REFRAMING THE ORDINARY: CYBERSPACE AND EDUCATION

Replanteando lo ordinario: ciberespacio y educación

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ABSTRACT

In an era dominated by social media, reportedly more concerned with self-expression than self-reflection, the classical injunction to 'Know Thyself' has renewed purchase. Increased self-knowledge on the whole enables a student to become more self-determining by exercising a choice, a 'freedom to *be'* that is central to the human condition. Identity construction, development and formation are all considered important functions within education, and many teachers adopt a pedagogical approach that stimulates adolescents to connect what they are taught to who they are and want to be. However, much of this development of self-knowledge takes place in non-formal learning environments, be they co-curricular clubs or activities outside of school. It is my contention that social media offers as much in terms of exploring new identity positions as these more traditional locations for self-learning. Although many do not feel a need to articulate and *share* in order to believe they are present in the world there are an increasing number of those, who believe that to *be* is to *be perceived* through online expression. Rather than focusing upon the envy inducing 'Perfect Me' posts that are so often linked to the decline in adolescent mental health and wellbeing, this paper explores how mundane and banal posts on social media can be used to frame and reframe aspects of modern life which in turn promotes self-learning. By drawing attention to the average, everydayness of existence, the relationship between the seemingly ordinary and self-knowledge becomes more apparent. This paper considers

the potential individuals have for coming to know themselves a little more deeply as they move through a process of self expression, to self curation, to self construal, to self construction. Rather than asking 'What is it to *be* in the [online] world?' it poses the slightly different question: 'What is it to present *being*?'. It also considers the space between these two questions as offering potential for fostering the wider educational ideal, that of greater self-knowledge.

Key words: know thyself; social media; self, self knowledge; philosophy of self; philosophy of technology, being.

RESUMEN

En una era dominada por las redes sociales, aparentemente más preocupada por la autoexpresión que la autorreflexión, el precepto clásico de 'Conócete a ti mismo' cobra nueva importancia. En conjunto, un mayor autoconocimiento permite al alumno desarrollar una mayor autodeterminación mediante el ejercicio de la elección, de la 'libertad de *ser*', esencial de la condición humana. La construcción de la identidad, el desarrollo y la formación se consideran funciones importantes en la educación, y muchos profesores adoptan un enfoque pedagógico que anima a los alumnos a conectar lo que se les enseña con lo que son y lo que quieren ser. No obstante, una gran parte de este desarrollo del autoconocimiento tiene lugar en entornos de aprendizaje informales, ya sean actividades curriculares complementarias o actividades extraescolares. En mi opinión, las redes sociales ofrecen tantas posibilidades para explorar nuevas opciones de identidad como estos espacios de autoaprendizaje más tradicionales. Aunque muchos no sienten la necesidad de expresar y *compartir* para creer que están presentes en el mundo, hay un número creciente de personas que creen que *ser* es *ser percibido* a través de la expresión *online*. En lugar de centrarse en las publicaciones del 'Yo perfecto', generadoras de envidia, que con tanta frecuencia se vinculan al deterioro de la salud mental y el bienestar de los adolescentes, este artículo explora cómo las publicaciones mundanas y banales en las redes sociales pueden utilizarse para formular y reformular aspectos de la vida moderna que, a su vez, fomentan el autoaprendizaje. Al dirigir la atención hacia lo corriente, hacia la cotidianidad media de la existencia, la relación entre lo aparentemente ordinario y el autoconocimiento resulta más evidente. Este artículo analiza el potencial que tienen los individuos para llegar a conocerse un poco mejor a medida que avanzan por un proceso que va de la *autoexpresión*, del comisariado del yo y de la *autointerpretación* a la *autoconstrucción*. En lugar de preguntar «¿Qué significa *ser* en el mundo [*online*]?», plantea una cuestión ligeramente distinta: «¿Qué significa presentar *el ser*?». También examina el espacio entre estas dos preguntas como un lugar con potencial para fomentar el ideal educativo más amplio, el de un mayor autoconocimiento.

Palabras clave: ciberespacio; educación; redes sociales, filosofía de la tecnología; filosofía del yo; conócete a ti mismo; autoconocimiento; ser.

