chatfield, 2016)

Chatfield, T. (2016, November-January). Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.

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On screen second lives are a collage of content; our 'identity', a series of profiles, data, and timelines

Whatever you type, share, like, tweet – whatever is said, shared or searched about you – that is who you are

"My batteries have run out so I can't record anything. It is like I am not really here"

Regarding the quote – some might say he was more fully present thanks to this inability to mediate the experience

Mindfulness is a trendy concept, a reaction against technological distraction, and its version of authenticity argues that you are really somewhere only when you are fully focused

However lacking a personal record of the experience meant he had nothing to share with friends and followers online; nothing to add to a profile or preserve; nothing to pour into the shared pool of information encircling his existence

(Chatfield, 2016)

Chatfield, T. (2016, November-January). Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.

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We humans have an outrageous talent for the processes of preserving and telling

We disclose information about ourselves in order to find out what those selves are – and to invent new selves, new seemings. We seek to change others, and their sense of us

Unforeseen consequences rebound and multiply

Most alarmingly, in an age of information overload we risk finding ourselves not only unoriginal but everywhere anticipated, precedented by others' words and actions and images

So we seek a certain fame all the harder: a reputation that proves we both belong to the world and are unique

(Chatfield, 2016)

Chatfield, T. (2016, November-January). Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.



An idea guys ... "Privacy is Theft"

... but not as you might perceive it

To deny others any aspect of your knowledge or experience is to steal from humanity's transcendental technological project of self-perfection

... total disclosure: total sharing, total transparency of living

This is a logic that has already provided profitable business models – you become both product and payment – your habits, preferences, friendships, and self-revelations are what *they* are aggregating and selling – and transmitting towards some greater whole

Your time is their money

(Chatfield, 2016)

Chatfield, T. (2016, November-January). Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.



Yet there remains a begged question at the heart of it all

For the entity at the start of each utterance – the real, the actual, the experiencing self – can never quite be captured, neither by the world not by itself

If fame is a chimera, then – a series of stories told at diminishing distance from truth and experience – authenticity isn't all its cracked up to be

There is however, one thing that technology teaches us only too well: that the bundle of stories we carry and speak are as real as it gets when it comes to selfhood

The man in the crowd morning the loss of his battery was at least half right.

Reality is what we can prove and preserve by sharing

(Chatfield, 2016)

Chatfield, T. (2016, November-January). Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.

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#### Rewired



#### Rewired - What the net is doing to our brains

"If we were to set out to invent a medium that would rewire out mental circuits as quickly as possible, you would probably end up designing something that looks and works a lot like the Internet. Its not just that we tend to use the net regularly, even obsessively. Its that the net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli – repetitive, intensive, interactive, addictive – that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions. With the exception of alphabets and number systems, the net may well be the single most powerful mind altering technology that has ever come into general use (Carr, 2010)

Carr, N. G. (2010). The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains. New York: W.W. Norton.



# 3

## **Unplugged For Twenty Four Hours**



#### **Unplugged For Twenty Four Hours**

Nearly 1000 university students across ten countries volunteered for *24 Hours: Unplugged* – a study on the effects of abstaining from media for one day

Banned from their usual fix of smartphones, tablets, television, radio, DVD's, game consoles, news, music, and social media, students were forced to experience the 'unmediated' world for a day, removing their filter of the media machine.

The majority failed to complete 24 hours unplugged.

Some students compared 'being unplugged' to being in solitary confinement.

Others said it was just like torture



#### **Unplugged For Twenty Four Hours**

"I felt so lonely - as if I was in a small cage on an island"

"I felt as though I was lost in a void"

"It was a very unusual and uneasy feeling"

"Never before have I noticed that my own life is full of media shadow"

"For people in modern society communication is as important as breath"

"To get through the last eleven and a half hours I turned to alcohol. With a few hours to go I passed out in an alcohol-induced slumber, dreaming of seeing the green light on my game console blinking to life and my laptop whirring up"







Nicholas Carr says that even a decade ago he could "spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose". Now his concentration drifts.

Brains are "massively plastic" (Carr) and our mental hardware – synapses and neurons – form new connections, break old connections, and create new nerve cells to adapt to experience

Through repetition of physical or mental activity (like say for example, looking at a television screen, computer screen, or mobile phone for 8.5 hours a day, as most in the West do) your brain changes accordingly and locks itself into new and rigid habits

The feeling that you cannot concentrate any more has a scientific foundation

(Simmonds, 2015)

Simmonds, A. (2015, August-October). The Frankenstein Of Social Media. Womankind, 44-47.



