

SELF-WRITING
IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET:
A NOVEL AND EXEGESIS

Connor Tomas O'Brien

Submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing

University of Adelaide
School of Humanities
Department of English and Creative Writing
August 2016

VOLUME 2

EXEGESIS:

The Playful Panopticon: Self-Writing in the Age of the Internet

Introduction

In *Memoir: A History*, Ben Yagoda marks out the first decade of the 21st century as one characterised by a memoir boom, noting a 400 percent increase in US sales of personal memoirs, childhood memoirs and parental memoirs from 2004 to 2008. “Memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged,” Yagoda writes (Yagoda 28). It is likely no coincidence that a surge in popular interest in published memoir has coincided with the rise of Social Networking Services (SNSs) like Facebook, which act as spaces for the online performance of subjectivity for billions of users. Taken together, this contemporary cultural obsession with multiple forms of self-writing, from the status update to the memoir, seems to both reflect and contribute to a sense of anxiety over competing demands for late-capitalist postmodern identity performance (Cover 66).

In my creative work, *The Golden Age of Autobiography*, I speculate as to future trends in the technologically-mediated performance of subjectivity. If individuals feel compelled to double the amount of data they transmit every year to take advantage of improvements in recording, storage, and network technologies (Coffman and Odlyzko 40), the current feeling of being “assaulted or overwhelmed by a proliferation of personal narratives” (Mendelsohn 68) is likely to only intensify over time, as a considerable proportion of the data shared will take the form of personal media content uploaded to SNS platforms. The availability of cheap and accessible digital storage has already begun to outpace the ability of users to create enough content to fill those containers, and we are approaching a point – if it has not been reached already – at which we will produce so much personal data that most will never be viewed by another human (Lesk). However, even as individuals find themselves saturated by this

proliferation of personal data, the SNS platforms they use adopt strategies designed to coax and coerce increasing amounts of personal information from them over time (Morrison 112).

The Golden Age of Autobiography explores the potential ramifications of what occurs when, in a Borgesian map-territory relation reversal, more information is shared online than it is possible for anybody to fully engage with. Readers are already grappling with feelings of ‘memoir overload’, but are also refashioning themselves as prolific publishers of their own personal narratives online. What happens, then, when the amount of personal data any individual produces takes longer than a lifetime for themselves or others to properly read or view – and, following this, how willing will individuals be to ‘outsource’ the creation and interpretation of their life stories to the algorithms created by SNS platforms, or to the proprietors of future digital platforms? *The Golden Age of Autobiography* is designed to engage, on a creative level, with current critical debates about emerging strategies adopted by users in constructing and responding to the sharing of mediated memories in an age of (apparent) narrative saturation.

The central questions that have motivated the writing of *The Golden Age of Autobiography* are broad, but deceptively simple: what are we aiming to achieve by documenting our lives online, how has this changed over time, and what forms might online self-documentation realistically take in the future? As will be explored in further detail, these questions have been taken up by scholars in fields from cognitive science to literary studies, but have not yet yielded straightforward or stable answers. At present, academic interest is heavily focussed on the implications of SNS platforms as tools for self-documentation, as well as the emerging implications of life-logging systems, while earlier ‘cyberstudies’ research concentrated on the life-writing implications of the chatrooms and ‘cyberspaces’ of the ‘Web 1.0’ era. Regardless of the communication technologies being assessed, however, the scholarly challenge remains the same: to assess the nature of the relationship between mediated memories, identity work, and the individuals who produce that work.

This exegesis will address two specific components of the broad question of what we aim to achieve through online self-documentation. The first relates to notions of truth: in what ways might we interpret the ‘truth’-value of the selves we construct online, and how does this change as the underlying networked platforms we use themselves change over time? The second relates to notions of subjectivity, and the specifics of how online platforms function as

technologies of self: how do online platforms both reflect and construct different models of selfhood? As will be explored, tensions exist between how selves are assessed online and how they are constructed. Most often, this takes the form of broadly conflicting inclinations: on the one hand, a desire to control how oneself appears to others; on the other, a desire to ensure that others represent themselves as ‘truthfully’ as possible.

This tension – between subjectivity and objectivity in life-writing – is certainly not unique to online spaces, but it does manifest uniquely within them. Online platforms diverge from traditional media for self-writing in one fundamental respect: they are various and ever-changing, rendering assessments of how we might interpret the truth-value of the selves constructed online dependent on which platforms are analysed, who is using them, and when that analysis takes place. Of course, truth-value is always contingent, no matter whether the form is digital or traditional. Traditional forms of written self-writing, however, become fixed in place by the nature of their form, whereas the project of self-production on online platforms is continuous and mutable. As online platforms change, so too do the models of selfhood that underpin them, resulting in users continuously reassessing how to construct selves and interpret the selves constructed by others.

In this exegesis, I examine three phases in the history of the web as a platform for self-writing: the ‘cyberspace era’, the ‘SNS era’, and a still nascent ‘lifelogging era’. These phases are not entirely discrete, but are identifiable as the result of a series of gradual cultural, technological and economic shifts that culminate in the elevation of different models of selfhood. The ‘cyberspace era’, for example, is characterised by a consideration of the ‘virtual’ self as a viable model for online selfhood, in which the ‘self-as-subject’ is elevated as a focus of academic interest. The ‘SNS era’, meanwhile, centres around the possibilities inherent in an ‘embodied’ model of online selfhood, in which the ‘self-as-object’ is prioritised as SNS platforms restrict the ability for users to engage in radical identity play. Finally, the ‘lifelogging era’ represents a further movement toward the consideration of a ‘posthuman’ model of online selfhood, in which individuals more fully cede the power to represent themselves to the communication networks they use, and devices are granted the ability to collect, and make sense of, quantifiable data about the self (McNeill ‘There Is No ‘I’ in Network’ 67).