1. WHO AM I IN AN INTERNET CONNECTED AGE?

Turkle (1995) wrote about the negative potential the internet offered people to formulate false selves or alternate realities and since then a number of scholars (Carr, 2010; Bauerlain, 2008; Greenfield, 2014) have continued to suggest that social media not only encourages people to present a fake self, or a veneer, to the world, but that it is also responsible for the rewiring of the teenage brain. Seemingly, the use of social media has resulted not only in superficial and self-centered thinking but also accounts for, as some literature argues, the recent rise in incidences of teenage depression, self-harm and suicide (Memon *et al.*, 2018; Pantic, 2014). Setting aside debate about whether such links are correlative or causal, it seems that much of the work in schools and popularist media around social media and declining adolescent mental health is still associated with the ills of unrealistic, fake and aspirational posts that social media sites are reported to encourage. This approach stems from an argument presented by some that «[t]here is a push towards an overall packaged sense of self» (Gardner and Davies 2014, p. 61), which is increasingly externalised, containing the edited highlights and focusing upon the 'sorted' and polished elements rather than any weaknesses or idiosyncrasies[1]. This line of thinking lends itself in support of the idea that we are living an age of self-expression rather than self-examination, for embedded within is the suggestion that young people are not affording themselves the opportunity to have deep self-knowledge or live an authentic existence. Commentators warn of the social ills of living a 'like life' rather than a real life, with value being assessed in terms of 'likes' and 'follows', based on how one appears to be. Turkle, for example, suggests that Descartes' famous dictum 'I think therefore I am' has been eclipsed by «I share therefore I am» (Turkle, 2012). It could also be suggested that a digital divide is opening up between those who feel that to 'be is to be perceived' online, like a curiously updated version of Berkeley's dictum, and those who do not need to articulate and share their actions / self in order to feel they are present in the world. The former seems to gain self-worth and a sense of value through the validation of others and this comes in the quantifiable form of 'likes' and 'follows'. It could be argued they are understanding 'being' in terms of 'beings' (Pattinson, 2000, p. 16) with the value of being quantified in terms of use or functionality. Both the perceived and the perceiver serve a purpose or utility to

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1. Research undertaken by Chou and Edge (2012) examined the impact of using Facebook on people's perceptions of others' lives and noted that FB users tended to attribute more positive content posted to others' personality rather than situational factors (correspondence bias), especially for those they did not know personally. Furthermore, their research indicated that those who used Facebook for longer each week agreed more than others were happier than them and had better lives.

the other, be that in the form of numerical value ('a like') or as entertainment. It is utilitarian in the sense that neither group have a sense of intrinsic value in and of themselves, for they could easily be replaced by any number of alternatives. In this interpretation, users are caused to see themselves online as an object, brought into existence both as a result of, and for the purpose of, being seen. This object becomes consumable and as a result many argue that the self that is presented is one designed to be desirable, something akin to a product or a brand, rather than a person.

However, Boyd and Gosling (Boyd 2014, Gosling, 2009) argue that there is no gap between the presentation of an ideal self on social media sites and the In Real Life (IRL) self-offline. Gosling's research suggests that online social network profiles actually convey a reasonably accurate sense of the profile owners (Gosling 2009). While there is no denying that some people do use aspirational posts on social media as a way of developing a 'brand-me', eg kimkardashian[2] , there is an increasing amount of content that does nothing of the sort. For example there are instagram accounts called womenIRL, Whathaveibeeneating, Supermarkettour, coffeeshopsoftheworld, everydayprk, #fridgepics, #mundane_matters, @onionring-sworldwide, the list goes on. The vast majority of social media posts are actually not aspirational but pictures of ordinary, everyday, mundane things that people do, be that the school run or their television viewing. They may be framed in such a way as to carry a message about lifestyle but the actual content for the vast major-ity seeks to be a way of making connection with others through the familiar and ubiquitous. Because people are rapidly maturing with their use of social media, popul2arist views regarding the 'Perfect Me', creating unrealistic and impossible ideals for people to live up to, are becoming increasingly outdated. It appears that people are exploring new identities, utilizing the space that has been opened up by social media, and blurring the boundary between private and public life, in order to come to greater self-knowledge.

It is this move away from 'Perfect Brand Me' style content that I would like to focus upon. The quotidian seems to be serving a purpose that is pushing back against the envy-inducing images that littered social media initially. Instead it enables people to have the everydayness of their existence made apparent, thereby facilitating an exploration of the Delphic Injunction to «Know thyself». This might be perceived as positive because self-knowledge enables a student to become more self-determining

2. Kim Kardashian stars in a reality show in America. She uses her Instagram posts to connect with her fans and market various products that she is in collaboration with or produces herself eg clothing lines and perfumes.

and autonomous seeking the freedom to *be* that is central to the human condition. Although there has been work done on social media as a phenomenon in itself «becoming ordinary» (Marvin, 1988), (Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, & Karnowski, 2013), and content studies have been undertaken that demonstrate that what is shared is likely to be of the ordinary and mundane. Linguists and sociologists (Lobinger, 2016) (Miller, 2008) have considered the implications of this new ordinary content with regards to communication and phatic content for example, but, little work has been done, to think about the impact on self knowledge or with regards to what such quotidian content might say about existential knowledge and the [educational] possibilities of being.

2. Method

In addressing the question «Who am I (in an internet connected age)?» I refer to the social networking sites Instagram and Snapchat, but my approach may be applied more widely to similar platforms. However, as the use of image is important to this conceptualization, I have not used the term to include online gaming sites and / or chat rooms. Given the majority of those on social media access an average of five different platforms[3] regularly it seems necessary to take more than one platform into account when reflecting upon the ways the modern generation attempts to come to self-knowledge in an emerging techno-culture. However, considering the entire reach is too broad for the purposes of this paper.