Your old mind, the one that was capable of "calm, focused, undistracted" thought, is being cannibalized by a new one that, "takes in and doles out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts"

When you think about the fact that the entire cultural edifice of Western civilization – everything from the Enlightenment to democracy to the novel – was created for and by minds that were capable of linear thought, this change is nothing short of catastrophic.

The techno-utopia that we were promised may have created a Frankenstein, or in the least, a new form of human: a skater upon the surface of life, distracted and skittish, a seeker of style over substance

This idea ties in with a range of other unsettling changes that digital technology is generating, particularly when we look at the kinds of 'selves' and the type of society that social media is producing



In a world where people are more likely to turn to online articles for the edification, and to social media for their entertainment, the nature and purpose of writing itself has changed

Writers are now governed by 'clicks' and 'likes'

They are hired and fired not on the complexity of their work, but only on its popularity

The internet's obsession with statistics – its interminable counting of how many 'friends' we have, how many page impressions our blog has received, how many 'shares' our article has won – means that success is now determined by numbers, rather than by depth of thought

Writing used to be about self expression. Now it is about promotion

(Simmonds, 2015)

Simmonds, A. (2015, August-October). The Frankenstein Of Social Media. Womankind, 44-47.



Anyone who says that they never anxiously check to see how their status updates have been received by friends online is a liar

We are writing to please more than we are writing to understand

And no wonder this makes us anxious

Never before has the 'self' that is writing been so distant from the 'self' that is written about, or the 'self' that is photographed photo shopped and run through a filter to make it look like every other 'self'.

The problem with certain forms of social media is that you are forced to have a real name, a real photograph, and a real address, and yet the 'you' that appears is more like a commodity or a business than an identity



Social media "asks" its users to manage themselves as flexible collections of skills, useable traits and tastes that need to be constantly maintained and enhanced (Llana Gershon)

Unsurprisingly, this means that there is a tendency towards conformity: people monitor and police themselves and others to approximate supposedly 'normal' behaviors so as to win more friends and praise

And the constant updating and re-crafting of this public self is exhausting work

Art curator Lauren Ptak has argued that we should be paid for our social media work. Every update, every check-in, every comment that we write is converted into data that is then sold to marketing companies for vast profits

Yet we, the labourers, are unpaid. "Our subjectivity turns them a profit. They call it sharing. We call it stealing" (Lauren Ptak)



The fact that social media commodifies our relationships may make you guys wish to 'leave the garden'

However, it is difficult to disengage with social media without seeming suspect

Social media is no longer a choice. It is a decree

There is a cultural suspicion that greets people who refuse to get online profiles

Social media also demands that you make yourself open to surveillance: you watch others, they monitor you, and then you then police yourself in the knowledge that others – including the corporation that actually owns the information that you put on the website – are looking

It is a type of regime – a 'Panopticon' (Foucalt) – a system of power where social surveillance becomes self-surveillance - which works terribly effectively to secure discipline and conformity



One of the biggest issues is that social media is abolishing the focus on our inner selves

We have become "confessing animals" (Foucault), spewing forth every aspect of our lives, our darkest thoughts, our most intimate secrets, for the gaze of others

It means the end of solitude, of quiet reflection, of authentic feelings that are not written to win 'likes' or to promote your 'self' as a product in a digital marketplace

When we talk about social media, we tend to link words like 'technological progress' and 'digital revolution'

We're marching towards civilizational advancement, one click at a time

However, consider this, just because technology allows us to do something, it doesn't mean that we should

(Simmonds, 2015)

Simmonds, A. (2015, August-October). The Frankenstein Of Social Media. Womankind, 44-47.

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"On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog"

Peter Steiner. The New Yorker. July 5, 1993.

This cartoon was drawn back in 1993. Prehistoric in terms of internet terms.

There was hardly anyone online twenty years ago, and yet there was already a worry that there was something unreal or inauthentic about online communication: that could be anyone behind the text appearing on your screen. Even a dog.

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. *New Philosopher*, Issue 2, 21-23. Steiner, P. (1993). The New Yorker.



The attitude that what happens online is less than fully real remains with us today.

