

Spring 2022

Decentered, Together, Alone: Thinking the Virtual World with Heidegger's Being and Time

Margaux Juliette Suinat
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022



Part of the [Comparative Philosophy Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Metaphysics Commons](#), [Philosophy of Language Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Suinat, Margaux Juliette, "Decentered, Together, Alone: Thinking the Virtual World with Heidegger's Being and Time" (2022). *Senior Projects Spring 2022*. 214.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022/214

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2022 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

DECENTERED, TOGETHER, ALONE:
Thinking the Virtual World with Heidegger's Being and Time

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Margaux Juliette Suinat

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2022

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Ruth Zisman, my wonderful advisor for guiding me through the woods of this project. Daniel Berthold, for showing me that my questions forever rest upon movable ground. Kathryn Tabb, for affirming my philosophical tools my sophomore year. Jim Keller, for fostering a space for me as a tutor to take hold of the rhythm of thought.

Thank you to my parents, Susan and Olivier, for your immense love and support throughout my passions and academic career, for letting me take the reins and learn the power of my own conviction. To my sister, Anna, thank you for your patience and reconciliation.

To Mike DeMicco, my guitar instructor, the only person who can tell me to relax, thank you for leading me to the oasis.

Zara and Sophia, my housemates, my home. From dancing on the roof of the bakery, to laughing in the living room, together we breathe into life. And Samantha, Lena and Elias, you made my last year at Bard the richness that it was.

Elisabeth and Amber, thank you for putting no end to our hours of conversation, thank you for showing me that there is always a place to go.

Thank you to Luciana, for demonstrating how to live in what you do.

And thank you to Tracy Colony, for clearing the path into your Heideggerian cloud that one autumn in Berlin.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: Public Private, Private Public	1
CHAPTER 1: “Das Man” as the Internet	7
The multifaceted everyday	7
Reconstructing “idle talk,” “curiosity” and “ambiguity”	10
The flux of public discourse	13
Postmodern: bringing the public close	16
The focus of “falling”	19
“The self is constructed by language”	21
CHAPTER 2: “Being-there” and Never at Home	28
“Being-with” others, alone	28
Virtual reconciliation: public-self versus authentic-self	31
“Being-with,” maximized: psychologizing the object	33
We use the world to show ourselves we are real	37
The uncanny: A world without “worldhood”	40
The constructive absurd	44
CONCLUSION: To what do we owe each other?	48
WORKS CITED	51

INTRODUCTION

“Dasein finds itself proximally in what it does, uses, expects, avoids—in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with which it is proximally concerned”
(Being and Time 155).

Public Private, Private Public

The regular, the mundane, the comfort, the routine—are all comprised of normalized choices that constitute an individual’s *everyday*. These decisions are fueled by fundamental concerns that uniquely shape one’s identity. Thinking of the self in terms of what characterizes one’s individuality, it is a common inclination to imagine oneself in *private*. It may be in the confines of one’s bedroom, for example, doing perhaps nothing at all. Or one might imagine one’s character through passion like playing music, a practice that allows one to enter a meditative state and momentarily detach from the ‘world’¹. While one’s daily choices become more habitual with time, there exist the moments of uncanniness, where the rediscovery of the world becomes an extraordinary event. Suddenly, this recognition of one’s quotidian structure momentarily takes one outside of the rhythm of the everyday. Everything becomes oddly distinguishable; it is oneself versus ‘the public’, you versus ‘the rest of the world.’ Upon examination of one’s own position in relation to this dual portrait of the private and public, one begins to gain a spatial, more clarified awareness of one’s existence within the world. The recognition of how we, individually, are situated among these contexts allows us to separate

¹ I distinguish the ‘world’ from the physical world to indicate the everyday world that the individual, over time, conceptualizes as *the world that they know*.

ourselves and gain a sense of our interiority—what is behind the creation of ourselves that we uphold.

In his seminal work, Being and Time, Martin Heidegger goes beyond this narrative of solitude when exploring the processes that lead us to uncover our authentic self. He emphasizes the crucial framework of one's environment, and how the physical boundaries of the world are what fundamentally allow one to cognize one's own existence. Through the concept of *Being-in-the-world*, Heidegger indicates the inevitable condition of interacting with one's environment in pursuit of one's actions. This begs the constant reflection of how one's surroundings influence one's embodied state of being and eventual progression of the notion of the self. Thus, contrary to initial inclination, Heidegger discerns the public as the starting point, the primary state of being, that informs the phenomenon of one's private life in a reactionary way. His illustration of the self in relation to the public recognizes one's perceptual methods of simplification while navigating the everyday. Our routine allows us to cultivate ourselves among like-minded individuals at work, as well as challenge ourselves in a healthy way with the ideas of others' expectations in mind. In doing so, we may read the news, engage in hobbies and interests inspired by those around us, or take up activities that bring us to a new place of like-minded individuals.

The self is algorithmically cultivated by the choices we make in relation to the public and our perception of the public evolves along with it. As Heidegger theorizes the infrastructure of the self, it becomes clear how the everyday in its regularity can lead to a generalized conception of society. This entrapping view distorts conclusions one might make about the world and stifles one's multidimensionality, as one is faced with a formulaic set of ideals at hand. Heidegger emphasizes the dangers of these generalities as he continues to address the public in a singular

manner. At the same time, his conclusions show how the individual's conception of the public is specific to their embodied experience. Therefore, as the self gradually evolves, the pressing reality demonstrates that there is no *one*, stable public.

In today's contemporary society, the virtual world exposes this precise sentiment, that there is a web of communities in which we either participate or adjacently influence. The possibility to visualize one's participation in multiple communities at once in this regard, exposes the illusory conception of *one public*. Digitalization transcends our physical boundaries as it presents us with opportunities for radical simultaneity—be it through interaction on social media while donating to a humanitarian relief fund in another browser window, or lying horizontally in bed to catch a moment of rest as a Zoom lecture drones on in the background. In the virtual world, connectivity enables one to be active in many areas at once. Now one can act in public from the quietness of one's kitchen, while physically in a private space, without interference of the 'outside world'. It has become a household norm to go to work from home. Worlds blur as time passes throughout the day and there is that moment of strangeness where one turns to oneself, away from the screen and realizes that while one may have had a productive day on the desktop, physically, one did not move an inch. Yet, the day was filled with dynamic thought and correspondence.

The ubiquity of the digital world expands the reality of Being into a medium that transforms the perceptual infrastructure of our daily lives. The virtual realm prompts us to revisit Heidegger's task of understanding the meaning of Being as the internet obscures the edges of the private and public spheres. Heidegger's phenomenological method of approach is grounded upon the most honest observation of our empirical characteristics of being. He examines the way in which one is present in the world—the subtle ways in which one conducts oneself—to arrive at

his conclusions about how the human being operates. *Being and Time* chronicles his excavation of the fundamental ontological structures of human *Being*. For Heidegger, the meaning of the word, ‘Being’ remains in constant crystallization. He writes:

But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression, ‘Being’? Not at all. So first we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question. Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being. (19)

The task of understanding the meaning of “Being” can be viewed as a constant invitation that asks, *how* are we in the world? Going beyond ourselves, to a further source that dictates our presence, we find ourselves in the exterior. By identifying the mechanisms in one’s surroundings that influence our behavior, we come to decode the relation between our interior and exterior Being. However, as the exterior now consists of the abstract, highly penetrable virtual world, notions of interior and exterior grow more complex. As the virtual world blurs the lines between the private and the public realms, it complicates Heidegger’s once stable definition of Being—there, as the plurality of virtual worlds allows the individual to be in multiple ways at the same time. In this sense, the virtual realm preserves the self; it perpetuates the self in its multidimensionality, as it allows the individual to occupy their *multiple* public worlds from a personalized lens.

Heidegger’s ideas of the public and how we are primordially as we interact with the world provide the vocabulary to begin deciphering the evolution of being in the age of digitalization. He terms the public as “das Man”, and treats it as the individual’s conception of what they believe the expectations of others to be. His structure of public discourse is broken down into a cycle of “idle talk,” “curiosity” and “ambiguity.” In Chapter 1: “Das Man” as the Internet, I borrow Heidegger’s concepts of the public and public discourse and put them into

dialogue with sociologist Sherry Turkle’s theorization of social networks, to illustrate how the multiplicity of public worlds to which one is exposed on a daily basis influences the individual to act in a decentralized, fragmented manner. The virtual allows one to curate specific ‘worlds’ that can address the intricacies of one’s personality. While it may feel like an intangible medium, the format of social networks asks us to present ourselves over and over again through tangible signs. Be it an image, a cultural reference, a poeticization of how one wishes to come across—the self is constructed by language.

I arrive at the tension of how the virtual realm can become a therapeutic tool in what strikes us as a context with no social consequence, as we act from the comfort of the private, feeling in closest control of our authentic selves. In Chapter 2: “Being-there” and Never at Home, I use Heidegger’s concepts of Being-there, Being-with, anxiety and the uncanny to approach the question of authenticity. If we can be in multiple ways and places at the same time, this begs us to address our *Da-sein*, that is, our *there-ness*. How we are there, and where we are, ultimately informs who we are. Examining this current everyday of multiplicity, alongside the process of uncovering one’s own authenticity, it is clear that conflicting desires can exist at the same time. It becomes a question of what we are choosing not to look at, as we commit to an action. We can act with precision, in an optimized private realm that enables us to revel in solitude and be among others as we please. But if the primordial nature of being is to look to the world to facilitate us with the tools to express ourselves, it would seem most natural to yearn for connection with others. In my conclusion, I hope to address the ethical end—to what do we owe each other? The extent to which connection serves us is most explicit through the pervasion of the virtual. Therefore, a world that invites the individual to be sensitive to entities beyond their

physical environment, urges us to consider what it means to take responsibility over our actions as we act from the private, together.