«Who am I?» is an existential question, philosophically rooted and this is sometimes overlooked when studying social media. It is true that there are other useful approaches to social media and online existence, such as the psychological and sociological research into performative models of self (Goffman, 1959) (Humphreys, 2018), (Hogan, 2010). Research has also been done into the quantified self (Neff & Nafus, 2016), (Lupton, 2016) (Wolf, 2010) seeking to measure what it means to be in a world in which everything is potentially measurable. Furthermore, while assorted surveys, content analysis and so on will provide data that is of interest, much remains unaddressed with regards to *being* online that only a philosophical mode of analysis can reveal. Empirical studies may tell us much about what might be happening, but they will not always explain why in terms of *being,* meaning and values. As a result, rather than any attempt to measure online content or make an assessment of whether posts are aspirational or mundane, I will instead be

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3. GlobalWebindex.net (2015) https://blog.globalwebindex.com/ 6.55 networks for those aged 16-24 and 4.21 networks for those aged 25-34.

considering the idea of re-framing a self, online. Just as if someone were asked to explain the meaning of a novel they would not begin by measuring the dimensions of the physical book, I will not be looking to explain or comment upon the specifics of a particular platform, or reality of a specific virtual space, but instead seek to explore both what it means to *be* in our current technological era and «what is it to present *being*?». This is why I have chosen to focus upon a philosophical approach to unpack the questions posed, looking to explore what it is to *be* as well as what it is to present *being* in our modern techno-culture.

Sociology and psychology often address questions regarding the integrity between an individual's online identity and the activities they may undertake in their everyday lives. Often the focus is upon the ontological reality of that which is performed, as opposed to personal meaning-making or self-knowledge. Goffman's dramaturgical approach is frequently used to explain how an individual represents an idealised version or performance of themselves rather than the seeking to establish what this means for understanding *being* and self-knowledge. «The metaphor considers life as a stage for activity» (Hogan, 2010, p. 378) and people are able to present their best-selves (Goffman, 1959). Goffman described 'front stage' being the place where people try to present the idealised version of themselves and 'back stage' being the place where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course (Goffman, 1959, p. 112) but it is where the preparation is undertaken in order to perform effectively when 'front stage'. Hogan (2010), however, draws a distinction between 'performance' spaces (Goffman, 1959) where actors behave with one another, and 'exhibition' spaces where individuals submit artefacts to show to one another. An exhibition remains a form of presentation of self, as in people still choose what to display and it becomes a form of impression management (Goffman, 1959). While the exhibition and performative space ideas resonate, they fail to ask the question «What is it to *be* in such an exhibition?» or «What do such performative / exhibitive notions of self-presentation do with regards to self-knowledge and ultimately *being* in the world?». It is here where I believe philosophy has much to offer.

Questions about the self, self-knowledge, existence and perception, are ultimately philosophical questions. To this end, I shall be drawing upon the work of Wittgenstein, Cavell and Sartre. Although they were not specifically referring to social media their work could be considered prescient and informs more fully upon self-knowledge and self-construction. I will explore how the same post can have multiple and shifting meanings that importantly, like speech, drama and art, change over time for both the person posting and for those viewing them. I will argue that is this fluidity that holds much richness, with regards to self-examination.

To this end, Jurgenson's description of that which is found on social media, as social photography, is also useful. He suggests as a cultural practice it acts as a way of seeing, speaking, and learning (Jurgenson, 2019, p. 10). As a result, I will be drawing all of this together to ask how the world of social-media-selves comes to light, and the way this fosters self-knowledge, instead of focussing upon the question «But is a social-media-self real?».

3. THE EXTRAORDINARY AND THE MUNDANE

Jurgenson (Jurgenson, 2019) suggests that the confluence of smart phones and social media has created a new form of photography: about neither artistic merit not documentation. He refers to this as social photography — that which is about routine communication and it is as «under conceptualised as it is ubiquitous». Social media, as a medium, finds aspects of style which do justice to the moments of life which do not proclaim their significance. Previously, the banal had not been readily visible but with the advent of the image on social media we have seen an explosion of the mundane. Although 'everyday' existed as a genre within photography, until the ubiquity of the digital camera phone most people only tended to be confronted photographs of events on television and in newspapers. These images will, for the most part, have been of something extraordinary — perhaps depicting a riot or a fire. «The camera's capacity to «capture» reality saw it used for family albums, police filing, pornography, war reportage and encyclopaedic records» (Jurgenson cited in Earle, 2020, p. 26). Furthermore, people tended to take photographs of special events or rites of passage — birthday's, Christmas', weddings etc, so the images that most people will have been exposed to will not have been of the ordinary or mundane. However, on social media platforms people now often choose to bring attention to different aspects of their life. Although the important events are still recorded in much the same fashion, saved in a virtual album, a lot of the everyday gets posted too. Scrolling through people's feeds will see images of the crowded bus, their journey to work, a pile of books that require marking and so on. These images now sit alongside the birthday party or Christening as a record of life. What is significant is that this re-framing of the ordinary makes it available to us in a way that we change our relationship towards it, enabling us to notice what, once seen, is powerful and striking. Perhaps this is what so many Vloggers have capitalised upon. By posting the daily events of their lives, they deliberately recast the average everydayness of existence. For example, the 'haul' became a popular phenomenon in which people simply unpacked their shopping bags on camera, either as a live feed or to be uploaded. Some people choose to 'haul' something as mundane and normal as their weekly grocery shops, something that a large number of people undertake