The Golden Age of Autobiography explores the rise of ‘Autobio’, a fictional technology company that manages a lifelogging platform that binds users to a peculiar set of conventions for recording, sharing, and consuming life

narratives. In particular, the novel focuses on three individuals who engage in the act of lifelogging: a user who shares his recordings, a user who interprets those recordings, and the creator of the lifelogging platform itself. This exegesis contextualises the creative work, by interrogating the shifting motivations of users and proprietors of networked self-writing platforms.

1: The ‘cyberspace era’

1.1: Tensions between subjectivity and objectivity in online spaces

Most online services offer users the ability to present themselves through text. They are, in a Foucaultian sense, ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault ‘Technologies of the Self’ 16). From the initial process of selecting a username, to filling out a profile and chatting, commenting or sharing status updates, users of these services are continuously invited to make decisions about how they will represent themselves. In the aggregate, these choices are more significant than they may initially appear. After all, if, as Foucault has suggested, “The role of writing is to constitute ... a ‘body’” (Foucault ‘Self Writing’ 213), and if it is not possible to write without reading what one writes (Foucault ‘Self Writing’ 214), an individual’s collection of online self-writing amounts to a composition in which the self is constructed in the mind of the individual in the process of being ostensibly ‘re-presented’ to others.

Considering that different forms of self-writing can lead to the emergence of very different conceptions of self (Foucault ‘Self Writing’ 207), it is unsurprising that tensions exist around how online services should enable users to practice selfhood. The use of technologies of the self that are designed primarily for the individual to correspond with a later version of themselves – memory devices, or *hupomnemata* – are complex enough, but technologies of the self that involve an interplay between an individual and others are more problematic still. There is, after all, a unique tension that emerges when individuals submit a representation of themselves for the scrutiny of others: in the process of written exchange, the writer must balance their desire to preserve their subjectivity, against their recognition that the gaze of the reader constitutes an “objectification of the soul” (Foucault ‘Self Writing’ 217). As correspondence enables the writer to control how they are presented, it simultaneously necessitates a loss of control.

In digital spaces, this tension has long been expressed in terms of an apparent friction between two ideals: self-determination and truthfulness.

Writing in 1985 about early pre-web online chat services¹, for example, journalist Lindsay Van Gelder noted that potential users were encouraged to view the services as spaces for role-play. One representative advertisement displayed “a man dressed up as Indiana Jones, Michael Jackson, and an Olympic athlete”, the copy inviting readers to “be anything you want on American PEOPLE/LINK” (Van Gelder 535). In Van Gelder’s conception, digital networks appeared “dazzlingly egalitarian, since the most important thing about oneself isn’t age, appearance, career success, health, race, gender, sexual preference, accent, or any of the other categories by which we normally judge each one, but one’s mind” (353). At the same time, the journalist noted that “some on-line habitués have soberly concluded that perhaps there’s a thin line between getting out of one’s skin and getting into a completely false identity – and that the medium may even encourage impersonation” (535).

Over thirty years later, this core conflict – between ensuring users of online spaces can radically control their own self-presentation, and ensuring that others do not feel misled by individuals engaging in radical identity-play – remains difficult to resolve. On the one hand, the ability to make use of digital

¹ *Note on terminology: In Computer Science parlance, the term ‘internet’ tends to refer specifically to a global computer network using the TCP/IP transfer protocol, while ‘web’ refers to one component of this system: a system of hypertext pages accessed using a browser. In the sources referenced in this exegesis, the terms ‘web’ and ‘internet’ are often used interchangeably, as technological shifts have resulted in a blurring of the distinction between a ‘web app’ and an ‘internet application’. At the outset, however, it is worth acknowledging the difference between the two. For example, many of the chat and MUD systems introduced during the cyberspace era – including ICQ and LambdaMOO – required dedicated software to run and were not directly accessible in early web browsers. This is also true of some contemporary SNS services, like Snapchat, which exist exclusively as mobile applications with no substantial website component. Facebook, Twitter, and other contemporary SNS platforms, meanwhile, may be accessed either using a web browser over the HTTP internet protocol, or via dedicated non-browser mobile and desktop applications. The specifics of these distinctions are explored by Anderson and Wolff (134), who provide a comprehensive account of the interplay between the ‘web’ and ‘internet’ in the contemporary SNS era. In this exegesis, in situations in which services may have either a web or internet application component, ‘online service’ will be used wherever possible.*

networks to transcend the limits of corporeal selfhood remains uniquely appealing for those who wish to “make a first impression on their own terms” (Van Gelder 535); on the other, the sense that individuals in online spaces may not be ‘as they seem’ can hamper online interactions in which the embodied, ‘offline’ identity of users is not firmly established.

While the friction between self-determination and truthfulness remains problematic, however, much *has* changed in the decades since the publication of Van Gelder’s piece. The online platforms individuals use to share life-writing are now considerably different to those examined by Van Gelder, as are the socio-cultural norms surrounding the use of computer-mediated communication technologies. In the academic sphere, similarly, new media studies has shifted through several paradigms which have influenced how online life-writing has been assessed and how the ‘online self’ should best be modeled (Kennedy ‘Beyond Anonymity’ 25).

1.2: The ‘cyberspace era’ and the online self-as-subject

In academic contexts, concerted attempts to construct a framework for online selfhood can be traced to the influential ‘cyberculture’ work of Howard Rheingold and Sherry Turkle in the early 1990s, which was based on asserting the dissimilarities between online and offline modes of self-writing. The work of these scholars, which tended to be celebratory, was structured around an overarching notion of ‘cyberspace’ as a “liminal space, a space where rules are overturned” (Bell 21). These spatial metaphors, as well as the contestation that online platforms worked to free subjects from “the exigencies of materiality” (Milne), worked to establish powerful dichotomies in which the ‘online/virtual’ self was represented as sitting in opposition to his or her ‘real/offline’ counterpart. Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto*, published a decade earlier, similarly served as a foundation for cyberculture theory, by providing a set of provocations for thinking about technologically-mediated identities – in particular, the possibility of utilising communication technologies to explore fluid and partial identity to transcend the domination of race, gender, sexuality and class (Haraway 149).