Two decades into the internet revolution, we still use terms like 'in real life' (IRL) in contrast to what we do online.

We look oddly at couples who tell us they met on the internet and distinguish between our 'real friends' and 'online friends'.

... do we really know these people ...

It is easy to become someone else online (think back to lecture where we covered the concept of Sockpuppets). Opportunities are abundant here.

In such a hall of mirrors, it is easy to see our contact with others as unreal, unreliable, or at least incomplete and provisional.

Until you meet someone 'in real life' it might seem that you really don't know them at all.

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.

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But is online communication really so unreal?

**Is there something inherently flawed about this form of engagement?** And if our online lives are unreal or provisional, are the people we interact with unreal too?

... "I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind" ...

E.M. Forster (1909). The Machine Stops

Nearly a century later Hubert Dreyfus cited the fictional passage above to demonstrate the inadequacy of online communication.

... 'Telepresence' can never be the same as 'presence' ...

Dreyfus's 'On the Internet' appeared in 2001; within a decade it had to be extensively re-written, when the sudden rise of the internet giants overtook some of its more pessimistic predictions.



For Dreyfus, when we communicate through a computer monitor or a TV screen, no matter how detailed and high resolution the image, how crisp and clear the sound, something is missing.

... "What telepresence lacks is embodiment: we cannot adjust bodily to our environment, to get the best view, the "optimal grip" on the world ...

Patrick Stokes (2013) citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty (specifically "optimal grip")

We cannot communicate directly through gesture and posture, nor participate in shared moods.

And online communication lacks the risk involved in physically being there, the sheer vulnerability that comes from our fragile bodies being in the same place as others.

... But are we still disembodied online ...

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.

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#### Increasingly the answer seems to be sort of ...

The internet-surfing dogs of 1993 could hide their canine bodies behind a blinking cursor and some basic text.

... "Today we flood social media with depictions of our bodily presence: photos, video, audio. We are extending our physicality through time and space more than ever before ...

Patrick Stokes (2013)

Internet denizens also chain each other to their bodies by policing how other users present themselves (think the use of flattering camera angles – 'MySpace angles).

The implication is that in showing yourself in this way you are perhaps trying to hide who you really are and what you really look like – which just tethers you back to your true body – not the idealized one you are trying to present.

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.



Even the path our bodies trace through time and space is increasingly logged and made into a narrative via social media.

We check in, post updates with location tags, and broadcast out physical movements to our followers.

... "The user's body has become increasingly inescapable when they enter the online world; our internet lives have become more spacialized and incarnated ...

Patrick Stokes (2013)

That, however, is still a long way off full embodiment. There are limits to what telepresence (Dreyfus) can achieve on its own.

Isn't there something about *being there* that we just can't capture through online video communication? We can't even look into the eyes of the person we are talking to given where the camera is placed.



Dreyfus describes limitations in the medium itself.

But perhaps, as the technical support crew like to say, the issue is one of "PEBKAC": Problem Exists Between Keyboard And Chair.

... perhaps the vulnerability, the risk, the 'nerve in conversation', is not something given by online communication, but is something we must bring to it ourselves ...

With the technology we now have at our disposal, the face of the other is brought close to us across physical space with a new (if still limited) vividness and responsiveness.

And with the face of the other comes ethics.

One primary concern is the lack of vulnerability of direct contact online (Dreyfus), however, perhaps we should instead attend to the vulnerability of the *other*...

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.



... we always find others placed in our hands and at our mercy in some way and to some degree, however trivial ...

Patrick Stokes (2013) citing K.E. Logstrup

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.



In that case, to insist that online communication is less real, that online communication is just something that has a vague, tentative, or shadowy resemblance to real human engagement, looks morally troubling.

We know that the internet can be an ugly place.

The cases of online abuse, bullying and viscous harassment highlighted by the media are only part of a spectrum that includes rampant cruelty, racism, sexism, homophobia and more besides

## ... Ten minutes of reading online comments should disabuse you of whatever faith in humanity you had left ...

Its almost a cliché that cruelty and exploitation are easier online because we don't see the users at the other end as real people; they are just so many spinning dots.

Like most clichés that has some truth while being too crude.

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.

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There are two very different ways in which we see other people: as a 'you' and an 'it' (Martin Buber).