almost without noticing. Yet the use of the medium of social media rendered this highly visible again, often with added shiny filters and #'s, for example #foodpics and #fridge, sometimes there was even a soundtrack! An exploration of these sort of posts allows us to enhance our understanding of the ways in which social media can bring the ordinary everydayness of the world. The interplay between the obvious and the hidden, the extraordinary and the mundane, and the naïve and the theoretical are fundamental as these relationships will lead us to a place of deeper self understanding. Often reflection upon the question of 'Who am I?' is metaphysicalised (mind and external world), however it is more useful to think that the inner and the outer, appearance and reality, [online and offline], occur *in* language and the other signs we use (Wittgenstein, 1982). Things occur in experience rather than behind it and therefore looking for a deeper or 'real' meaning behind that which appears serves no real purpose. The way in which the obvious often fails to be obvious to us because we have ceased to see it as important in its own right, or even notice it as if it has become part of the scenery or background noise.

Jurgenson argues that the vast majority of photographs taken today are a kind of «visual speaking» and are «as essential as gesture, as breath, or the «ums» and «ahs» of everyday speech (cited in Earle, 2020, p. 26). Using this sense of social media as 'visual speaking' to describe common life as it is can be helpful when trying to understand what it means to 'be' in this day and age. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that the reality of someone's mental life lies hidden «behind» their words — say, in their «mental operations» or brain activity — and the idea that we must see through their words in order to unmask reality: what we need to do rather is to place importance on describing and explaining common life. Instead of introspecting or asking what our words, actions, or indeed status updates, *really* mean, we should be looking at them as having intrinsic, descriptive value as, according to Wittgenstein, it is describing this that can lift one's blindness to the ordinary. The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. One is unable to notice something — because it is always before one's eyes (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 128). His suggestion that there is a dangerous temptation to privilege what is hidden beneath or behind the everyday is useful to bear in mind at this point. We should not be trying to dig through the surface of the images to look for their' true meaning', treating what is hidden or 'lies beneath the surface' as more 'real' or 'true' than the ordinary suggests the surface is as an obstacle which needs to be dug through or moved out of the way. Therefore, as it can be argued that the images on social media are a part of language in as much as they are part of communication, rather than trying to establish their hidden meaning perhaps

it would be more useful to view them as having meaning in and of themselves, especially with regards to *being*.

Images and status updates form an integral part of life, so rather than them being a communication about an aspirational and unattainable lifestyle perhaps there is a sense in which individuals are looking to reframe their lives for themselves, in a diaristic form, in order that it seems more interesting to them and so they can 'know' something of themselves in a different way. Cavell refers to this as the «physiognomy of the ordinary» in which things, rendered virtually unseen by their familiarity, are rendered new and therefore visible. «I understand it to be… a natural vision of film that every motion and gesture and station, in particular every human posture and gesture, however glancing, has its poetry, or you may say its lucidity… « (Cavell, 1984, p. 14) Posting a picture of one's coffee may well be suggesting an aspirational life to some, but actually a coffee itself is quite mundane, it is accessible for the majority of people. It is therefore not the mere ordinariness of the cup of coffee that carries the significance but that fact that it is photographed and framed, both literally and figuratively. It is the framing of the event, and the ensuing perception of it as a 'framed event', that makes it seem aspirational. Therefore, perhaps it is more realistic to work on the basis that the majority of things posted are ordinary and every day, but somehow reframed to make them seem special. There are various social rules and norms that have sprung up around this framing of events. For example, Vogue (Bloomingdale, 2015) posted a slightly tongue in cheek article about the 'rules' of Instagram posting in 2015. The main aim seemed to be preventing the ordinary being ordinary! It suggested that «coffee art should be used sparingly» and «food posts kept to a minimum». It forbids posting more than three pictures a day (if you are in a position where you have done that you are not allowed to post at all the following day). It recommends a limit of one a week for baby / puppy pics;

> people love puppies and all babies. Pictures of puppies and/or babies are a guaranteed golden 'gram. But limit yourself to one post per week. More than that and people will start to hate your puppies and babies. Do not Instagram cats. Please just spare us all. (Bloomingdale, 2015).