In new media studies, of course, theory is embedded in ever-changing socio-technological context, so it is useful to establish the nature of the online platforms that served, during the ‘cyberspace era’, as the focal points of scholarly inquiry. In broad terms, this era can be understood to coincide with the

‘narrowband’/‘dial-up’ period, from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, in which the web was, prior to the emergence of digital cameras, broadband, and multimedia PCs, a primarily text-based medium. In particular, scholarly focus was directed at novel correspondence environments unique to digital spaces – predominantly role-playing MUDs (multi-user dungeons) and chatrooms, in which geographically-dispersed strangers were provided with intimate text-based environments for constructing and sharing details about the self pseudonymously.

It was this unique combination of the technological possibilities and limitations of this era that enabled text-based pseudonymous platforms to emerge and gain traction, and cyberstudies theory that enabled scholars to promulgate shared reading and writing practices for these platforms. ‘Cyberspace’ can thus be understood as standing in for a particular set of technological affordances (Norman 39) and conventions that together gave rise to particular notions of selfhood in certain early online spaces. Crucially, these notions of selfhood were designed to resolve the tension between self-determination and truthfulness through a radical unsettling of the subject-object dichotomy. By recognising ‘virtual’ selves as the primary selves of cyberspace, the question of whether a user’s ‘virtual’ self aligned with details of their ‘real’ self aligned was, at least theoretically, rendered moot. While practically unstable, as will be revealed, this conception continues to provide a useful framework for understanding subsequent attempts to resolve tensions between subjectivity and objectivity in online self-writing.

1.3: Conceptions of ‘truth’ and selfhood on the narrowband web

To move into a deeper analysis of ‘cyberspace’ as a self-writing medium, it is necessary to briefly interrogate contested understandings of ‘truth’ across earlier self-writing media. In ‘Maps and Journals as Maps of Intrapersonal Communication’, Marvin Jensen constructs a framework for understanding forms of self-writing relative to notions of honesty, truthfulness and factuality, with a direct focus on memoir and autobiography. While noting that memoirs and journals are uniquely useful as objects of analysis, for example, Jensen also suggests that no form of self-writing can claim to offer a more or less ‘truthful’ account of any individual’s experiences, as supposedly ‘objective’ accounts of experiences will fail to offer substantive insight into human subjectivity and vice-versa (Jensen 237). Different forms of self-writing will elicit sometimes

apparently contradictory disclosures that, when pieced together and assessed by a reader/writer, can offer a fuller impression of an individual than that found in any particular form of self-writing alone. This framework helps to explain the continued production of multiple forms of self-writing, as readers and writers move between diaries, memoirs, and (auto)biographies (and now, different online platforms) in order to develop an understanding of the life of an individual – or, in the case of what Jensen refers to as ‘intrapersonal communication’, to better understand the self.

Jensen’s conception of ‘intrapersonal communication’ reveals the dual purpose of self-writing: it is a tool utilised both to communicate the self to others and to commune with oneself. This aligns with the Foucaultian conception of shared self-writing as that which generates a narrative of the self by “bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and that gaze which one aims at oneself” (Foucault ‘Self Writing’ 221). As Jensen suggests, the ability for individuals to selectively and subjectively revise their own memories in the process of self-writing enables individuals to construct self-identity by resisting the hegemony of externally-imposed, ‘objective’ accounts of events (Jensen 238). Looking at traditional forms of self-writing, this is especially the case in memoirs, which allow for the revelation of an author’s introspection, and are “not simple records of experience” (Jensen 237). If we grant that self-writing can take the form of both extra- and intrapersonal communication, often simultaneously, it follows that when truth claims about the self are contested, it is not always due to deliberate acts of deception on behalf of a writer, but sometimes as a result of a disjunction between a writer’s constructive illusion of selfhood measured against a reality that is perceived to be more ‘objective’. Put another way, it is often the case that a ‘personal truth’ may involve distortions or fabrications which enable an individual to self-mythologise in order to develop an internal sense of self-identity (Jensen 238).

In support of this notion, Fern Kupfer has suggested that memoir writers are given implicit “permission to lie, but only when the reconstructed version of the story does not deceive the reader in its search for the aesthetic truth” (Kupfer 292), proposing that the emotional truth of an event for an individual may not correspond to objective, externally observable facts. According to Kupfer’s conception, ‘lying’ is not necessarily synonymous with ‘deception’: the latter occurs only when a ‘lie’ about the objective reality of a scenario also results in a lie about the individual’s subjective reality or ‘aesthetic truth’. As self-writing is both utilised for the purposes of extra- and intrapersonal communication, an act of self-writing designed to enable the writer to

subjectively construct a sense of self may, as a byproduct of this intrapersonal communication, mislead others who expect the individual's construction to closely align with objective 'facts' – but this can be permissible in aid of the revelation of subjective truths.

If the unique constraints and affordances¹ of memoir, (auto)biography and diary-writing enable the writer to engage in different forms of 'intrapersonal communication', then, part of what differentiates these forms is in how subjective and objective truths are understood – and, when these truths come into conflict, how they are weighted. As subjectivity-objectivity tradeoffs may be made in a variety of ways, emerging self-writing mediums offer the opportunity for writers to attribute different levels of importance to the subjective or objective, and, in doing so, seek new 'truths' about the self.

Cyberspace, as a self-writing environment, then, emerged from the acceptance of 'aesthetic truth' in memoir, and subsequently expanded what truths about the self may be revealed when subjectivity is further privileged. As Lisa Nakamura suggests, "Web 1.0, or 'cyber' space, conceptualized the Internet as an alternative reality, a different place in which one could exercise agency and live out fantasies of control. This control extended to all aspects of personal identity" (Nakamura 49). With little ability to prove or disprove the credibility of an anonymous stranger's identity beyond traded exchanges of text, self-writing in cyberspace enabled a virtually complete control over an individual's self-construction and self-representation (Nakamura 44). From the perspective of life-writing as an intrapersonal communication medium, this control granted the writer the ability to go beyond simply shaping and selectively recounting events – as in the writing of memoir – and engaging in a more radical form of self-mythologising, in which the 'objective' facts of the writer's embodied identity are rendered secondary to their subjective assessment of who they believe they 'are' or 'could be'.