CHAPTER 1: “Das Man” as the Internet

The multifaceted everyday

The self begins in public. The individual makes sense of themselves via the language shared by the culture that surrounds them. Heidegger conceptualizes the reactionary behavior of the individual in this way by drawing a framework that illustrates the relationship between the self and one’s mental image of the public, a theory which he calls *das Man*². Das Man can be thought of as one’s impression of society that arises as one perceives other individuals in the system of one’s common environment. As we collectively form environmental associations with one another, universalities arise through our shared traits and characterize our community in return. Das Man is comprised of a collective of others, whom we encounter in our regular environment on a daily basis. An abstract approximation emerges through the commonalities one draws between others and oneself, that informs one’s expectations and what one perceives as ordinary. Heidegger writes, “In that with which we concern ourselves environmentally, the Others are encountered as what they are; they *are* what they do [sie *sind* das, was sie betreiben]” (163). Heidegger uses “Others” as a distinctive term to indicate one’s automatic objectification of other Beings in the everyday context. One characterizes another Being by their actions—their perceivable disposition—as our judgement is only equipped with such sensory mediums. Given that characterizes others based on one’s interpretation of their exteriority, their external output becomes what mainly dictates one’s perception and understanding.

² The English translation by Macquarrie and Robinson terms *das Man* as the “they,” while Hubert L. Dreyfus debates a more precise term of *the one* in his work, Being-in-the-world, A Commentary on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Division I. While the “they” emphasizes the generalizing and thus othering effect of the collective public as a notion, it also confuses, as one is technically also a part of the “they” as an individual. The one preserves this element of singularity that is accompanied by the simultaneous overwhelming feeling of generality. Dreyfus writes, “It is misleading to translate this term as “the They,” since this suggests that we are not part of *Das Man*” (xi). I will stay with *das Man* as much as possible, for consistency.

The routine of encountering others in a shared environment of interest builds upon an impression of human beings which is more aesthetically charged. Similarly, the experience of social networking on a screen leaves one with snapshots of the realities of “Others”, but in a more fragmented format, as it comes with the choice of shifting one’s focus from the physical to the online world. As “Others” become “what they do”, they construct themselves through their actions, and we perceive them as such as well. One must naturally deduce the intentions of “Others” externally, which in turn diminishes their subjectivity. This shows the significance of one’s own interpretation in the work of constructing one’s own expectations. Heidegger remarks:

In one’s concern with what one has taken hold of, whether with, for, or against, the Others, there is constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one’s Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relationship to them, or whether one’s Dasein already has some priority over them and sets out to keep them suppressed. (163-4)

Heidegger illustrates how community members use each other as aids of reference and become a collective sounding board of expectation. The community becomes a referential ground for potential possibilities of one’s own choices to make within the ‘world.’ Since one does not have access to another person’s interior being, this amplifies the practical roles of “Others” to create an impression of a more complete character that grows to feel less penetrable over time. As one forgets that it is impossible to perceive beyond “Others” actions, one fills this gap with a most logically interpreted hypothesis until, *das Man*—*the public*—grows to be an omnipresent figure that dictates one’s choices toward its ideal of success. This losing oneself in the desire to belong with one’s surroundings is dangerous for Heidegger, as it may seem one is surrendering to averageness by accepting a common language of the public. However, in cyberspace, the circumstances have evolved to a multi-faceted level as one can uphold one’s presence in several contexts simultaneously.

The boundaries of the everyday have expanded to reveal an individual's interests in ways that are no longer limited to the physical sphere. The Internet deconstructs the singular nature of the physical with significantly more convenient modes of multitasking. One must no longer commit to being in just one place at a time, doing just one thing at a time. The self is no longer a hierarchical system in this way, that prioritizes between its different roles. In her text, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet, Sherry Turkle examines the phenomenon of simulated life in the everyday. She writes:

[In] the daily practice of many computer users, windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system.³ The self is no longer simply playing different roles in different settings at different times, something that a person experiences when, for example, she wakes up as a lover, makes breakfast as a mother, and drives to work as a lawyer. The life practice of windows is that of a decentered self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time.⁴ (14)

Turkle's use of the windows metaphor captures the act of oscillating between worlds that can now exist in parallel. If one is able to access one's professional and social world on the same screen, this allows one to think in different demeanors at the same time. In this way, Turkle reminds us of the tranquilization Heidegger speaks of when he condemns how an individual must adapt and learn a publicly shared language in order to be comprehended by society, with the belief that this shared language will also provide one the tools to comprehend oneself.

In the context of the everyday, it is most commonly through speech that one discloses one's being; thus, one must be mindful of how language becomes the main medium through which phenomena of being are interpreted. As individuals express themselves publicly, Heidegger elucidates the tranquilizing cycle of *idle talk*, *curiosity* and *ambiguity* in *das Man*. This refers to how when there is common use of language by the public, it implies inherent

³ Author's underline

⁴ Author's underline

acceptance of universals—whether they are upheld by one’s own conception of *das Man* or publicly declared. This lets one move across topics quickly as ‘knowledge’ of their substance is shared. Therefore, one is less inclined to inquire further and examine its ground(lessness). One ‘understands’ passively and walks on with the illusion that there is something said.⁵ The flatness of idle talk creates a space for ‘curiosity’⁶, which, in the ‘world’ of *das Man*, is shown to be merely rapid association. With this feeling that one has a sense for many things—which, in reality, is inconclusive—one harps after this sensation of novelty as one continues to move with the fast-paced trends of the public. Ambiguity⁷ is a result of the vagueness of idle talk. It inspires a mode of being that is complacently detached, and therefore engages less with the world. Thus, in confusion as to whether or not a meaning is complete in its integrity, one resorts back to idle talk.

Reconstructing “idle talk,” “curiosity” and “ambiguity”

As one becomes absorbed in the process of committing to possibilities in the ‘world’ through utilizing the discourse *das Man* employs, the habitual portions of one’s daily life embed themselves deeper into one’s reflexes. They become less thought through; it becomes easier to

⁵ Heidegger stresses, how common use of language by *das Man* allows for acceptance of universals so as to preserve order. He says, “Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own. ... Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer” (213).

⁶ Heidegger distinguishes that the act of really *seeing* something involves active perception and engagement—to truly let ourselves encounter the world. Seeing is not just pure cognition, which is merely the ‘desire to see’. Yet, as idle talk induces a more unattached mode of being, we become more akin to ‘seeing’ in order to ‘have seen’, versus seeing to understand. The ‘reality’, that “The “they” prescribes one’s state-of-mind and determines how one ‘sees’” (213) grows ever more stubborn. As one harps after the sensation of novelty, “Curiosity, for which nothing is closed off, and idle talk, for which there is nothing that is not understood, provide themselves ... with the guarantee of a ‘life’ which, supposedly, is genuinely ‘lively’” (217).

⁷ Ambiguity, or *Zweideutigkeit* refers to confusion in the potentiality of meaning(s), which is created by the vagueness of idle talk. “Everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken of, genuinely spoken, though at bottom it is not; or else it does not look so, and yet at bottom it is” (217). With ambiguity, the beginning or end of meaning is cloudy, as *das Man* detaches us from authentic engagement and leads us toward the lens that prioritizes one’s choices in relation to what is shared by all. “This ambiguity is always tossing to curiosity that which it seeks; and it gives idle talk the semblance of having everything decided in it” (219).

lose track and harder to undo these ‘unthought’ portions of the day. The lover with the roles of a mother and a lawyer has the opportunity to diffuse this autopilot progression with the proximity of other worlds. If she decides she would like to work at home one day, she can superpose the language of her work life with that of her home environment. Public and personal—the virtual allows her to experiment with the proximal closeness of these parallel selves, to see where they depart and where they meet. The behavior of one self may also illuminate an area of ambiguity in another, which would therapeutically inform one’s *home* sense of being that ties these parallel versions of oneself together.

With the decentered self, one is able to play different roles at the same time. This may alleviate the previously constricting feeling one notices while ascribing to one world, as one enters into another. As one acts within different environmental formats that are in close proximity to each other, one can switch between different sets of vocabulary frequently and fluidly. Namely, the normality of constant flux ignites an awareness of the boundaries of each environment. This habit of transition inclines one to mentally deconstruct each ‘world’ more often, while also embracing the utility of their specificity in an authentic way.

This embrace affirms the presence of the ‘world’s’ structure as well as one’s sense of autonomy over its boundaries. By viewing one’s participation in society as a choice, one is thereby left with a sense of freedom as one absorbs oneself in a particular world. Heidegger writes, “This ‘absorption in...’ [Aufgehen bei...] has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of [das Man]⁸. Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its self and has fallen into the ‘world’” (220). One’s engagement with the ‘world’ can be taken as the act of turning away from one’s authentic self, as

⁸ Author’s modification

one commits to the structure of das Man. The ‘world’ distracts one from oneself as it seduces one to participate in its prescribed framework that is fueled by the discourse-based cycle of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. The individual *falls* into the language, and thereby the structure of das Man. However, in the virtual, the constricting effect is less inhibiting with the multiplicity of communities. Their proximity to one another allows for one’s immersion in one ‘world’ to be ever more brief. In this way, das Man, like the self, becomes less centralized and many. The layering of the parallel worlds in time inspires the complexity of one’s actions, as one can personalize the way in which one occupies each environment more concretely, and also be aware of the particularities of one’s behavior in another ‘world’. The self becomes a polyphonic combination of modes as the virtual places no end on one’s existence in its realms.

The windows suspended on the computer desktop screen, are a direct exposure to the reality that the notion of a common public is a constraint that originates from the limitations of one’s perspective. This decentralization of das Man is not meant to insinuate that one is able to escape one’s perspective through one’s constant presence in the virtual worlds, but that they influence the refinement and evolution of one’s frame of mind. It would be impossible to elude any notion of das Man *completely* as it comes with the territory of being and acting in the world. Heidegger stresses, that “[we] would also misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe it to the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves” (220). One must not read Heidegger’s apprehension about falling into the cycle of das Man as a negative implication, as it would be unrealistic to place a value on a natural tendency. Namely, participating in the world asks for an individual’s conception of their intention and potentialities; acting in the world consciously, without a perspective, is a hypothetical scenario, as in the

phenomenological sense, it would be equivalent to *acting without a body*, i.e. acting without sensation. If one wishes to interpret one's surroundings, the natural tendency would entail deducing a pattern, or coming away with some universal. Therefore, the idea of a sort of plausible, common expectation embeds itself in one's perception, even if it creates the illusion of a fuller picture.