The article is poking fun at over exposure and ubiquitous posts, suggesting that the ordinary is interesting if it remains slightly mysterious. Vogue's guide makes sense in terms of the development of the self through its focus on making the ordinary seem special in the same way as Cavell draws attention to the unfamiliarity of the familiar and the unseen in the seen. He highlights a double relationship we end up having to the ordinary as an illusion as well as a freedom from illusion through its exposure. Vogue seems to be suggesting that it is more important to keep this element of the unknown and unfamiliar in order to make the most out of social media.

For Cavell the actual ordinary is not that which is obvious to us, but instead that which passes before us unnoticed because it is so familiar and is in plain sight. The extent to which we become aware enables us to transform this actual-ordinary into the eventual-ordinary; «the ordinary will come out of the shell of our lives as we now live them» (Norris, 2017) This eventual ordinary differs from the actual ordinary as it is more aspirational; standing in the recognition that we have an inclination not to be here in our lives. The eventual ordinary, the ordinary that has been seen, requires that people repeatedly experience their lives as sites of estrangement. Furthermore, Wittgenstein refers to the way theatre / film presents the process of being lived in a new way; having seen life as composed of a series of seemingly insignificant and uneventful moments, film can transform these same actions into something he describes as 'uncanny and wonderful' (Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 6). «[S]uddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes» (Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 6).

Cavell explores the actual and eventual ordinary in terms of what he refers to as Emersonian Perfectionism; this refers to the state of moral development of one's soul and is self-centered way of thinking about ethics, that places a greater emphasis on personal matters. In direct contrast to the ideas of utilitarianism or Kant, it is not interested in considering the universal or universalizable. Emersonian moral perfectionism suggests that the self can be attained and is to be attained.

> It is always divided against itself and in the process of moving away from a past self towards a next or unattained self, a movement that is governed by the notion of being true to oneself, of becoming what one really is or wants to be (MacArthur, 2014, p. 102).

One never arrives at one's perfect self, as that would suggest a fixed state or version, yet it is about a process of better-ment; «Perfectionism without perfection» (MacArthur, 2014, p. 102). There is no external version of 'the' perfect self, and yet at any one time an individual is aware of versions of self that are not in line with the ideal — partly because the ideal is always shifting. It essentially amounts to an attainable but unattained future self that one strives towards. However, Cavell, using the metaphor of marriage, suggests that in order to do this one must live within «earshot of skeptical despair» (MacArthur, 2014, p. 104) for threats develop when one is no longer open to seeing / hearing the potential next self. Sharing and posting can, arguably, keep this skeptical despair in view as the focus remains on the events of one's life. It is only within a confrontation with skepticism that the eventual every-day comes into view, as it leads to the discovery of the every day, «a discovery of what it is that skepticism would deny». His perfectionism involves

finding out where you already are. So, it's not kind of aspirational in that familiar achievement-oriented way. And the eventual ordinary is one way in which he tries to explain this. It is possible to get too caught up with the societal norms and expectations therefore restricting self-reflective practice and leaving one satisfied with the status quo. The striving for perfection ceases, and one version of the self stands in the way of the next-self.

Having said this, however, it is still important to note that photography/ status updates involve forms of «visual editing»; photographs isolate and focus our attention on fragments of things (Szarkowski, 1976). They are extracted from a visual field, acting as a kind of «excision in space… This 'cut' extracts a portion of space, while suggesting there it is a fragment of a much larger field of view» (Edwards, 2006, p. 105). However, it remains the case that the meaning is not hidden beneath the image, or that one needs to dig past the surface on order to establish what is really being said, but one ought to bear in mind that one cannot escape the importance of the frame that excludes certain elements and includes others. The frame is important as it often imposes aesthetic order on chaos only allowing us to see what «takes shape in the photograph» (Edwards, 2006, p. 105). Photographer, Garry Winnogrand, is reported to have said «I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed» (Strecker, 2013), suggesting that only by looking at the photographs of the world would he be able to think about what he is looking at, and therefore what the world is. Although Winnogrand would often argue that photographs were purely literal and descriptive, once in a while he would indicate that he also believed them to be symbolic. He has been described as a «poet of American life (…) seeking to capture 'who we are and how we feel' (Rubenstein, 2013) even though his insistence that «the true business of photography was to capture a bit of reality» (Strecker, 2013). The suggestion here is that photography is a really intuitive way to create a reflective distance or space within which to think about one's place in the world / in relation to the world. It appears that towards the end of his life taking pictures became a kind of mania, with him leaving behind 6,500 rolls of unprocessed film. The process of taking the photograph was what was important to him, and what enabled him to consider the world, rather than the outcome. It is possible to argue that much of that attitude is reflected in the way that people take and post photographs today. The idea that the image is less important than the act of taking the image is showing up increasingly in the ways people are choosing to use photographic content online. It seems that some of the pictures people post on social media take on meaning not for their content but for the way they are turned into content and responded to. Some of these pictures show nothing but a partial face or knee (see fig.1), they are deliberately disposable, being used on an app in

which all the content is ephemeral. The aim is to get people to respond to the act of contact, not the image itself. This unites the way in which a photograph can be an act of visual speaking as well as visual editing. They can be described as a form phatic communication.