¹ Note: *The perceptual psychology concepts of 'affordances' and 'conventions' are useful in clarifying how users relate to emergent communications technologies. 'Affordances' refer to "actionable properties between the world and an actor" (Norman 39), and 'conventions' to non-arbitrary "cultural constraint[s] that ha[ve] evolved over time" and that "require a community of practice" (40-41). Different web-based platforms, then, are distinguished by offering different affordances, while conventions may dictate what platforms evolve and how they are eventually used.*

With all forms of self-writing that are designed for a readership extending beyond the writer, of course, the product of a writer's engagement in a process of textual self-mythologising eventually involves the establishment of a contract of truth with a reader, in which the reader is led to understand what constitutes 'authenticity' and what constitutes acceptable fabrication (Steinberg 142). Even in the realm of autobiography and memoir, such contracts are usually implicit, and based on broadly-held assumptions about how 'truth' should be understood within the realm of whatever genre of self-writing the work has been crafted or interpreted to exist within. Outside of critical debates, genre is a 'common sense' tool, used by readers to determine what expectations and reading practices to bring to works of self-writing (Rak 501).

A focus on pre-digital forms of self-writing is instructive, revealing how fraught and inconsistent it can be for readers to distinguish between even well-established and longstanding genres. Continued debates about how best to differentiate 'autobiography' from 'memoir', reveal both the inherent difficulty in determining, and the readerly compulsion to determine, the nature of the implied contract between themselves and the author of the work they are engaging with. Without broadly agreed-upon definitions, the work involving in determining the difference between 'memoir' and 'autobiography' is often handled by readers on an individual level; as George Fetherling suggests, "people may not agree what a memoir is but they know one when they see it" (Fetherling *vii*). Even after a genre is determined, the reader must work to determine what this means, in terms of how truth-value should be assessed in the reading of one genre as opposed to the other. Depending on the reader, the truth-value of a memoir, for example, might lie in the perceived sincerity of the writer's subjective sketching of memories (Kupfer), while the truth-value of an autobiography might lie more directly in whether the memories described are perceived to be accurately recorded, perhaps with reference made to corroborating documentation. For another reader, truth-value in each genre may be assessed differently – which partially serves to explain recent controversies about 'deception' in memoir that will be explored later in the exegesis.

Like memoir or autobiography, 'cyberspace' could be considered in generic terms. As a realm in which selves could be "made and transformed by language" (Turkle 'Looking Toward Cyberspace' 646), reading or writing in cyberspace was a product as much of shared discursive practices as much as the underlying technologies that made the transfer of text possible. If 'cyberspace' was (and, to some degree, remains) a genre, then, it follows that it relied on establishing a collective formulation of truth, by which users could attempt to

distinguish 'aesthetic truth' from deception. Considering the two-way nature of cyberspace environments, which worked to dissolve a clear demarcation between 'author' and 'reader', a stable mechanism to establish such a 'contract of truth' can be seen to have involved a formulation of the Golden Rule: 'read others as you would like to be read'. In some role-playing environments (both online, and offline in tabletop games like Dungeons and Dragons (Bolter and Grusin 258)), this formulation was sometimes made explicitly, with rules informing a participant of the nature of the textual world and the possibilities for play within it. In such fantasy MUDs, a collective fantasy could be maintained and policed as users were explicitly aware of the distinction existing between the characters constructed on those platforms and the users constructing them. In a 1993 analysis of fantasy MUDs, for example, Julian Dibbell likened these environments to a form of "Punch-and-Judy show, in which the puppets and the scenery were made of nothing more substantial than digital code and snippets of creative writing" (Dibbell 474-475).

The clarity of the conceptual demarcation between user and character in cyberspace role-playing MUDs suggests that, when users are aware that they are communicating in a 'fictional' realm, the truth-value of identity claims is linked only to internal consistency within the constructed fiction. In other words, while the identity of a user may come to bear on the character he or she constructs, the congruence of that relationship is unimportant to others, as long as the constructed character behaves in accordance with the rules of the fiction. At the same time, though, Dibbell notes that the "emotional content" of the interactions between fantasy MUD users went beyond "mere playacting" (475-476), noting a particular example of interactions in which gendered violence was textually enacted. In such situations, in which a shared commitment was made to role-playing in a text-only environment, a violent act taking place within the bounds of a cyberspace role-playing environment could be seen to result in a response from users that sat in the "buzzing, dissonant gap" between a reader's response to such acts taking place in a work of fiction and an individual's response to such acts taking place in 'real life' (Dibbell 476). When users interact in real-time in online spaces in which 'truth' is contingent on shared reading practices, then, it can be seen that the distinction between user and character is never total, and acts performed on or by their characters are not entirely 'fictional'. Instead, even the most fantastic textual role-playing involves the writer creating 'themselves', especially when all users commit to upholding a contract of truth in which all claims consistent with the structure of the MUD world are accepted as truthful. As Dibbell suggests, shared reading practices are powerful in

establishing conceptions of truth that have repercussions on reader-writers that cannot be perfectly sealed within a particular writing environment. As an extreme and controversial example, he notes that a textual act of ‘rape’ in a cyberspace MUD resulted in emotional trauma for the user, “a real-life fact that should suffice to prove that the words’ emotional content was no mere fiction” (Dibbell 475).

The structure of cyberspace chatrooms, as realms without a pre-defined fantasy role-playing context, present a more nuanced challenge for life-writing scholars. As Crystal has noted, while chatrooms and MUDs are technologically similar, “it would be wrong to think of MUDs as a variety of synchronous chatgroups [or vice-versa]. The reality which exists in a chatgroup situation, such as in Internet Relay Chat, is a function solely of the online participants. Take away the people, and there is nothing left. The reality which constitutes a MUD, by contrast, is independent of the players” (Crystal 184). This presents a unique situation for communication and the construction of self, in which the context for determining ‘truth’ shifts continuously as a result of interaction between pseudonymous participants.