The flux of public discourse

As we engage with the desktop, the virtual worlds become situated side by side and can be navigated mentally in a malleable way. With awareness of the framework of expectations of a community, one grows autonomous regarding one's commitment to the meaning of one's actions. There is always the refreshing prospect that another welcoming community is available to enter into. Given that being is no longer limited to a singular context, actions that may have had a larger threat to one's authenticity can be embraced more deeply with the knowledge of their boundaries. The idea of what comprises one's perspective is complicated through these simultaneous layers of worlds that fulfil different parts of one's being. Turkle conceptualizes cyberspace through older examples of virtual spaces termed as Multi-User Domains (MUDs). "MUDs are dramatic examples of how computer-mediated communication can serve as a place for the construction and reconstruction of identity" (14). As we construct ourselves online in terms of our output, we are able to observe on the screen, the progression of our expression as it catalyzes a particular response. The individual can trace more concretely how their presented identity shapes their public interaction. Like social networks today, members of MUDs essentially create an account and build a character of themselves, in which the software then enables users to "navigate [the space], converse and build" (11). One has agency over the textual description of one's own identity, which may be a poeticization, an aspiration or an emphasis of

a characteristic of oneself. As a composition of audio, graphic and textual output, the virtual realm asks one to read others and also express ourselves through such signs. It is up to those who we encounter to cognize a ‘full’ being beyond the chosen textual description of an account, and vice versa.

In seeing how the public responds to one’s demeanor in the digital context, it is easier to distance oneself and evaluate how one’s actions fulfil one’s intentions. With the means to be in more than one world side by side, one can handle one’s active disposition in each community with more autonomy. Namely, the routine of flux has one distance oneself from the public regularly, and in turn creates more frequent opportunities where one must momentarily dissociate from one’s actions. Such transitions are likely to induce moments of personal reflection regarding the satisfaction of one’s actions, as well as the honesty of the role one embodies in the community. In this way, the therapeutic effect of this life of flux is freeing in terms of the way it brings about introspection. In return, it can let one enjoy oneself more thoroughly as one engages with the world. Heidegger writes:

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as *they* shrink back; we find shocking what *they* find shocking. The “they”, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness. (164)

Das Man puts one’s authenticity into question as, when engaging with the ‘world’, it becomes less clear whether one strives in the way that “Others” presumably do or if one strives to uncover one’s unrepressed self. Heidegger magnifies the danger in believing in one’s conception of the public too strongly—that it can simplify one’s view of society over time and shrink one’s capacity to read beyond constructs. Das Man appears to distance oneself from authenticity, as the sounding board of the public blurs the lines between what one is used to and what one truly finds

enjoyable. It would seem that the fluidity of being in virtual worlds induces a more honest sense of self, or creates room for one to question one's being, if one were to use flux as a tool for maturation. But, as multidimensionality is normalized and the individual handles the different facets of their life in a more equalized manner, there are still reflexive elements in this movement as it becomes habitual.

When faced with the digital, one still ascribes to a particular way of being for a brief amount of time. Even if it feels less dominating, there is still a contrast from the feeling of the public self to the experience of the private self. In privacy, one creates one's own pace and is not obligated to report to others. In solitude, one can move beyond idle talk and make the language of the public "one's own" (Heidegger 213). This would entail cultivating one's personal connection to the meaning of the language that coincides with one's experiences. It would be more than simply fulfilling criteria, like going to work every day in order to pay rent, or taking a break for the sake of one's physical health. The case of authentic intention calls one to develop a purpose beyond the logical nature of these tasks, to find the source in oneself that feels enjoyment, lives with vigor, strives poetically. Throughout these moments of solitude, one may look to the public again, whether to scroll through feed or check an inbox and feel that the shared language has turned hollow or grown vapid. During the time in which one meditates 'alone', the 'worlds' still carry on and advance to something new. Heidegger affirms this difference in pace as he states, "But when Dasein goes in for something in the reticence of carrying it through or even of genuinely breaking down on it, its time is a different time and, as seen by the public, an essentially slower time than that of idle talk, which 'lives at a faster rate'" (218). To break down upon the meaning of words employed in idle talk would mean to examine the grounds of their intention, namely, to connect the dots in terms of how they perpetuate this particular way of

public life. Dasein refers to one's authentic being. Thus, in private, an individual would go about an action in the name of their unrepressed self, as opposed to looking toward what is expected simply of their public persona. This process would break the cycle of ambiguity, curiosity and idle talk, as the essence of the task—its personal meaning to the individual—would expand to a greater depth than that of public interpretation.

Postmodern: bringing the public close

Living in solitude welcomes awareness of the unique sensations of one's embodied experience that cannot be linguistically expressed. As the individual makes something *her own*, it becomes clear how the rhythm of public life caters toward what is *shared*. Idle talk does not thoroughly address the personal dimension, nor is it necessarily able to. The aim of shared language in this way is to permit functionality. In the name of personalization, while the virtual allows for one to occupy many more 'worlds' at once, this does not alter the experience of pure solitude. As one utilizes the language of the public to make sense of oneself, this process leaves one with a richness of interiority that one must then somehow constellate into language. The individual might also feel truly complete in her whole-hearted act of expressing herself. But the portion of the experience that is translated as external output is left for others to interpret and would thus rely on their perspectives. The mobility of the digital world has caused the picture of solitude to evolve; more often, complete solitude is less reachable as it has become easier to access others and stay productive when 'alone.' In effect, the advancement of public interest is even faster than before. Heidegger remarks:

Idle talk and curiosity take care in their ambiguity to ensure that what is genuinely and newly created is out of date as soon as it emerges before the public. Such a new creation can become free in its positive possibilities only if idle talk which covers it up has become ineffective, and if the 'common' interest has died away. (218)

The time one takes to create something out of authenticity automatically puts one in competition with the fast rhythm of public interest. In expressing oneself, one inevitably runs the risk of simplification, while there is also the adjacent factor of harnessing the interest of others. When pursuing interests in private, one has the autonomy to maintain one's own pace. Being alone creates the space for one to exert full focus on oneself and cultivate a relation to the world that is independent of others.

Yet, with the virtual worlds at one's fingertips, there is more room for experimentation to see how many of these key aspects of oneself can be reinvented online. As one lives at one's own rate in private, there are several phenomenological aspects at play. In a similar way, the digital world has become layered and densely connected in a way that is hard to capture in real time. Turkle's notion of the decentered self signifies how we can organize the everyday in a less hierarchical manner. The proximity of 'worlds' allows us to commit to more than one task at once, with the efficiency to complete both. We can multitask in a way that lets us finish a spreadsheet, stay up to date with events that may concern us, all while discovering new music through a curated radio. These operations at least maintain the appearance of the multidimensionality of being, even if one's focus is divided; they preserve one's potentiality of being. Turkle conceptualizes social networks as a tangible emulation of post structuralist philosophy and how they reflect the preoccupations of being in the everyday today:

MUDs are evocative objects for thinking about human identity and, more generally, about a set of ideas that have come to be known as "postmodernism." These ideas are difficult to define simply, but they are characterized by such terms as "decentered," "fluid," "nonlinear," and "opaque." They contrast with modernism, the classical world-view that has dominated Western thinking since the Enlightenment. The modernist view of reality is characterized by such terms as "linear," "logical," "hierarchical," and having depths that can be plumbed and understood. (17)

As operations in the everyday progress in a non-linear manner, parts of an individual's routine are more intelligible than others. Just as *das Man* perpetuates mechanisms in one's reflexes, the digitalized world does so in a contemporized way. The possibility of multidimensionality is aided by the Internet's quality of bringing dimensions close together. As it eliminates transition time, actions are condensed and more efficient. What may have been a phone call of approval in the past, can now be equivalent to a "thumbs up" sign, or something of the like—a system that only requires one click for the project to continue on its track of progression. While these actions may only have a temporal difference of minutes, this change requires less effort; a thought one would have previously had to compose into words, now translates to a click. Thus, technology permits us to think less as we grow accustomed to the mechanisms that enable this 'multidimensionality.' One could say this multidimensional outcome of being is a generous name for distraction.

The decentered quality of virtual worlds thereby creates an undertone of being that also feels less penetrable. As the beginning and end of one's presence in the world(s) becomes indefinite, these facets of oneself as parts of one's interior being feel more opaque. Turkle elaborates:

The new opaque interfaces—most specifically, the Macintosh iconic style of interface, which simulates the space of a desktop as well as communication through dialogue—represented more than a technical change. These new interfaces modeled a way of understanding that depended on getting to know a computer through interacting with it, as one might get to know a person or explore a town. (23)

This technological notion of opacity arises due to the fact that through interacting on social networks, we are faced with new infrastructures that suggest to us how to organize our lives. Consequently, such platforms that provide these systems of readily prescribed actions and responses alter how we perceive the meaning of the content we contribute, as a result. Creating

an account in a social sphere may have brought one joy in the beginning, but perhaps now feels like just another function of one's being in which one's presence 'must' be periodically actively maintained. A mother can create a public photo album for relatives to stay up to date with the development of her newborn child. Yet there is also the case through which the account may gain a following and turn into a public asset that brings the mother satisfaction and attention, reasons that account for the public value of sharing, versus commemoration of a child's rites of passage. The meaning of the account evolves, as does the mother's perception of its 'success.' Though it may originate out of love, an individual may present any extent of their 'private' life for the infrastructure of the Internet to alter how it is perceived in return. Thus, the digital world with its own limits of public interpretation is inconspicuous in its own nature, as it tempts one to participate in its worlds 'with ease.'