FIGURE 1
Images taken for Snapchat[4]
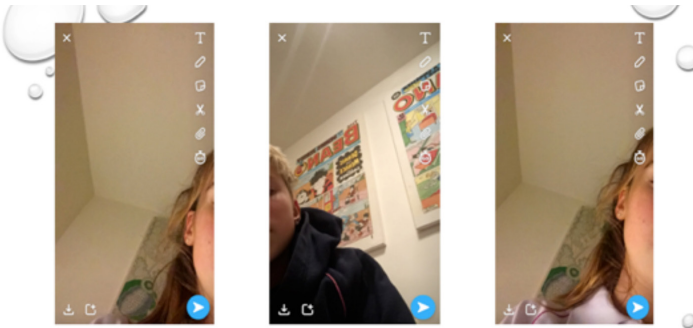
Photography and film (both of which are now evident in a more ordinary and everyday way within the context of social media) are both art forms that powerfully evoke experience. Vloggers, Youtube films and social media posts all invite the viewer to share in the experiences, participate in the action, identify with the characters and identify with their own situation. They can have a relevance but also, simultaneously the viewer can be left with a sensation of emptiness and / or alienation. For some these snaps are evoking experience that hangs on a vacancy and emptiness, which is filled by Snapping and responding. This emptiness and alienation is reminiscent of that described in Nausea (Sartre, 1964) in which Roquentin constantly repeats «I exist» but eventually comes to the conclusion that existence is a deflection. On social media there is a similar constant repetition of «I exist» by those who post. Parallels with social media sites can also be seen in the way that Roquentin suggests that people emphasise their past as a way of taking a «vacation from their existence» as well as telling stories so as to put time into a recognisable and linear order, «trying to catch time by the tail». His realization that existence is contingent and there is no necessary reason for anything to exist leads to a sense of nothingness and ultimately his nausea. However, it was this sensation of alienation and emptiness of *being* that led to a positive turn. It was this that inspired action

4.   Permission granted to use these images 22/01/2020.

and reliance on artistic creation to understand oneself becomes Roquentin's ultimate cure to his Nausea. Rather than giving into despair, the inspirational music he hears on a jazz record convinces him to confront the bare existence of things and that is how through despair, true optimism begins. A part of the significance of the jazz he hears is that this is a form of art, which is a kind of sense-making, a making sense of the world, or making meaning out of the world. Linking this back to the use of snapchat, etc., is that so much of it is non-functional in any obvious sense, not that it is futile, but that it operates in a sphere beyond the functional, as art does.

4. SELF CURATION

The phrase 'Curation of self' emphasizes the importance of the capacity to display a particular kind of self, be that the Past Self, Best Self or Next Self; It suggests a way one can «take charge of or organize, to pull together, sift through, select for presentation (…) and *to preserve*» (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013). 'Curation' implies that different aesthetic objects are put together deliberately to create a cohesive story and in a social media setting it serves the function of throwing 'spotlight' on the self one might want to present. It frames a collection in order that it be considered a unified whole. Simply posting a picture on Facebook, or a collection on Instagram, may not count as curation in the sense that is normally associated with galleries and museums, but, in the same way as curation can be described as an organizational tool (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013), adding value to the content posted by the way in which it is co-presented with other content, it can be argued that when by deliberately appropriating aesthetic forms, such as photographs, meme's, or selfies, people are constructing a story and looking to present who they are in a particular way. The different social media platforms serve different purposes and have different audiences, for example, on Facebook an individual seeks to tell an edited highlights version of their current life while Pinterest collections tend to be highly curated, and more aesthetically-focused by comparison. Pinterest tends to be used to imagine and communicate aspirations, offering a window into how people would like to construct themselves. They look to curate collections in order to create a certain aesthetic, thereby suggesting themselves to be people who possess a certain taste or style. Because these objects are virtual, rather than real, and placed in an aesthetic collection, it means they are used, as objects to communicate something of the self, not as objects in themselves. Together, the overall impression brings some form of self-story, and is a way of expressing one's social being. The clothes individuals choose, the music they listen to, even the food they eat, all seeks to answer the question «Who am I?» both for the individual, as well as for the others who see them. Wearing a certain style of jeans or owning headphones that are

also owned by thousands of other people does not detract from an individual's original identity, because by appropriating them they are investing them with their own meanings. Unlike Benjamin (Benjamin, 1936), who views reproduction as a negation of authenticity, Miller ((Miller, 2016) argues that the mass production of consumer goods can expand the possibility for self-creation as it gives access to an array of goods which can be combined in an almost endless way to express unique identities. The result is creativity, not homogenization. The curation of self content as a reflective process gains most value when it is shared, be that to a wide audience or just one friend. This externalization acts as a mirror, confronting the viewer with a reflection. In much the same way as Sartre referred to culture as a product of man, social media can be seen to serve the same purpose: «he projects himself through it and recognizes himself in it; this critical mirror alone shows him his image» (Sartre, 1964b, p.157). The reflection itself does not comment or seek to find hidden meaning but shows up the image of what it is to 'be' that individual in a new way — reframed and viewed as if through an other's eyes.