On Internet Relay Chat (IRC), a communication protocol popular during the cyberspace era, pseudonymous users would join pre-existing public ‘rooms’ or ‘channels’ designed to enable communication between individuals united by common interests or demographic ties (Crystal 154). With no pre-defined ‘fantasy world’ context to ground discourse in cyberspace chatroom environments, however, the ability to assess truth-claims was rendered more complex. If in MUDs, the foregrounding of roleplaying encouraged users to accept identity claims that were obviously ‘untrue’ relative to a user’s embodied identity, this was not necessarily true in chatrooms, in which conflicting expectations existed surrounding how identity claims should be assessed. As Whitty and Gavin have noted, with no overarching rules governing their use, a single cyberspace chatroom might be understood differently by different users – for some, as “a potential forum for intimate and personal relationships”, or for others, perhaps, as a space for “emotionally disconnected and superficially erotic encounters” (Whitty and Gavin 626).

In the disembodied environment of a chatroom, attempts to ascertain the ‘A/S/L’ (‘age/sex/location’) of another user acted a means by which to coax information about the individual’s embodied identity, creating a mechanism in which the ‘truth’ of claims was implied to exist in the congruence between the objective facts of a user’s identity and their subjective textual claims. However, as chatrooms provided no recourse to verify claims beyond the apparent

plausibility of the user's textual utterances themselves, responses to requests for 'real' personal information were themselves easy to falsify. In such a situation, of course, a bilateral reader-writer contract of truth cannot be maintained, as a prisoner's dilemma takes hold – a situation in which, while all users might benefit from acting 'honestly', an individual gains additional benefit from acting dishonestly, guiding all users toward a negative overall outcome of proliferating false claims (Pilisuk). In other words, even in cyberspace environments *not* based on explicit role-play, the affordances of the medium could be understood to encourage an unacknowledged form of role-playing, in which false virtual identities were constructed but claimed, by the writer, to reflect their 'actual' identity.

The tendency for pseudonymous cyberspace platforms to collapse into role-play environments, however, does not suggest that these platforms were intrinsically flawed. On the contrary, there are benefits to be gained for some individuals from participating in environments in which their identity is disguised or falsified, even if these environments simultaneously enable others to lie from a position of anonymity. At the level of intrapersonal communication, for example, cyberspace chatroom environments could be seen to have value in enabling a user to try on 'realistic' alternate personas, which could be used to develop a sense of empathy by 'walking in the shoes' of others, or to "act out unresolved conflicts [and] play and replay characterological difficulties on a new and exotic stage" (Turkle 'Looking Toward Cyberspace' 644). In other situations, by disguising their embodied race, gender, or other aspect of identity, a user could ostensibly access social environments they may have been unable to gain access to offline (Lea and Spears 204). Moreover, one key insight of the work of early cyberstudies scholars was that an unknowable and physically distant audience could facilitate a unique form of self-disclosure in which certain aspects of the self could be falsified in order to maintain anonymity, in aid of the revelation of more intimate details about the self – an extension of the notion of privileged subjective memory in memoir in aid of revealing 'aesthetic truth' (Kupfer 292).

Referencing Thibaut and Kelley's 'stranger-on-the-train' theory, for example, which suggests that individuals feel more comfortable engaging in self-disclosure to strangers they will likely never meet again, Whitty and Gavin noted that a "unique sense of safety and space [was] called forth by the sense of anonymity that the Internet engenders" (Whitty and Gavin 629). Indeed, as a result of qualitative research, Whitty and Gavin were able to verify Turkle's theory that, in particular circumstances, online anonymity and identity play

could be seen to facilitate a “rapid process of intimate self-disclosure” but “without the emotional investment that leads to close and enduring relationships” (624).

Additionally, as the work involved in constructing even the most fantastic disembodied digital identity also had a component of reflection and revelation, the postmodern identity play that took place on these platforms did not represent simple escapism. As boyd suggests, the process of role-playing in cyberspace chatrooms was an active one, and “much could be gained from the process of self-reflection that was enabled when people had to act out or work through their identity in order to make themselves present in virtual worlds” (boyd ‘It’s Complicated’ 36-37). Seasoned users seemed cognizant of the benefits of this postmodern approach to ‘typing selves into being’ (Sundén 3): in 1995, Lea and Spears argued that anonymity of early web users was “frequently (if sometimes rather idealistically) celebrated by participants themselves”, and was part of the ‘magic’ of early online relationships (202). It is easy to understand, then, why early cyberculture scholars were so bullish about the possibilities of ‘cyberspace’, conducive as it was to a form of self writing in which individuals could trade white lies in aid of developing intimacies with strangers.

1.4: Resolving tensions surrounding the ‘contract of truth’ in cyberspace

Tensions surrounding the ‘contract of truth’ begin to emerge when the self-writing produced on cyberspace-era chatrooms is examined at the extrapersonal level – from the position of readers assessing the identity claims of others. While a chatroom ‘reader’ might expect the truth-value of another user’s claim to lie within its veracity to the embodied reality of that anonymous user, the affordances of cyberspace-era chatrooms place limits on this kind of verification. As such, the truth-value of a user’s writing on a cyberspace-era chatroom could only be measured according to the user’s ability to construct an alternative self that is textually credible enough to be regarded by others as authentic. In Turkle’s utopian notion that, in cyberspace, “The obese can be slender, the beautiful plain” (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 643), she and other cyberspace evangelists operated under the assumption that users were willing participants in a form of communal role-playing in which one’s ability to textually ‘pass’ was enough to signal the authenticity of the self being presented to other users (McNeill ‘There Is No ‘I’ in Network’ 65).