The focus of "falling"

Given that one fundamentally looks to the world to devise a path for one's being, the quest to find and identify with a community proves to be a natural inclination for an individual. And so, the cycle of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity comes hand in hand, as an inevitable rhythm into which one *falls*. The tension with Heidegger remains, that the pursuit of uncovering one's authentic self lies in the potential of radical individualization. The digital realm may provide us many worlds at our disposal, yet the limits of shared interpretation inherently obstruct the depth of a role one occupies, when one acts in contribution or in relation to a collective.

Heidegger arrives at the conclusion, that the authentic self and the everyday self are different.⁹

⁹ "The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen]. As they-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the "they", and must first find itself. This dispersal characterizes the 'subject' of that kind of Being which we know as concerned absorption in the world we encounter as closest to us. If Dasein is familiar with itself as they-self, this means at the same time that the "they" itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest. Dasein is for the sake of the "they" in an everyday manner, and the "they" itself Articulates the referential context of significance" (167).

One operates in relation to the ‘world’ it cares about, and the other sees beyond public conventions and seeks a deeper individual relationship to the earth. He writes:

Thus the particular Dasein in its everydayness is *disburdened* by [das Man]¹⁰. Not only that; by thus disburdening it of its Being, [das Man] accommodates Dasein [kommt...dem Dasein entgegen] if Dasein has any tendency to take things easily and make them easy. And because [das Man] constantly accommodates the particular Dasein by disburdening it of its Being, [das Man] retains and enhances its stubborn dominion. Everyone is the other, and no one is himself.¹¹ [Das Man], which supplies the answer to the question of the “*who*” of everyday Dasein, is the “*nobody*” to whom Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another [Untereinandersein]. (165-6)

As a person seeks community in the world, they create themselves under the terms of das Man. They consider the perspective they believe the outside world to hold and orient themselves toward the exterior. The goal for the individual is to work to distinguish themselves amongst others, which means to create or maintain an outward disposition that falls under the criteria of the ‘world’s’ convention, while staying unique and comparable at the same time, give or take. In doing so, one leaves oneself behind, in return for comfort. Placing ourselves in subjection to das Man, *disburdens*—it alleviates—us from the responsibility of our actions. It lets one place the premise of one’s intentions on *them*—the doings of the collective. Acting in the world, an individual focuses on engaging with what drives their surrounding environment to the point that they mask their authentic being from themselves. Idle talk leaves no room for the personalization that occurs in solitude. However, online and offline being blend into each other. A mother who captures her baby’s first steps is physically ‘there’ with her child, but then she is also among ‘others’, as she conceptualizes their experience of receiving the intimate photos she will soon share. She sees her private and her public at the same time. As the means to reach out to

¹⁰ All [das Man] are author’s modifications of quotation

¹¹ Author’s underline

communal spaces does not require one to be physically present, it becomes less distinguishable ‘where’ one’s being intrinsically is focused.

Essentially, the permeable nature of the virtual world provides it difficult to isolate an action and decipher in a linear manner, how a facet of oneself may have been manipulated through the act of expressing it online. Social networks enable one to express *immediately* from a private space. One takes a photograph or composes a text alone in a setting that can empower one to revel in the phenomenon of the experience. Then, to share the moment asks for the most minimal effort, a minor movement of the thumb to the ‘upload’ button, or something of the like. With that, what was devised from the interior is in the exterior in the blink of an eye. The immediacy of this transition accompanied by the invisibility of others in their physicality, opens up what might follow the process of online expression. One is not physically among others and can thus choose when to receive a reaction, if at all. A musician who performs a song onstage in front of a live audience can let the crowd influence the dynamics of their delivery, whereas uploading a video online permits specific commentary from viewers, where there can be particular thematic engagement and response. One could click to upload for the sake of public gain and then turn off one’s device to avoid social consequences and continue one’s life in private, according to one’s own expectations. An individual has both the choice of *when* to connect, that is, how often, and also *where* to engage on this ‘spectrum of proximity’ between their private and public life. They can choose how close to bring the digital world as they perform acts out of their own personal volition.

“The self is constructed by language”

Cyberspace presents to us a dimension for an individual to express themselves without the immediate notion of their body being attached to their digital image. This convenience

provides for the fantasy of ‘acting without a body’, and exhibits the phenomenon that in social networks, *the self is constructed by language*. Turkle theorizes the nature of how MUDs shape identity on the condition that one is not bound to the limitations of the physical. She writes:

As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction. One player says, “You are the character and you are not the character at the same time.” Another says, “You are who you pretend to be.” ... On MUDs, one’s body is represented by one’s own textual description, to the obese can be slender, the beautiful plain, the “nerdy” sophisticated. A New Yorker cartoon captures the potential for MUDs as laboratories for experimenting with one’s identity. In it, one dog, paw on a computer keyboard, explains to another, “On the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog. The anonymity of MUDs—one is known on the MUD only by the name of one’s character or characters—gives people the chance to express multiple and often unexplored aspects of the self, to play with their identity and try out new ones. MUDs make possible the creation of an identity so fluid and multiple that it strains the limits of the notion. Identity, after all, refers to the sameness between two qualities, in this case between a person and [their]¹² persona. But in MUDs, one can be many. (12)

The infrastructure of social networks allows the individual to choose an aspect of the self they wish to crystallize into their persona for a given moment. There are many factors at play—an individual can divide and organize themselves into digestible traits. They can emphasize those most desirable that best cater toward the goals of their presence in a particular ‘world’, and set aside other characteristics of themselves, more suitable for other ‘worlds’. This process of fragmentation, as one sits, ‘hidden’ behind the screen invites a game of creation and simulation. An individual can live on the internet by projecting themselves upon their most positive aspirations. At the same time, they can orient themselves in a another ‘world’ in a way that maximizes their public benefit. It seems most satisfying to build a character specialized in a particular quality and delve into its world. Online, one can accomplish this in several ways, simultaneously. Once an account is created, one’s presence is virtually immortalized.

¹² Author’s modification

With the specialized context a ‘world’ offers, one can truly embrace the way it functions as it can be used to fulfil a certain part of oneself. To consider a musical context of playing a live show: one can bask in the layers of the experience—the presence of the audience, the appearance of their reactions and support, all while losing oneself in one’s craft. By posting material online, one can carry through aspects of the embodied experience on different levels. Users can watch the video and absorb its content. Although they receive a different sonic experience which is dependent on their speakers and recording equipment, view counts and likes confirm a sense of their engagement, while comments invite clear expression of support and informational feedback in a precise way for the creator to absorb. Sensation, analysis, engagement—it seems these elements all appear in their own way when one wishes to be among others online. In the external world, acting online provides empirical proof of one’s engagement through such analytics. It seems, that through this specificity of fragmentation and an individual’s embrace thereof, one can radically *be* on the internet. However, the question remains, as Turkle emphasizes—how much of this potentiality of being is actualized versus merely further hypothesized through the means of the virtual?

The virtual provides for an atmosphere that welcomes many different possibilities for experimentation of identity. An individual can join communities and write themselves into a personality of more self-confidence than they feel they present in real life, which can help them hone in on parts of themselves they wish to change. Connecting with others in such communities that exhibit a distinct purpose or commonality among members can lead one to access and cultivate parts of oneself that may have otherwise remained buried. Then, if it is a less flexible circumstance of an individual’s life they wish to bypass, such as an injury or geographical location, they may live vicariously through simulation. The added layer of anonymity is an

opportunity that invites the possibility of new kinds of interaction for an individual, which can help them rediscover the ‘world’ and gain an evolved sense of themselves in turn. Heidegger articulates:

If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [eigens] and brings it close, if it discloses its authentic Being, then this discover of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (167)

The pursuit of a relationship to the world based on what uniquely individualizes oneself from the public asks for constant reflection upon the essence of one’s actions to ensure they go beyond mere public interpretation. It calls for the breaking down of idle talk in order to make a project one’s own. Heidegger’s theoretical distinction of individualized private life and contexts where one finds oneself among others, are spheres that are thus rendered incompatible with one another. Yet, with the possibility to bring the public world closer to the private world of the authentic self, an individual’s experience of expressing their authentic self in the everyday cannot be so clearly written off with multiple communities at one’s disposal. The claim, that “[everyone] is the other, and no one is himself” (165) is complicated in the they-world of das Man as the decentered self is not required to commit to a unified façade in one given moment. Uncovering one’s unrepressed self requires one to go beyond the public constructs around entities and discover the drive behind what pulls us to do what we love, which must be separate from simple public instruction. This is where one takes a hold of one’s responsibility toward one’s actions, as a human being.

As one establishes a unique relationship toward one’s tasks, the permeable nature of the digital world permits one to choose how proximally one wishes to allow the public into one’s private life. There is a way to tailor one’s public involvement around one’s personal relationship to daily routine. The infrastructure of social networks makes it that one is invited to fill in the

formatted blanks with the crux of what one wishes to put forward about oneself, which is then curated by the ‘world’ into an effortless performance of character. Even the name, *network*, suggests the implication of a wish to connect, thus, the empirical format of a post on a social platform is centered around aiding the content to attract attention. No matter how private the content one shares with the ‘world’, when infiltrated by the virtual, one automatically adapts, even if only in the slightest, to appear in accordance with the context. There may naturally be a loose set of expectations one believes the context to hold. Even if the intention of one’s expression is authentically grounded, the public interpretation of one’s profile cannot be extended to such depth of a singular phenomenological experience.