Curation is a concept that has acquired a new prominence in various aspects of life, well beyond art-galleries. The word comes from the lating *cura*, which means care. «Care» is a multifaceted term in English, involving the different senses of «care about» and «care for», etc. In Plato there is the idea of *epimeleia heautou*, which is usually translated as «care of the self», and to which Foucault gives a great amount of attention, tracing how far this was a preoccupation in the ancient world. Now «care of the self» can sound like the sort of thing which would probably be quite self-focused, perhaps narcissistic, perhaps self-indulgent. But in the ancient world it had a sense that was closer to this: you had better care for yourself because, you are responsible for what you do; your actions will have consequences; what you make of your life will matter; and you had better not mess it up. Now the accent here is on responsibility, and it is not egocentric. You are a being with others, inescapably having moral and political responsibility. What are you going to do to live up to these demands? So, this might give a sense of curating that is different from the rather manicured sense that can otherwise come through and it is this that is useful when considering the relationship between Past Self, Best Self and Next Self.

5. CONSTRUAL MOVING TO SELF CONSTRUCTION: BEST SELF- NEXT SELF

When negotiating images and posts there is an important difference between Construal of self and Construction of (next) self (Sayer, 2000) «Discourse may construe aspects of the non-discoursal in particular ways, but what constructive effects such construal's have depends on various non-discoursal as well as discoursal conditions» (Hartwig, 2007, p. 90). How one's identity is construed online can have a causal

effect upon one's identity construction, thereby impacting upon the construal of future versions of 'me'. There is a sense in which the relationship between our facticity (current self) and the transcendence (next/best self) that can be apparent on social media comes into play. «I am (construed to be) what I am 'not yet'» echoes the Emersonian Best Self Next Self. By framing pictures of themselves it is possible that users of social media are trying to capture something they fear is missing and therefore reframing it. It enables each person to see the other with fresh eyes in that moment. Perhaps, for example, they need to present an image of themselves baking in order to construe themselves as a good parent, which in turn means that they can then construct themselves into being a good parent.

I came across the post in an article that reported a movement that had been inadvertently started in July 2018 by Tracy Clayton, host of the Buzzfeed podcast (Fessler, 2018). She had shared the reality behind her picture from the previous year, and tweeted the following;

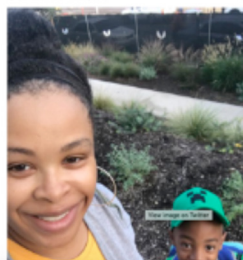People had replied with pictures of their own adding the 'real stories' behind them. All of these stories were far more vulnerable than the images appeared. For example;

«Just a day or two removed from losing my husband last November. I took this selfie of our son and I walking to school trying to proceed with our 'normal' routine»

When these pictures were initially posted, there was no indication that there was anything wrong. It appears these people felt the need to be construed, by themselves as much as others, as coping or doing well. This then played a role in facilitating their personal construction of themselves into someone that can cope. Their existence precedes their essence. «Just as Frida Kahlo painted self- portraits, our selfies construct a small part of who we are» (Fang, 2019).

This relationship between existence and essence is highlighted by Sartre:

> They viewed themselves through future eyes (…) The dead man stands halfway between being and worth, between the crude fact and its reconstruction: his history becomes a kind of circular essence which is summed up in each of his moments. (…) (Sartre, 1964b, pp. 127-128).

The move from their current facticity towards their transcendent next self is imagined and moved towards in the sharing of the picture. Sartre, in a similar passage, exploring this dynamic of moving between facticity and transcendence, refers to a waiter acting a role. The waiter's social environment becomes a stage on which various performances interact with an audience. Although these roles are artificially adopted and overplayed in many ways by the waiter, it is possible to view them as a part him that forms a part of his identity. It could be argued that initially the waiter (and by comparison the posts) were in some way scaffolding a life (as opposed to a lie — albeit one that did not reflect a holistic reality of existence), reaching out to a version of themselves they needed to *be* in that moment whilst simultaneously needing to *be perceived* as such by their imagined audience as a validation of their performance.