Most of the people we encounter each day are merely 'its' to us, objects to navigate around or deal with more or less mechanically, acting out pre-programmed conventions of behavior and manners.

... much of our online life is like that too: liking a status or sending a perfunctory birthday message, more for the sake of form than feeling...

Worse, sometimes we simply don't think of the other person, the actual living human consciousness, on the other end at all (think trolls).

So what we need, then, is to get better at seeing faces: to see ourselves as face-to-face with the other when confronted only with lines of text and two dimensional static images.

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.



To see the other 'you' takes effort.

The medium can not do the work for you no matter how advanced it is.

... we have to look at the other as a being like us: with the same depth, the same inner life

We must take on the risk and engage in vulnerability. We must engage in the nerve of conversation.

We must let the 'light in the faces of others' reach us through the pixels. We somehow have to learn to see the image on the screen as a person, not merely an image.

... unless, or course, if it is a dog ...

Stokes, P. (2013, November). Do You Really Exist Online?. New Philosopher, Issue 2, 21-23.





## On Physical Connection



### On Physical Connection

When I do speeches now, I day, I'm sorry, you cant film me. I'm having an intimate moment with you, the audience. I don't want to see it recut on You Tube (Tyler Brule, in Bartlett, 2013)

Bartlett, M. (2013). Tyler Brule Makes Monocle. Dumbo Feather, 35, 66-82.







'Life in the digital now'. Abha Dawesar. TEDGlobal 2013

"One year ago, Abha Dawesar was living in blacked-out Manhattan post-Sandy, scrounging for power to connect. As a novelist, she was struck by this metaphor: Have our lives now become fixated on the drive to digitally connect, while we miss out on what's real?"

#### Click Here To Watch

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"Nature had just reminded us that it was stronger than technology, and yet here we were, obsessed about being wired"

"... our devices and their connectivity matter to us right up there with food and shelter"

"The self as we once knew it no longer exists, and I think that an abstract, digital universe has become part of our identity"

"Technology has altered the flow of time. The overall time we have for our narrative, our lifespan, has been increasing, but the smallest measure, the moment, has shrunk"

"It has shrunk because our instruments enable us in part to measure smaller and smaller units of time, and this has in turn given us a more granular understanding of the material world, and this granular understanding has generated reams of data that our brains can no longer comprehend"

"The gap between what we can perceive and what we can measure is only going to widen"

Abha Dawesar 2013



"... the internet archives. And it warps the past. With no distinction left between the past, the present, and the future - the here or there. We are left with this moment everywhere. This moment I call the digital now".

"Time warping technology challenges our deepest core, because we are able to archive the past and some of it becomes hard to forget, even as the current moment is increasingly unmemorable"

"By archiving everything, we think that we can store it, but time is not data. It cannot be stored. You and I know exactly what it means like to be truly present in a moment. ..."

"The self that lives in the long narrative arc and the self that experiences the moment become one"

"Things happen in the time they take. That time can't be fought. And because it will pass and it will move we owe the present moment our full attention. Attention is time. Love is attention..."

"The digital world cannibalizes time. It threatens the completeness of ourselves. It threatens the flow of love"

"But we can choose to take time back"

Abha Dawesar 2013



# 8

# Losing Ourselves to Technology



Canadian philosopher Marshall McLund realized 30 years before the emergence of online search, social media, streaming videos, RSS feeds, blog posts and emails, that "we shape our tools and out tools shape us". The person before technology is no longer the user afterwards (Case, 2014)



We are driven to fill our lives with the quest to access information. For what purpose or with what limitation it is not for us to ask; and we are not accustomed to asking, since the problem is unprecedented (Postman, in Case, 2014, p. 37)



The world has never before been confronted with information glut and has hardly had the time to reflect on its consequences (Case, 2014)

Since the advent of the internet, the amount of information available for consumption has mushroomed. By 2010 the amount of data created on the internet every two days was equivalent to all extent human cultural artifacts and information created from the dawn of time until 2003 (McCheesy, in Case, 2014)

We're awash in information, so much that we cant quite remember what we've seen, heard, or read (Case, 2014)



Greek philosopher Seneca believed that memory is the essence of self. Our memories of what we do in a lifetime – regardless of what we choose to remember – become the scaffolding of our unique self (Case, 2014)

"As individuals express their life, so they are (Engels & Marx, in Case, 2014)