Having multiple communities at hand can allow one to specialize one’s actions. The fragmented way of being creates a noncommittal tone in the sense that the virtual lets one treat identity with a more transitory approach. We become our own authors, exercising the possibilities of ourselves through language. In a sense, this can become a reminder of the question of authenticity, as an individual becomes aware of the infinite possibilities to frame their expression. One can construct one’s output with deliberation, and be aware of the incompleteness of a phrase. Turkle articulates:

MUDs imply difference, multiplicity, heterogeneity and fragmentation. Such an experience of identity contradicts the Latin root of the word, *idem*, meaning “the same.” But this contradiction increasingly defines the conditions of our lives beyond the virtual world. MUDs thus become objects-to-think-with for thinking about postmodern selves. Indeed, the unfolding of all MUD action takes place in a resolutely postmodern context. There are parallel narratives in the different rooms of a MUD. The cultures of Tolkien, Gibson, and Madonna coexist and interact. Since MUDs are authored by their players, thousands of people in all, often hundreds at a time, are all logged on from different places; the solitary author is displaced and distributed. Traditional ideas about identity have been tied to a notion of authenticity that such virtual experiences actively subvert. When each player can create many characters and participate in many games, the self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit. (185)

Virtual spaces are essentially a means for us to play. We can play with the expectations of others, and hypothesize scenarios for ourselves. Playing is a fun and useful tool for exploration with room for failure. But the question seems to remain, whether control over one's online appearance does tempt one to act authentically, or merely take advantage of the lack of social consequence. The empirical appearance of one's output on the screen may influence one to formulate words with care, while on the other hand, the fact that one can create a catalogue of different posts to associate with oneself, may tempt one to act more instinctually, with a less inhibited attitude. This culture of flux can amplify the tension of an individual's inability to encompass their whole self, a reminder that their identity is always comprised of several *other* fragments.

Or it can induce the opposite, the sensation that a user has found the perfect channels for their authentic selves. Upon the ease of embracing and embedding the 'worlds' into daily life, over time, fragmentation that once felt vibrant, is glossed over and taken at face value. What may have been thought of as an open-ended, malleable persona can also be treated as an empirical page of the online catalogue that an individual deems as their 'personality'. As the fast-paced 'worlds' advance, a user finds distance between themselves and their simulated life. The question grows as to whether it is simulated or their own. They may experiment with the prospect of a malleable persona, yet be too tempted by the comfort of idle talk to seize it as an opportunity to evolve—to *penetrate it and make it their own*. Heidegger states, "By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone" (155). Whether an individual is able to admit their own responsibility toward themselves, lies in their ability to break down upon the shared discourse that perpetuates the networks in which they regularly act. Breaking this cycle would entail one to recognize the infinitude of the decentered self, and the insatiable expectations of one's publics, in

return. The digital world places its most captivating foot forward as it masquerades as the (un)attainable life of self-optimization. There will always be another 'world' to which users can turn. The virtual realm becomes a game of efficiency, a marathon of 'How much information can I encounter today?' The 'worlds' distract one into making room for more, rather than making something of the freed-up space. As memory dwindles, it is easier to confuse the sensation of one's monotonous desire for stimulation with that of true novelty. The fragmented self becomes a potent metaphor for the reality of the psyche, that conflicting desires can exist at the same time. But the potentiality of the disclosure of these authentic desires is dependent upon the actualized pursuit of life outside the boundaries of das Man.

CHAPTER 2: “Being-there” and Never at Home

“Being-with” others, alone

The ubiquity of the virtual world theoretically enables us to be among others as we (cannot) experience ourselves in solitude. The clarity of *das Man* as an impersonal entity is blurred, as the individual makes more room to connect with public worlds in the midst of their private life. Perhaps the habitual scrolling originates from an interest to look into the lives of others, but has turned into a fear of finding oneself, alone. As one dissects the sequence of photos or miscellaneous information they have decided to share, others appear so confidently as themselves. The individual eats dinner and comments as well, to affirm that they, too, are there as users in—and in need of—support. As a user creates their account, the online world provides one with the infrastructure of a space that is held open, reserved for one’s presence. One develops a continuity of existence across several spheres at once. Online and offline being grow intertwined and complicate Heidegger’s question of what it means to ‘be there’. He writes, “Dasein, man’s Being, is ‘defined’ ... as that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse” (47). In English, the approximate translation for Dasein is *Being-there*.¹³ As a construct, Dasein acts as a placeholder for the state of one’s being in the given moment. The ability to address the being who is there—through what one “does, uses, expects, avoids” (155)—raises the question of who Dasein is. The individual’s mood and environment inform their disposition; how they are there, and what surrounds them shapes who they are. *Who is there* when we are at home and at work and at dinner? What is being mediated,

¹³ Kaufmann adds in his translation of Heidegger’s essay, *The Quest for Being*, to the concept of Dasein in relation to ‘thrownness’—the state of existing as thrown into the ‘world’. In his notes, Kaufmann writes, “*Geworfenheit*. Literally “thrownness.” M. Corbin, in his French version of this essay, renders the term by *déréliction*. The underlying thought would appear to be that in Da-sein we are “thrown-there” and left derelict, like a thing cast up by the waves on the seashore” (381).

as individuals resort to meditation at work to find balance within themselves? The infrastructure of the digital world places the public very closely at hand, to the point where the propensity of moments for the individual to break away from *das Man* seem to decrease.

In periods where the individual turns the computer off in pursuit of solitude, they allow their interiority to come to the forefront of their actions. Namely, a person would hope to create a space for their volition to express itself without influence, or regardless of the watchful eyes of others. Heidegger's phenomenological approach toward being paints a picture in a way that affirms an individual's tactile navigation of the world before anything else. A person shapes the world they know as 'familiar' through establishing a relationship toward their immediate surroundings. Heidegger terms this state as a fundamental *mode* of being, called *Being-with*. Being-with indicates how we are inclined to interact with our surroundings by default, in order to make sense of them. He elucidates:

This understanding, like any understanding, is not an acquaintance derived from knowledge about [entities]¹⁴, but a primordially existential kind of Being, which, more than anything else, makes such knowledge and understanding possible. Knowing oneself [Sichkennen] is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially. (161)

One's essential tendency is to face outward, to be 'within-the-world.' Without an awareness that orients oneself in the world, one would be considered without agency. We build our 'world' through observation and induction; we see objects through the others who have placed them there and we associate others through the ways in which they interact with those objects.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Author's modification

¹⁵ Heidegger dissects the mechanics behind Dasein's interpretation of its environment and how it comes to be a 'world'. He writes, "In our 'description' of that environment which is closest to us—the work-world of the craftsman, for example, —the outcome was that along with the equipment to be found when one is at work [in *Arbeit*], those Others for whom the 'work' ["*Werk*"] is destined are 'encountered too'. If this is ready-to-hand then there lies in the kind of Being which belongs to it (that is, in its involvement) an essential assignment or reference to possible wearers, for instance, for whom it should be 'cut to the figure'. Similarly, when material is put to use, we encounter its producer or 'supplier' as someone who 'serves' well or badly. When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it', the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth. The

processes of association and inference are essential, as the mode of Being-with is crucial if we expect to distinguish ourselves from a context alongside other entities. *Being-with seeks to understand, thus it pushes the individual to situate herself within the world.* To develop an awareness of one's environment is a first step, but Heidegger asks us to consider what we may be choosing not to look at within ourselves, as we adopt roles in the social world. An individual can approach their Dasein by recognizing how the public informs their vocabulary and the extent of their will. Upon cognizing the mechanisms behind their reactions to particular entities, the individual may detect the traces of das Man around where their authenticity seems to hover.

When doing things in private, away from other beings, an individual feels they are at the liberty to arrange their environment in a way that allows them to express their interiority first. The state of Being-with can present itself as a utility to the individual, to understand themselves, for themselves, before they construct their relation to others.¹⁶ In the ideal private, the individual makes room for themselves to play, to reflect upon themselves through the objects with which the world has facilitated them. In doing so, they can explore how they possess particular objects, or vice versa, that is, a will toward one thing versus a feeling of obligation regarding another. Heidegger's definition of authenticity does not go about a direct statement of its meaning. It focuses rather upon the methodologies to help direct an individual toward uncovering the comportment of their own Dasein. Heidegger distinguishes:

The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen]. ... If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [eigens] and brings it close, if it discloses itself to its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the 'world' and the

boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a boat which is 'strange to us', it still is indicative of Others. The Others who are thus 'encountered' in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such 'Things' are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others—a world which is always mine too in advance" (153-4).

¹⁶ Heidegger remarks, "The expression 'Dasein', however, shows plainly that 'in the first instance' this entity is unrelated to Others, and that of course it can still be 'with' Others afterwards" (156).

disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (167)

Heidegger elucidates how the public “they-self” is defined by idle talk, and is therefore incompatible with the “authentic self”, which originates from an individual’s unique relationship to the earth. Shared language encapsulates a rudimentary lived experience. When a word is truly *used*, it is internalized and filled with sensation beyond public interpretation. Its manmade-ness transpires as it becomes a tool to signify one’s interiority, rather than a guide for direction. The authentic-self challenges the they-self to assume full accountability of one’s habits. Through understanding the nature in which one has taken hold of the world, a doer may attempt to disclose themselves as an individual in return.

Virtual reconciliation: public-self versus authentic-self

While Heidegger renders the authentic-self and the they-self as two incompatible ways of being, the virtual world permits a possibility to establish a tangible thread of reconciliation between the two. The ability to bring the public into a sphere in which one might appear vulnerable can illuminate how it serves one’s interest of coping every day. As one *takes hold* of the world, one opens oneself to an object; one lets the object be observed and learned from. Upon understanding the effect that the individual perceives the object to have upon themselves, the individual’s world is reshaped, as their honesty is revealed to themselves, as a result. Dasein brings the world close through its undoing of concepts. It demonstrates its will to authenticity through its treatment of objects without simplification. But given that in our default mode, we are Being-with, this signifies that an individual inherently places relations upon their surroundings if they wish to operate in the world. Therefore, it would be remiss to think that one could remain at a ‘ground zero’ level of seeing the world, ‘as it is, in itself.’ If authenticity

entails an acquisition of agency over how the world is shaped in relation to oneself, it is a process that must be revisited as one continues to evolve.