Although those who posted the updates were able to reflect on the difficult points in their life, for the most part they were able to do so because they had incorporated this into their sense of who they were. By suggesting that the true self is a version of what you display, rather than something that is completely hidden away, it will be found in the world through, as Wittgenstein and Cavell suggest, bringing to the fore the average and the everydayness of existence. The true self was to be seen in the original picture, the one that survived the time of hardship. By choosing to repost pictures those individuals were able to reflect on those times as difficult, but that had ultimately come through them and were living some, if not all, of the life they had attempted to portray. In the picture of the mother walking her son to school the ordinary and everyday had been reframed for her in every way. It is interesting to see that she chose to post a picture which framed the ordinary that had been hers from 'before'. The activity of posting took on a deeper significance, perhaps with the idea that she needed a 'normal' in that moment, but also was looking to a future-self who would be able to look back at this picture; a self for

which 'normal' would have returned, albeit changed forever. A sense in which she needed to have a semblance of ordinary to hold on to (or even just behave within) whilst she got through the extra-ordinary. In a different way to Sartre's waiter, she was not living in bad faith, constrained by the role, but used the role as a stepping-stone to freedom and self-knowledge. It is possible to argue that the way in which she had conceived of her role became second nature and ultimately an integral part of her personality. The picture then was reframed for her again when she reposted it a year later; looking back at herself in that moment, knowing she had survived. There is also a sense in which at the time of posting she may also have been looking to her future self for affirmation and a connection with that moment in which she would 'look back'. Cavell's development of the 'best self' and 'next self' feels relevant here. Rather than striving to be the 'best self' considering the «next self» fosters a healthy skepticism of our current selves. «The worst thing we could do is rely on ourselves as we stand (…) We must become averse to this conformity, which means convert from it, … as if we are to be born (again)» (Cavell, 2003, p. 105). The self we are born into is not in any sense our best self; it is by no means final; it is only our «next self».

Although photography is often referred to as a way of making time stand still, it is perhaps worth considering that noticeably in the context of social media this is not really the case. Images have the potential to be posted and reposted in perpetuity, each having a different meaning or possible interpretation and different framing. For many this sense is embedded at the point they are first posted. The photograph of the lady walking her son to school for example, may be viewed in a way in which the mother was potentially trying on all the kinds of woman she was now supposed to be following a seismic event in her life. She was looking at her next self from the perspective of her present self. However, the next self was very much tied up in the facticity of her existence at that moment and her next self could not / would not come into being without being framed by the events of the previous day, that of her husband's death. It was cutting a portion of space in which she later might be perceive as an act of reclaiming herself. Photography itself makes the past present the whole time, reminding one of the circumstances in which it was taken as well as what it shows. It refers to that which is outside of the frame as much as what is visible in the image.

Considering the conventions of acting evident within the photographic examples above, is a way in which to view the relationship those conventions have with regards to our everyday lives. It is an occasion to reflect on the relationship between theatricality and subjectivity itself. In the pictures originally posted the individuals were playing a role, in which they conformed to, or imitated, the conventions of 'a

social media posting'. When they re-posted they shed light on these with the aim of overcoming them and this was incredibly powerful for a short period of time. But, as with much else on the internet, the phenomenon itself (of reposting with a more 'real' explanation) went on to become a genre thereby developing its own set of conventions which, to complete the cycle, people went on to imitate, ultimately becoming 'memes'. It is a *'like life'* that is being lived. However, it is important to hold in mind that Knowing Thyself' is an ongoing process, so although certain memes sprung up from the meaningful learning process of some, that does not mean that others will be excluded from a similar experience of self-reflection.

6. CONCLUSION

I have argued that posting, reposting, framing and reframing the average every-dayness of existence on social media can be incredibly powerful tool on the path towards a place in which one may 'Know Thyself'. It was also noted that social media, and the practice of posting digital images in particular, is such a powerful feature of the lives of young people that educational institutions cannot afford to ignore this. However, education is something that extends well beyond schooling and into experience / life more generally. It profoundly affects the way young people can *be* and the way the world comes to light for them.

It was demonstrated that users of social media are beginning to approach the various and numerous platforms available in order to reframe themselves in multiple, and often simultaneous, ways. Sometimes in a diaristic fashion, and other times for the benefit of being seen by others. By showing that the posting of photographs can be seen as a form of development of self, it was argued that self-expression can be said to open the way for self-reflection. In many ways the images that are posted are a literal reflection of self, like holding up a mirror, but then opening up a space for people to reflect upon what it is to *be* through their reflection on what it is to present *being*.

Social media is increasingly foregrounding the ordinary, reframing what often passes by unnoticed. It has seen a shift in concern from representation (the way things are represented) to extension (the extension of the world through the replica-tion and proliferation of images). People are, in many ways, more mindful of their existence, paying closer attention to events and people in their lives albeit in order to post. Reframing the everyday allows people to announce its significance and, rather than looking for deep, underlying meaning in these posts, it is important to see what is there. It is also these encounters with the reframed-ordinary-self that leads people to a place in which they are able to notice themselves in new ways. However, this in turn leads to individuals being able to view themselves as if by

an other and re-framed, presenting aspects of themselves, to themselves. They are able to see things that may previously gone unnoticed. Therefore, it is my contention that individuals come to know themselves a little more deeply as they move through a process of self expression, self curation, self construal to self construction.

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