As Whitty and Gavin have noted, in anonymous cyberspace environments, users' expectation of being lied to by others encouraged them to themselves engage in identity play (630). At the same time, however, their findings reveal that the "ideals that are important in traditional relationships, such as trust, honesty, and commitment are just as important in [cyberspace-era] online relationships; however, the cues that signify these ideals vary" (Whitty and Gavin 623). In their research, Whitty and Gavin note that chatroom participants developed sophisticated strategies to determine how to assess truth claims, especially a formulation in which lying is recognised as "not necessarily signify[ing] deception on the part of the liar, but instead [...] signify[ing] a desire to reveal a deeper level of truth about the self" (630). A shared reading practice, in other words, could be seen to have emerged, based on establishing a new formulation of 'truth-value' by which to assess claims. In this formulation, somewhat unique to the cyberspace medium but conceptually related to the practices brought to bear on the reading of memoir, the truth-value of a claim could be seen to centre not only around a user's ability to consistently 'pass', but for them to offer deeply intimate information that reads as genuine even as other details about the self are altered to preserve anonymity. The challenge for users in such cyberspace environments, then, was to identify and discount 'white lies' in identity claims, in order to trust in and engage with deeper truth claims. In some ways, there are parallels to be drawn with some more traditional forms of confessional communication, from the interactions taking place within a Roman Catholic confessional booth, to questions submitted to magazine advice columnists, in which the confessor may fabricate aspects of their identity in order to protect their privacy while publicly divulging intimate details about the self.

Stabilising a complex reading practice, however, requires mechanisms to ensure that all reader-writers approach a text with shared expectations – especially in a synchronous communication environment, such as a chatroom, in which that text is being written and shaped continuously. Norman's notion of conventions – "cultural constraint[s] that ha[ve] evolved over time" and that "require a community of practice" (Norman 40-41) – is relevant here. As the reality constructed within a chatroom is solely a function of the participants within that space (Crystal 184), and the affordances of the medium do not inherently dictate how to 'correctly' respond or interact to claims made by users, to stabilise a shared 'cyberspace' reading practice involved constructing mechanisms in which reading conventions could be taught and learnt.

As the number of web users was, even by the end of the 1990s, still a small subset of the broader population, norms were relatively fast to develop around chatrooms and MUDs, which functioned as tight but permeable semi-anonymous communities. In general, newcomers would begin as ‘lurkers’ on cyberspace-era communication channels, peripherally learning how to correctly communicate with other users, then, as ‘newbies’, would have their early attempts at communication subtly corrected by older users more familiar with established norms (Volda, Newstetter, and Mynatt 1993). This hierarchy of users, from ‘lurker’ to ‘veteran’, helped to resolve tensions caused by the narrow expressive resources of early web platforms and limited interface affordances, by ensuring that established users could textually ‘pass down’ informally established reading and writing practices. The ability to deceive others from behind a veil of anonymity remained open to abuse, but, while the influx of new web users remained a trickle, could be mitigated by ensuring all ‘newbies’ passed through a process of initiation that would encourage them to adopt the prevailing values of cyberspace.

Arguing strongly for maintaining a version of cyberspace in which users were granted total freedom to manage their textual self-presentation, Rheingold noted in 1993 that, “The only alternative to imposing potentially dangerous restrictions on freedom of expression [online] is to develop norms, folklore, ways of acceptable behavior that are widely modeled, taught, and valued, that can give the citizens of cyberspace clear ideas of what they can and cannot do with the medium, how they can gain leverage, and where they must beware of pitfalls inherent in the medium, if we intend to use it for community-building” (Rheingold 54). The firmness of community norms worked to ensure that some forms of identity play, especially the ‘white lie’, were established within early cyberspace era communities as admissible creative tools. Ensuring that white lying would be ‘correctly’ written and read by all users as the revelation of deeper truths, however, was heavily reliant on the ability for veteran web users to cogently model and teach novel and often counterintuitive conventions to incoming users.

Beyond the conventions established on chatroom platforms themselves, the ‘cyberspace-era’ was defined by the promulgation of additional works explicitly devised to establish shared norms for ‘cyberspace’ by influencing new users and controlling the development of emerging online platforms. In publications as established and mainstream as *The New York Times*, theories of ‘cyberspace’ were amplified to a broad audience (Markoff), while *Wired* magazine, founded in 1993, served as a vehicle for cyberstudies scholars to

promote their work to a popular audience interested in the new possibilities of online interaction. As Langdon Winner noted at the time, *Wired* was a magazine with an “underlying philosophy”, a “cyber-libertarian worldview [that] draws heavily upon the fizzing bromides of technological utopianism” (Winner 19-20). Perhaps the most widely shared cyber-utopian text, however, was John Perry Barlow’s ‘A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace’, which was republished on more than 5000 websites in 1996 – a considerable number, considering the relatively small size of the web at this point in time (Yang 58). The manifesto established ‘cyberspace’ as an occupied territory, from which existing world governments exerted no sovereignty over the “virtual selves” that existed within. In one representative passage, Barlow employed the language of an indigenous group under threat of colonisation by forces that threaten to undermine established norms and traditions: “You claim there are problems among us that you need to solve. You use this claim as an excuse to invade our precincts” (Barlow ‘A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace’). As critics at the time argued, Barlow’s declaration served to encourage existing web users to “remain caught in a closed ideological loop, a self-perpetuating strain of anti-realist thought” (Jones), which would need to be continuously defended against threats from governments and incoming web users.

The kind of gatekeeping pedagogical model employed by both Barlow and Rheingold illustrates the delicacy of shared communication practices, especially those that subvert how the truth of claims should be assessed by readers. To adopt Silicon Valley parlance, however, such careful gatekeeping processes are not ‘scalable’ – after all, if many new users inundate an online platform with limited affordances, in which the “The reality which exists ... is a function solely of the online participants” (Crystal 184), the ability to maintain tightly shared reading practices is substantially diminished. In the realm of memoir, it is notable that similar concerns are now being raised in the wake of the rise of ‘vanity publishing’ and digital self-publishing. As Phil Cohen has noted, the existence of publishers as gatekeepers previously worked to restrict the supply of ‘authentic’ memoir (P. Cohen 177), with critics’ responses working to model and teach both authors and readers what was permissible within the medium. In the case of both memoir and cyberspace, anxieties over the opening of ‘floodgates’ can be partially understood as a result of the reading practices in those genres or communities as having been initially stabilised by bottlenecks on the participants ‘authorised’ to write within them.