Thus, if authenticity is an active process of opening oneself to the potentiality of a world without conceptualization, which aids one in exchange, to see the forces within oneself that ignite the formation of particular relations, this raises a latent complication. It seems there is a fine line between the conclusions one may come to regarding one's tendencies, and the way in which this fixedly determines one to view the world. If authenticity is accomplished through the "clearing-away of concealments" (167), and Being-with is a primordial mode of being that asks for the building of relations, this task of removal of the mask requires a constant return. We arrange our environment in a way that it useful to us, in a way that lets us accomplish our aims in the everyday. Heidegger states, that "[Dasein] is always also absorbed in the world of its concern" (236-7). The 'world of one's concern' is the world one 'sees' as one utilizes one's surroundings at hand. One would have to be careful, when coming to know an object beyond its 'usage', not to write—and inadvertently block—it off as *understood*. The duality of authenticity and Being-with thus prompt a cyclical movement of deconstruction, observation and rebuilding within the individual. It would be negligent to consider this process of 'knowing' oneself as a means to an end.

The ubiquity of the digital realm enables a person to reside in what they can consider a solitary atmosphere that provides them the space and comfort to become familiar with themselves. Simultaneously, they may choose the degree to which they allow the external world to infiltrate their private space. The autonomy over the influence of the public world upon oneself theoretically allows for a careful construction of a world of concern. Furthermore, the possibility to occupy multiple 'worlds' would appear to foster the maturation of one's

perspective, as one may approach the world from more than one angle. The flexible boundaries of contact with virtual ‘worlds’ allow an individual to tailor their environments to fulfill the layers of their will. They have the means to become engrossed in their relationships with others in an uninterrupted manner, all while in the comfort of their own home. Such control over one’s navigation of the world can encourage one to be vulnerable with others in circumstances where one can experiment without any necessarily tangible social consequences. The virtual enables one to readily reposition oneself in relation to the ‘world’, as the self is iterated through language, rather than the physical body. In fact, as one navigates the digital in flux, it conditions one to build and rebuild many worlds of one’s concern. However, the immediacy of the digital raises the question of how the integrity of these ‘worlds’ persists, namely, if the interest of this repetitive rebuilding does not amount in an individual’s haste in the facticity of their communication.

“Being-with,” maximized: psychologizing the object

In these frequent moments of multitasking, Dasein is distributed, decentered and hovering around the individual’s actions. The worlds of one’s concern do not stop at a door. In the case of the digital, the depth of objects is expanded to contain more worlds than physically meet the eye; the physical frame of a cellphone is not definitive of the potentialities it contributes towards one’s being. A computer is more than a storage space of documents, it is a portal to share and connect with others, regardless of location. As we are taken by the doings of others on the screen, time passes as the windows behind the couch on which we sit turn dark. One proceeds to the next step of one’s routine, to play a daily podcast to wind down and wash the dishes. It seems one can tend to one’s necessities and be entertained at the same time; thoughts

are a lull in the background until one ingests a nightly dose of melatonin; a few milligrams to quiet one's thoughts completely, and combat the last hours of stimulation.

The fundamental orientation of Being-with is maximized in the everyday of the virtual world, as the decentralized public feels infinitely more immersive. It becomes clear, that being physically alone is no longer a limitation for an individual who seeks to connect with others. As they grow accustomed to interacting with the world through a cellular frame, Sherry Turkle recounts the evolution of humans' treatment of intelligent machines, noting that over time, we have developed forgiving attitudes towards their integration into our lives. She writes:

A dialectic can be seen at work in these developments, although it has no neat resolution. In the first stage of a computer's presence in everyday life, the seeming animation of the machine challenged the boundaries between persons and things. Then there was a romantic reaction to the notion of the almost-alive machine. People were granted a sacred space, a claim to human uniqueness. People were special because they had emotion because they were not programmed. Yet, even as the romantic reaction reestablished firm boundaries between people and machines, crucial earlier distinctions between people as psychological machines and nonpsychological were not reestablished. People and machines still ended up on opposite sides of a boundary, but psychological qualities that used to belong only to people were now accorded to machines as well. Both advanced artificial intelligence and the new, opaque personal computers of everyday life have pushed things in the same direction. ... A protective wall came down. People were taken to be what computers were not. But there was an uneasy truce at the border between the natural and the artificial. Often without realizing it, people were becoming accustomed to talking to technology, and sometimes in the most literal sense. (84-5)

As the individual abides by their own business in their comfortable home, they choose the company made possible by technology. Whether through a proclaimed wish to distract one from oneself, or to further one's tastes with the help of a curated playlist of new songs based on one's listening history, the virtual allows the quest for connection to continue. One might staunchly regard the computer as unemotional. But it invites its owner to fill it with unique information, and to experiment with the idiosyncratic possibilities of presenting themselves. It is natural to share in hopes of a response. The computer invites personal creation, and thereby opens a space

for sensitivity. Humans may bestow a sentimentality upon the contents they encounter through the digital, as the private provides a space for them to situate their interactive device into their personal life. Rather than deciphering the way a system functions behind its screen, the interface invites an individual to converse with it.¹⁷ By sharing, humans psychologize their device as they place expectations upon it that will fulfill their emotions.

The virtual can be used as a tool for getting to know oneself. It is an opportunity to test the integrity of the signs with which we choose to signify ourselves. With Turkle's concept of the self as decentered, it seems a user can acquire agency over the aspects of themselves which feel indistinct. They can take advantage of the capacity of the digital as it invites them to converse with it, and employ its necessity to concretize one's output as a means to capture the subtleties of a self. As one actively occupies the virtual world, it leaves one with a hyper awareness that is constructed by one's actions being concretely reflected in front of oneself by the medium. The exact format of a virtual world is displayed in front of the individual, as one inserts oneself into it; the nature of the medium permits one to lay out one's thoughts using tangible signs of image and text. For example, an individual may conduct a discourse with somebody through a text box, basing each response upon the chat history, versus talking with someone face to face, where words do not feel as set in stone. As a person looks back and questions what was allegedly on their mind *back then*, they can evaluate their past through the eyes of their present selves. As we catalogue aspects of ourselves in these worlds, we are left

¹⁷ The Macintosh computer upholds the model of the postmodernist lifestyle in that its composition sports a sleek interface and removes the question of parsing how it programmatically operates. Turkle expounds, "The desktop's interactive objects, its anthropomorphized dialogue boxes in which the computer "spoke" to its user—these developments all pointed to a new kind of experience in which people do not so much command machines as enter into conversations with them. People were encouraged to interact with technology in something resembling the way they interact with other people. We project complexity onto people; the Macintosh design encouraged the projection of complexity onto the machine. In relationships with people we often have to get things done without necessarily understanding what is going on within the other person; similarly, with the Macintosh we learned to negotiate rather than analyze" (35).

with what we have compiled, haphazardly fragmented digital models of ourselves staring back at us, ready to be reexplored, cultivated and reconfigured. It seems the endless options of how one can express oneself, next to the infinite memory of the digital sphere discloses a paradoxical, contradictory duality of human nature.

The everyday being of the solitary individual who wishes to remain virtually connected with others in real time, obscures the clarity that Heidegger draws between Dasein's authentic being and Dasein in the world of *das Man*. The virtual sphere leaves one simultaneously with a hyperawareness of oneself and a meticulous control over the presence of others, to which Heidegger's conviction that in *das Man*, "[everyone] is the other, and no one is himself" (165) grows less stable. He elaborates:

One's own Dasein, like the Dasein-with of Others, is encountered proximally and for the most part in terms of the with-world with which we are environmentally concerned. When Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern—that is, at the same time, in its Being-with towards Others—it is not itself.¹⁸ (163)

Heidegger distinguishes how in expressing oneself, the individual utilizes the world as a tool to signify the state of their Being-there-ness. In the 'world', discourse is centralized around external communications of operations among others, and the obligation toward one's intrinsic drives might be momentarily suspended. As Dasein is Being-with everyday, it face outward, so far as to act in accordance to what others would expect from watching it. One's *there-ness* is suppressed as the responsibility of one's actions is placed upon how urgently one perceives the doings of others. Heidegger implies that for Dasein to be "itself", it must operate beyond the shared expectations of the 'world' in which it is absorbed. But, the notion of Dasein's absorption in a singular world is complicated as the virtual sinks into one's everyday personal sphere. The beginning and end of public and private is not easily distinguishable, as an individual has many

¹⁸ Author's underline

options of how to engage, and what to share about themselves, from professional to personal matters. Thus, Dasein's absorption is decentralized in that one communicates with others in different spheres that are not defined by an immediate, collectively shared environment. The virtual asks to rethink the clarity of being for oneself versus being for others, as an individual may be absorbed in their environments to different degrees. As one decides to present a part of one's personal life on a social network, one can reside at home, and *be on the internet*.

We use the world to show ourselves we are real

To further consider what is entailed in Heidegger's notion of authenticity is difficult, as the situation of one's there-ness is obscured and heightened by the multiplicity of digital worlds. What does it mean to be oneself, as one constantly traverses contexts of varying subtleties? The individual's digital presence is achieved via their device, and their output is expressed through signs emitted from the screen. Where to 'locate' oneself, to harness one's disguises seems a task more convoluted than ever, simply also because to express oneself, the world is one's primary tool at hand. There would be no other option than to unveil oneself via another 'mask' within the world. An individual's presence within a virtual community embodies a fragmented structure, as what they do online is not always grounded upon a clear intention. One may enact momentary impulse and abandon it shortly afterwards. These quick signs and actions may be difficult to parse together as corresponding to a large, all-encompassing premise. The reality as to whether an action pertains to a short-term want or a long-term desire is easily tangled with the cloaking sensation of immediate gratification. However, one can also claim that the medium of the digital presents a new way to think about authenticity, as it records minute characteristics which can count toward bases for astute judgement of one's character.