But not all memories stick. Most sit in our short term memory for just a few seconds, never to be though up again. It is our long term memory that we rely on for reflection, for deep understanding, and it is here that we develop an idea of self (Case, 2014)



Cognitive scientists point to long-term memory as the powerhouse of the brain. It is a vast reservoir with almost limitless capacity. With each expansion of the out long-term memory comes an enlargement of your intelligence (Carr in Case, 2014, p. 38)

"It takes about an hour or so for memories to become fixed, or consolidated in the brain. Shortterm memories do not become long-term memories immediately, and their consolidation is delicate. Any disruption can sweep them from the mind (Muller & Pilzecker, in Case, 2014, p. 38)

When too much is going on in our working memory, the successful transfer of information from working memory to long-term memory just doesn't happen. To prevent cognitive overload, no more than four pieces of information can be processed at any given time but the optimal amount is probably less – it is more than likely closer to two (Swelter, in Case, 2014, p.38)



Distraction is the enemy of learning an memory. Many technologies can be referred to as 'interruption machines' (Carr in Case, 2014, p. 38)

Reading online comes complete with hyperlinks, banners and images; we encounter constant updates from feeds, posts, instant messaging and notifications – a technical discoparlour (Case, 2014)

So what then are the consequences for long-term memory? What are the consequences for our sense of self?



An argument ... The tie between information and human purpose has been served. We live in an age of technological progress, but no longer human progress (Postman in Case, 2014, p. 38)

Information appears indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volumes and at high speeds, and disconnected from theory and purpose ... (Postman in Case, 2014, p. 38)

Information is dangerous when it has no place to go, when there is no theory to which it applies, no pattern in which it fits, when there is no higher purpose served (Postman in Case, 2014, p.38)





#### **Voltaire And Seneca**



#### Voltaire

... Men had blasphemed against memory: the Muses took from them this divine gift so that they might learn once and for all what life would be like without its assistance. Thus it happened in the middle of the night every brain was dulled, so that the following morning everyone woke without the slightest recollection of the past ...

Voltaire



#### Seneca

... To remember is to safeguard something entrusted to your memory, whereas to know, by contrast, is actually to make each item your own, and not to be dependent on some original and be constantly looking to see what the master said ...

Seneca





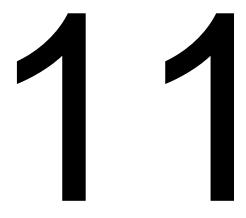


If the art thinking and the consolidation of that thinking into long-term memory is the foundation upon which our sense of self is built, then what happens when your memory becomes so sorely impaired by technologically driven information overload that you can't remember a thing?

Tell me ...

Who are you then?





## A short Story



#### A Short Story



#### On Social Media And Being Human Jason Harding

It is very easy to write of social media as a platform designed to leverage narcissism and invade cognitive surplus in order to generate profit – all under the guise of providing us with enhanced reach, connection, freedom, and power. It is also easy to write it off as a dehumanizing technology – forcing us to reduce our concept of personhood and friendship so that it fits within the limitations of the software. However, social media only exists because we do. Without us it is just code. Empty. And unconscious. So for all the negative arguments you could throw at social media we are the ones who actually breathe life into them. We are the ones at fault. Not the platform – not the code. And in that context we are not without choice here. We are

not without power. In fact we are in complete control. We do not have to fuel the machine with narcissism, mundane descriptions of trivial external events, or updates that are more for the sake of form than feeling. We can easily remove the pervasive view that people are just "its" online – simple objects to navigate around and leverage for whatever purpose we deem important at the time. We can make social media human. And it might be easier to do than we think. We just have to be brave enough accept the risk, the vulnerability, and the nerve required for real conversation. Some advice from Lanier's book 'You Are Not A Gadget' (2010, p. 21) on how to actually do this ... "post a video once in a while that took you one hundred times more time to create than it takes to view, write a post or an update that took weeks of reflection before you heard the inner voice that it needed to come out, innovate and find a way to describe your internal state instead of meaningless peripheral events." Take the time to position yourself outside the relentless and fleeting white noise that is social media's status quo.

Featured Image: Jason Harding. Spiderbait. The Triffid. Brisbane. 26th February 2016.



## **One Final Thought**



### One Final Thought

Where is this all going guys? Where are we heading here? Is this the end of everything?

Thanks for your time

See you next week