A key error made by early cyberstudies scholars, perhaps, was the belief that cyberspace reading and writing practices might prove so appealing and

comprehensible as to withstand increasing influxes of new users. Part of this error was based in a misrecognition of why the number of internet users was growing, as ‘cyberspace’ and the underlying internet technologies that enabled it were conflated. As the number of web users grew through the late 1990s (‘Internet Users’), for example, some scholars understood this growth as the result of a “mass-psychological transition” as individuals began to view themselves as citizens of cyberspace (Rheingold 53), or as a vote for a new mode of ‘virtual’ selfhood expressed in preference or addition to ‘real’ or embodied selfhood (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 643). “In cyberspace, we are learning to live in multiple worlds,” Turkle suggested in 1999, adopting a framework in which the web functioned as an educative apparatus which served to “challenge what [new users] have traditionally called ‘identity’ [as they] are moved to recast [their identity] in terms of multiple windows and parallel lives” (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 643). In some ways, the popularisation of the work done by Turkle, Rheingold and others fell prey to a variant of the observer effect, as depictions of ‘cyberspace’ in mass media repeated the claims made by these scholars, reinforcing the notion of a constructed real/virtual dichotomy in which lying was utilised as a tool to differentiate real and virtual selves (Kennedy ‘Beyond Anonymity’ 25). Moreover, while there is evidence to suggest that early web adopters were a self-selecting group “of self-identified geeks, freaks, and queers”, this makeup changed considerably as affordable broadband began to saturate western markets, and the demographics of those connecting to the web began to map more closely to those of the broader population (boyd ‘Am I a Blogger?’ 306).

1.5: The destabilisation of shared cyberspace reading practices and identification of issues with disembodied selfhood

The truth-value of claims made in cyberspace-era environments can be understood as dependent on two components: the ability for a user to convincingly ‘cyberpass’ by assuming a coherent and believable constructed identity, and the ability for users to accept white lies as necessary in order to render users unidentifiable, in aid of eliciting deeply personal disclosures. From the perspective of a writer, by situating the truth-value in these realms, subjectivity is privileged: a user in an idealised cyberspace environment is granted the ability to tightly control what disclosures are offered without the inherent risk of readers fact-checking these details against ‘objective’ accounts.

There are, however, inherent problems with situating truth-value in this way. As has been examined, for such distinctive reading-writing practices to be sustained, strong conventions must be modelled, learnt and enforced. Moreover, as Whitty and Gavin have noted, such conventions can only hold if users generally agree that they are beneficial (626). To some degree, the work of Barlow, Rheingold, Turkle and their contemporaries – as well as publications like *Wired*, which provided a pop cultural channel for utopian cyberstudies discourse – can be viewed as an attempt to rapidly solidify the legitimacy of these emergent reading and writing practices. However, their theory that disembodied and nonlocal ‘virtual’ selfhood can be empowering to many was weakened by the small sample size of the observed population. After all, in 1995 less than 1% of the world’s population had an internet connection (‘Internet Users’), rendering it difficult to generalise from observations of the self-selecting pool of cyberspace denizens that served as the focal point of cyberstudies scholarship. While Turkle’s suggestion that “cyberspace becomes an object to think with for thinking about identity – an element of cultural bricolage” was not entirely inaccurate, for example, there was an element of technological determinism in her subsequent claim that, due to the rise of early web technologies, “today [in 1999], the pendulum has swung away from that complacent view of a unitary self” (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 646). Even by the turn of the century, after all, the number of global web users was still considerably fewer than one in ten (‘Internet Users’).

The notion that inevitable socio-cultural consequences flowed from the adoption of the web – and that all web users, regardless of their backgrounds and experiences, would feel these consequences similarly, if not identically – took the form of what boyd has referred to as the kind of ‘magical thinking’ that plagues much early research into new information and communication technologies (boyd ‘It’s Complicated’ 15-16). Indeed, subsequent research has revealed that early cyberstudies scholars, in focusing on the more unusual forms of identity play taking place on MUDs and chatrooms, tended to de-emphasise the less ostensibly novel forms of identity work already taking place on the early web. As Wynn and Katz noted in 1997, the key assumption made by cyberstudies scholars was that “because [the] Internet is more anonymous, even supposedly totally anonymous, more people will take the option to participate in marginalized roles[, but this] presume[d] a primacy of fantasy over practical motivations in large numbers of people” (303).

One example of the ‘practical motivations’ to which Wynn and Katz refer was the ability to maintain stable relationships with others in online spaces,

which was problematised by the radically subjective model of cyberspace identity promulgated by cyberstudies scholars. Some chatroom users noted that the possibilities for disclosure enabled by anonymity eventually proved limiting, as the ability to delete and construct identities at will rendered the deepening of online-only intimacies over long-term timeframes precarious (Whitty and Gavin 627). As one user argued, “it doesn’t work if you only speak on the Internet, you end up losing interest after awhile” (627).

Over time, similarly, the utopian potential of anonymous online identity play, even in situations where role-playing was able to hold, has been called into question. Claims that the ‘disembodiment’ of identity in online environments could act as a ‘curative’ to racism or sexism, for example, have been revealed as problematic. An influential summation of the utopian position was made by Jerry Kang in 2000, in which he suggested that being able to “freely choose the social categories we inhabit or present – including race, as well as gender” might constitute a form of ‘cyber-passing’ or ‘racial transmutation’ that could “teach us that the bodies we have been given need not dictate the identities we embrace” (Kang 1136-1137). The claim that “adopting multiple racialized identities in cyberspace” might serve to “slowly dissolve the one-to-one relationship between identity and the physical body” (Kang 1206) *did* prove somewhat true in cyberspace environments. However, the perceived benefits of cyber-passing were based on a belief that the oppressive rigidity of traditional social categories was a product of an individual’s historical inability to transcend them, and that individuals in marginalised groups would find benefit in willingly discarding components of their identity – or, alternatively, that individuals in non-marginalised social positions would find benefit in ‘putting on’ marginalised identities online.