Humans as users permit their machines to frame their psychological lives. Computers become sounding boards for quick questions, and “objects-to-think-with” (48)¹⁹ when conceptualizing information. Turkle defines this term by emphasizing the need for the presence of the computer in the thought processes it inspires. The customizable nature of software allows a user to reflect the complexities of their interiority in a concrete way, through their interactions with applications on the screen. It feels like a new mechanism through which they can see and evaluate themselves from a distance, while in an unthreatening private space. Turkle writes:

The computer can be similarly experienced as an object on the border between self and not-self. ... The machine can seem a second self, a metaphor first suggested to me by a thirteen-year-old girl who said, “When you program a computer there is a little piece of your mind, and now it’s a little piece of the computer’s mind. And now you can see it.” ... Computer holding power, once tied to the seductions of programming, today is tied to the seductions of the interface. (30-1)

We project ourselves onto our computers, which in many ways reflect our complexities back to us. This example of how the computer concretizes what may feel like a minor individual thought, shows how the manner of personalization is based on the unique ways of how one tends to think, the culture to which one has been exposed, and so on. The personalized image chosen for a home screen, affirms Being-with as a primordial way of being in the world.²⁰ Even in our ‘turning away’ from the ‘world’, we use the world to manifest our interiority, to show ourselves, we are real.

¹⁹ “...Macintosh-style computer interfaces have served as carriers for a way of knowing that depends on simulation and surface representation...” (Turkle 48).

²⁰ “Our minds, of course, are very different, one from the other, so it is not surprising that different people make the computer their own in their own way. People choose to personalize and customize their computers. And they have very different styles both of using computers and of interpreting their meaning. In this, the computer resembles the psychologist’s Rorschach test, whose inkblots suggest many shapes but commit themselves to none. It is up to individuals to make out what the legacy of personality, history, and culture causes them to see. Just as different people take up the computer in different ways, so do different cultures. Indeed, from the very beginning of its mass deployment, computer technology encouraged a variety of cultures in which a wide range of social, artistic, and political values found expression” (Turkle 31).

As an individual immerses themselves in the oasis of their personal surroundings, they look toward the digital as a further source of comfort. The computer adds a layer of responsivity for which an individual can rely less upon others. They can occupy themselves with their questions in an independent manner; instantaneous results leave them no moment to ponder. Yet, it remains unclear as to what end the individual searches for comfort—from the exposure to others, in front of which they must ‘play their role’ as prescribed by their environment, or the reminder that the experience of their interiority goes beyond any external interpretation. As the user psychologizes their device, it blends into their foreground of focus. As one becomes increasingly transfixed by one’s actions, one sees past the physical frame of the screen, which continues to dictate how one is physically in one’s environment, ‘alone.’ Heidegger elaborates:

Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein, even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. Even Dasein’s Being-alone is Being-with in the world. ... Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with; its very possibility is proof of this. On the other hand, factual Being-alone is not obviated by the occurrence of a second example of a human being ‘beside’ me or by ten such examples. Even if these and more are present-at-hand, Dasein can still be alone. So Being-with and the facticity of Being with one another are not based on the occurrence together of several ‘subjects’. (156-7)

“Being-alone” manifests itself in the way that an individual utilizes their empirical world at hand as they express their interiority to the external world (even to only themselves). One organizes the world to signify the result of one’s mental experience before one interacts with other beings at all. That is, the presence of others does not necessarily ask one to address them in light of their being-in-the-world too, as this has no bearing on one’s empirical access to the condition of someone else’s Dasein. Being-with entails an individual’s reaction to their surroundings, but does not determine their conclusions gleaned from their experience thereafter. One chooses to fully humanize one’s conception of another person based on how they show a fraction of themselves in the environment in which one encounters them. Thus, in the subtle instance that

technology asks us to interact with it, we can fine tune our private atmosphere to be more receptive to our wants and needs. Regardless if another user is present on the other end, one psychologizes the object into being a part of one's 'world', as a result.

The uncanny: A world without "worldhood"

The closeness of the public 'world' could prompt one to act in a more self-reflective manner in the public, whilst Being-alone. It would seem, this process of cultivating a deeper relationship toward one's interiority in an uninterrupted setting could lead to a potent sense of authenticity with the possibility of immediate action in a virtual 'world.' Heidegger expands upon the phenomenon of absorption:

The structure of the world's worldhood is such that Others are not proximally present-at-hand as free-floating subjects along with other Things, but show themselves in the world in their special environmental Being, and do so in terms of what is ready-to-hand in that world. (160)

The spatiality of a 'world' facilitates the particular tools which individuals arrange in order to express themselves. One employs *ready-to-hand* elements, which have an empirical quality, in such a way that exhibits what one wishes to express of one's interiority. In the same way, an individual interprets the interiority of others through the way they themselves stand around the mediums facilitated by the world. The sentiment, that "Others are encountered *environmentally*" (155), highlights the boundaries between others and oneself that are corroborated by environmental circumstance. These dictate the spatiality of a 'world' that is sensed as one encounters others.²¹

²¹ Dreyfus interprets what Heidegger means to say regarding an individual's capacity to relate to others to illuminate the intuitive but limited nature of Being-with. He states, "Others do not normally show up as minds, and we do not normally have beliefs about them. Heidegger must therefore account for how the problem of other minds can arise. His answer is that in special situations of breakdown we hold back, or disguise, our activities. Then, in effect, our relation to others becomes unavailable" (150).

There is also the plausible instance that a user is so immersed in participating in a virtual ‘world’, they forget to step back for a moment to make sense of the environment with which they are interacting. That is, until the physicality of their existence starts to call for their attention. As a college student participates in a lecture over Zoom, they encounter others in the ways they choose to present themselves on the screen. The composition of the group of singular faces builds this virtual ‘classroom’, stacked in an array, each with personalized backgrounds of an atmosphere they might consider comfortable. In this example it is the particular spatiality of the Zoom screen, that creates the circumstances that are crucial determinants to the nature of communication within that environment. The student feels calm, like they have their situation in control as they observe the apparent presence of everyone else on the screen. Yet, a natural occurrence of a stomach rumbling or the urge for a cigarette disrupts this entire structure of being in an instant. Upon the sensation of a physical urge, one suddenly checks one’s own camera in the ‘classroom’, to see if one’s demeanor has changed. The student glances at their peers for any signs of disconcertion they might be struggling to mask, but everything seems fine. Nevertheless, this moment where the body announces itself to the individual in such a supposedly subtle manner causes one to perceive the world, past the ‘world’ on the screen. The menial task of sitting still within a digital frame and focusing on what is being said in the given moment could not feel more strangely pronounced. One feels the reality, that others, like us, are “free-floating subjects” that exist *alongside* one another. The student psychologizes the appearance of others into a coherent conception of an environment, a “worldhood.” But then they remember that their peers, too, have only exposed a fraction of themselves within the frame of the ‘classroom.’

The there-ness of others is deconstructed as one comes to terms with the far reaching, psychological infrastructure of the virtual world. As it prompts the idea of acting without a body,

it suggests the possibility of an endless presence of Being-there. Yet, an inconceivability of being arises as one's attention drifts to crispness of the physical world. The there-ness of the other is made truly insecure in the moment where acting without a body feels like being nowhere. One questions the indeterminate tone of this state of mind, where the being of the self is not in sync with the being of the body. Heidegger characterizes such moments of absurdity as belonging to anxiety, which he deems as another mode of being. He writes, "Anxiety can arise in the most innocuous situations" (234). In anxiety, one experiences the world as a realm of the uncanny.

Heidegger illuminates the mechanisms behind an anxious Dasein:

As we have said earlier, a state-of-mind makes manifest 'how one is'. In anxiety one feels '*uncanny*'. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to the expression: the "nothing and nowhere". But here "uncanniness" also means "not-being-at-home" [das Nicht-zuhause-sein]. ... Being-in was defined as "residing alongside...", "Being-familiar with..." This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "they", which brings tranquilized self-assurance—"Being-at-home", with all its obviousness—into the average everydayness of Dasein. On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world'. Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized [by anxiety for its ownmost potentiality of]²² ... Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential mode of the "*not-at-home*".²³ (233)

Heidegger constructs anxiety as a fundamental state where one's being primordially discloses itself. Dasein makes itself vulnerable as it reveals its presence beyond the masks in the 'world' to which it clings. It takes responsibility a being beyond the roles it embodies externally, and makes clear that an individual's choice of how they live is their own. Such a moment of anxious realization can occur at any point. One can dwell upon the mundane until its monotonous aura dissolves, or be so intent to finish a task only for its absurdity to reveal itself at its most momentous stage. But where one decides to go in wake of these seconds begs one to revisit the

²² Author's modification

²³ Author's underline

question of reconciliation: Is there always such a clarity between ‘being for oneself’ and ‘being for others’ in the climate of the virtual world? It seems the separation between oneself, the screen, and the presence of the other complicates the potentiality to perceive the real.

The student in the ‘classroom’ notes the lines of the screen as boundaries of unmappable distance. In disbelief, they barely trust themselves to cognize their peers as others—to trust in their own intuition of environmental clues and signifiers. As anxiety reminds the individual of the fullness of their life alongside the fragments they disclose to others, the now rudimentary sounding assumptions posed about others fall away. Such constructs begin to feel utterly irrelevant. Anxiety prompts uncanniness as it pushes one to face one’s facticity of being in the world, that is, the inescapable conditions that allow one’s lived experience to function as one knows it. Heidegger explicates:

Anxiety is ... also *anxiety about* something. ... Indeed, the threat itself is indefinite.... That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The ‘world’ can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others. (232)

Heidegger distinguishes anxiety as different from fear. Fear derives from a concrete source that can be found within the ‘world’.²⁴ Anxiety looks past objects themselves, at the framework of how one perceives. In turn, objects reveal themselves outside of their conceptualization.²⁵ It may create a feeling of groundlessness for an individual, yet, in a sense anxiety turns the negative space of the mundane into a positive space, as it pushes one to see something not seen before. It

²⁴ “Dasein’s falling into the “they” and the ‘world’ of its concern is what we have called a ‘fleeing’ in the face of itself. But one is not necessarily fleeing whenever one shrinks back in the face of something or turns away from it. Shrinking back in the face of what fear discloses—in the face of something threatening—is founded upon fear Our interpretation of fear as a state-of-mind has shown that in each case that in the face of which we fear is a detrimental entity within-the-world which comes from some definite region but is close by and is bringing itself close, and yet might stay away” (230).

²⁵ “Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world. ... This does not signify, however, that in anxiety, the worldhood of the world gets conceptualized” (232).

exposes the individual to the way they *are*—the way they *exist*. It positions one to see oneself in terms of one's materials, and the world as such in return. One feels a sense of fundamental disorientation as the things that matter suddenly no longer do. Nevertheless, this anxiety produces a certain kind of lucidity in the individual at the same time, that discloses their potentiality for authentically being in the world. It becomes self-evident, that they are their own supplier of answers, as they please.

The constructive absurd

The student glances at themselves in the frame of their screen, next to the faces of all the others in the 'classroom.' They feel their instinct dissolve, as they try to imagine the logic of their next action. At the same time, the absurdity of the 'world' impels the individual to become intensely conscious of the directions they could take, while being simultaneously aware of the observations of others. Turkle recounts the metaphor of the Panopticon and the dissociating effect it induces upon those participating within the model. She describes:

The social philosopher Jeremy Bentham, best known for his espousal of utilitarianism, proposed a device called the Panopticon, which enabled a prison guard to see all prisoners without being seen. At any given moment, any one prisoner was perhaps being observed, perhaps not. Prisoners would have to assume they were being observed and would therefore behave according to the norms that the guard would impose, if watching²⁶. Individuals learn to look at themselves through the eyes of the prison guard. Foucault has pointed out that this same kind of self-surveillance has extended from the technologies of imprisonment to psychotherapy. We learn to see ourselves from a teacher's or a therapist's point of view, even in their absence²⁷. (247-8)

Turkle emphasizes in this metaphor, the culture of omnipresence the internet has normalized over the years. On an individual level, it enables one to feel seen, to surpass physical elements that feel burdensome. Life on the screen maintains a regularity of self-awareness as it keeps a record of one's actions. This can be a pragmatic tool for self-optimization, but it would be naïve

²⁶ Author's underline

²⁷ Author's underline

not to consider the halting effect the notion of mass observation presses upon an individual, in the scope of a communal environment. In the sphere among others, the monumental capacities of the digital can impose the opposite effect of freedom upon one's perception of oneself. Within a moment of pause, access reveals itself as a paralyzing excess²⁸, as the individual imagines an exponential horizon of interpretations in a rapid timeframe. In other words, one reflects oneself into standstill.

On the other hand, the closeness of the virtual realm catalyzes a collective sharing of personal content, in which the accessibility of others' lives leads one to flaunt one's own. It inspires one to experiment and find recognition among others by challenging one's originality. According to Heidegger, the rapid evolutions of public discourse in digital worlds call one back to what Heidegger would deem as inauthentic. Yet, the pace of production of information and visual multiplicity of worlds displayed on the screen push one into more frequent confrontation with the uncanny. The uncanny of the digital world conditions the individual to be sympathetic to others, as it thrusts them into the realization that one is wired to navigate the world based on external output. In Heidegger's frame of reference, the individual comprehends the worlds of others in regards to the context they are in, but one is pushed into doubt as anxiety brings upon the awareness of another individual's life beyond the fragment they encounter—beyond a person's mere output as a *user*.

The uncanny places a constructive quality upon the postmodern everyday rhythm that Turkle calls "taking things at interface value" (102).²⁹ While one might be so fascinated by the

²⁸ "From Foucault's perspective, the most important factor would not be how frequently the agents are used or censorship is enforced. Like the threat of a tax audit, what matters most is that people know that the possibility is always present" (248).

²⁹ "Taking things at interface value means that programs are treated as social actors we can do business with, provided that they work. In this way of seeing things, the question of whether people or programs are better suited to the job of psychotherapist merits empirical study rather than philosophical speculation" (104).

real life application computers have brought to understanding the structure of postmodern thought, one need not go so far as to treat this embrace in the dissolution of structure as a satisfactory end. As the interface seduces the individual with its personal inquisition and mobility, the shift in lifestyle gradually begins to show as people strengthen their productivity and aspire toward fast lives of unattainable self-optimization. Meanwhile, an immersive project that may have begun with a passionate motivation, possibly could have transformed into a partial mask, a mechanism to separate one from the realization of one's finitudes.

With the constant option to continue work at one's disposal, to occupy oneself with the online doings of others, one need not so often reflect. The individual may always resort to their ready-to-hand, personal device. Turkle affirms, "We know that today's computers are not sentient, yet we often treat them in ways that blur the boundary between things and people. ... There is a new nonchalance [toward the idea of a personal, emotional relationship with a technological device]³⁰" (102-3). As an attractive device is welcomed into everyday life, the computer, with its symbolism of success, initially minimizes the stigma of loneliness. However, users might at first confuse this with the hypothesis that loneliness can be overwritten.³¹ The mode of anxiety indicates otherwise, as it admits to Dasein its own tendency to resort to the 'world' in the face of oneself as a standalone being. Anxiety divulges one's activities, both mindless and fervent, as mechanisms that fulfil one's intrinsic drives. As the uncanny forces the individual to come to terms with their extrinsic methods of being in the world, they find themselves at a distance from the significance they have consciously built their habits to hold.

³⁰ Author's modification

³¹ "We are social beings who seek communication with others. We are lonely beings as well. Despite our fear of having our essential humanity reduced through comparison with a machine, we begin to relate to the computer whenever it appears to offer some company. When this happens, philosophical concerns are often swept aside." (102)

The individual sees the true purpose of these practices, that is a reaction to an inherent desire within themselves.

The space of anxiety which first feels desolate and grey is now rich with clarity. It drives one into seeing the depth of one's actions previously covered over by the think-less rhythm of postmodernism. Turkle states:

Frederic Jameson characterized postmodernism in terms of both a new "depthlessness" and a decline in the felt authenticity of emotion. With the word "depthlessness" he referred to the idea that there was nothing beyond simulation and surface. To refer to the decline of emotion's perceived authenticity he wrote of "a waning of affect." (103)

The fast pace of technology positions one to focus on the doings of things, rather than the premises of one's choices. This proves to be effective in terms of productivity. Yet, on the surface, one might dismiss technological actions as opaque and baseless, which may at times be sound. But anxiety divulges the contrary of this sentiment. One need not stop one's analysis at 'fragmentary' and abandon all trace of structural intention. Postmodernist perspective teaches humans to be more forgiving of each other, as it shows that one can commit actions that are incoherent and contradictory to one another. It embodies the nature of our desires that are multidimensional and many times illogical to practicality. Thus, there is a depth to acknowledge, that revolves around the many fragmentary actions of the self. The virtual provides the individual with tools to achieve an overwhelming self-awareness, where the resolution lies, rather, in how one chooses to treat this responsibility.

CONCLUSION

“Up to a certain point, I could be understood equally well even if I had deviant pronunciation. Still, I automatically conform. As Heidegger stresses: Only when there is some problem with the norms do I realize that I have all along been doing what one normally does”

(Being-in-the-world A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1 153).

To what do we owe each other?

What do we decide not to look at, as we move with our convictions in stride?

Heidegger's aim with Being and Time is to carve out the structures of the most basic human ontology. His phenomenological objective is to see the human in its honest form as it is placed in the physical world. As I have put his concepts in dialogue with Sherry Turkle's theorizations of the virtual world, it has become prominent throughout my explanation, that the digital provides the individual with the means to detect the subtleties of the self as they act among others from the comfort of their private sphere. The digital encourages the human to experiment with their identity—to disclose their uninhibited self. The unique interface exhibits human irrationality in its most honest and haphazard form, through the individual's momentary expressive, impulsive, enthusiastic output. Its ubiquitous character actualizes *Being-with* as the primordial mode of being in the world. The instinct of Being-with is to understand. It yearns to make a distinction. It begs to situate the self in the world. Thus, the virtual has given us the ideal private. We can bask in solitude, and mold the frames of words to the intricacies of ourselves. The individual can alleviate themselves from loneliness by being among others when they find themselves alone.

The infrastructure of the virtual equips the individual with the means to learn from the public and construct themselves with care in return. If an essential nature of being is to look to the world to cultivate oneself, it would seem that this affirms the innate necessity to identify with others, or more so, to find *connection*. Heidegger does not explicitly address the ethical question of being, as the task of knowing oneself renders the ethical as an extrinsic construct based upon the imagined ideations of a collective. However, as the internet enables the individual to connect with others at their own accord, the question of accountability comes to the fore. As the individual brings the public close, they construct their relationship to the consequences of their actions. One virtually has the room to refine one's traits through testing the reactions of others. The self begins in public—the presence of others is what catalyzes us to distinguish ourselves and understand our tendencies as we develop them. The public inspires the possibility for change, while the multiplicity of virtual realms exposes the movability of boundaries as they prompt the individual's agency. As others help us make sense of what it means to be the selves that we choose, I arrive at the question of responsibility. What does it mean to take responsibility over oneself in a world that incentivizes self-expression, yet allows one to retreat in the face of misunderstanding?

As the depiction of the self evolves via the digital into a postmodern, fragmented, decentered web of relations, the screen of linguistic symbols and vibrant signs faces one with the amalgam of one's actions. The empiricism of such personal evidence makes due in regards to the shortcomings of the postmodern lens which suggests the hypothesis that the individual's actions can be dismissed as opaque. The occurrence of the uncanny moment, however, reveals otherwise. It rather opens us up to the reality of conflicting desire, and how one's drives may reveal themselves during the individual's most mundane instances. Since the virtual provides us

with the tools to be intensely aware of our complexities, the question comes to be a matter of what we choose not to look at, as we commit to an action that involves another individual. The mobile device expands the individual's avenues of connectivity, yet romanticizes the life of the recluse. This discloses itself as a paradox upon the examination of Being-with, as we seek to define ourselves among others. As we look to find others, we find ourselves building the public, together, and it shows us we are real. Others, like us, use the world to show themselves they, too, are real. Perhaps it is in our obligation, as beings in the world, to be the public for others, as they are so dutifully to us. Being in the world affirms that we do not seek to be left solely to our devices, as to experiment inconsequentially, would be a game of pretend.

Works Cited

Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-world A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division*

I. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford:

Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Penguin Group Inc.,

1975.

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York City: Simon &

Schuster, 1995.