As Lisa Nakamura has suggested, however, the notion of ‘cyber-passing’ was based on a view of race (and, by extension, gender and other traits) as “modular, ideally mobile, recreational, and interactive”, which legitimised a form of ‘identity tourism’ that “let users ‘wear’ racially stereotyped avatars without feeling racist” (Nakamura 45) and “without any of the risks associated with being a racial minority in real life” (Nakamura 40). As Nakamura notes, this form of postmodern identity play tended toward a “narrow range of racialized performance visibly enacted in many online social spaces – gangstas, samurai, geisha, Latin lovers, and hot Latin mamas” (45), which suggested that such performances were based primarily on the appropriation of obvious signifiers of an ‘Other’ while shielding users in non-marginalised positions from the negative or complex ‘real world’ experiences of life in a racialised body.

Moreover, the notion that anonymous online spaces might give rise to ‘post-gender’ or ‘post-racial’ communicative contexts could be seen to delegitimize the offline identities of users, for whom gender or racial identity could be seen to provide a principal foundation for selfhood and belonging.

Writing on a study of personal home pages constructed during the cyberspace era, for example, Kennedy notes that the students she supervised “showed no signs of wanting to hide such aspects of their identities as their gender and ethnicity, and thereby ‘benefit’ from the possibility of anonymity that cyberspace offered them” (Kennedy ‘Technobiography’ 128). Instead, these students included “explicit and implicit references to gender and ethnicity” in their online self-writing, which “could be said to empower them and other black women more than hiding their identities would [...] in a technical medium dominated by white male voices” (129). On this point, Tiziana Terranova noted the importance of taking the ‘outernet’ – “the network of social, cultural and economic relationships which crisscrosses and exceeds the internet” (Terranova 34) – into consideration when analysing the possibility of cyberspace as an environment for marginalised groups to engage in equalizing identity play. Nakamura, meanwhile, notes that the term ‘cyber’ began to vanish around 2001, when “Critical race theory [...] caught up to the Internet” (48), which also happened to coincide with the beginning of the broadband era, which broadened the availability of internet access to a wider variety of users interested in using digital technologies to represent their embodied racial and gender identities.

In short, it can be understood that ‘cyberspace’ served as a useful conceptual label to organise a set of affordances and cultural conventions that, combined, enabled the construction of a novel set of shared reading-writing practices. From the perspective of a writer, these practices enabled and legitimised a unique form of identity-play, in which aspects of the embodied self were obscured or redefined in order to explore ‘deeper truths’ (Whitty and Gavin 630). The notion of the ‘virtual’ self as distinct from the ‘embodied’ self, moreover, served to situate the truth-value of claims made in cyberspace environments relative to a user’s ability to compellingly ‘cyber-pass’ as their constructed subject (Whitty and Gavin 630). Ultimately, however, these practices proved precarious and of limited appeal, requiring continuous protection from new users unaccustomed to (or disinterested in) “some new, truer way of relating” (Van Gelder 535). A belief that disembodied, virtual selfhood could act as a ‘curative’ to offline prejudices – by ostensibly divorcing a user from their embodied self and enabling them to create a new self through

language – also proved somewhat misguided, based on a presumption that selfhood and identity can be separated from an individual’s embodied traits.

2: The ‘weblog era’

2.1: The ‘weblog era’: a return to established conceptions of truth and selfhood in online writing

One of the stumbling blocks for scholars working at the nexus between new media and auto/biographical studies is that initial generalized claims made about ‘cyberspace’ during the cyberspace era served to draw critical attention away from the less overtly novel ways in which users were making use of early web technologies. Moreover, the spatio-territorial metaphors of ‘cyberspace’, ‘virtual reality’ and ‘netizenship’ proved influential and enduring in academic contexts, delaying the emergence of frameworks situating participatory online media relative to non-digital forms of life writing. As Kennedy, Tetzlaff, boyd and others have noted, the relatively narrow focus on the MUDs and chatrooms of the early web involved disregarding or marginalizing the work of those users writing and interacting on web-based platforms that did not conform to the characteristics of ‘cyberspace’ environments. The work of early online diarists, for example, received little academic attention for several years, as cyberstudies scholarship continued to centre on the philosophical and practical issues raised by anonymous environments.

Philippe Lejeune’s examination of French online diaries from 1999 to 2000 is widely considered a pioneering work in this regard, in part because the author’s analysis of the form involved side-stepped existing critical debates about the nature of ‘cyberspace’, and in doing so established the basis for new conceptualisations of identity in online environments. In Lejeune’s exploration – itself presented in the form of an online diary – the author reflects on issues that would later be taken up by scholars attempting to assess the role of SNS platforms as spaces for self-writing. In particular, Lejeune foregrounds the degree to which practices of keeping a diary, journal, or public chronicle have shifted over centuries, such that his ambivalent embrace of the blog format is founded in a recognition “that the self is not an unchanging essence that has now been altered by disastrous technical progress [but] has always been shaped by the development of new media” (Lejeune 310). Indeed, Kennedy has coined the term ‘technobiography’ to refer to individual’s accounts of their relationship with technologies of self, but prefers ‘technobiographies’ in the plural to emphasise the differences rather than the similarities in how individuals relate to technologies (Kennedy ‘Technobiography’ 122).

In conjunction, Lejeune's historicized perspective and Kennedy's focus on technobiographic diversity serve to undermine Barlow's declaration of cyberspace as an independent sphere giving rise to a singular, radically new mode of selfhood. In situating the emerging online diary form in terms of a lineage of self-writing technologies, Lejeune worked to soften the technological deterministic position that assumed that the web "possessed intrinsic powers that affect *all* people in *all* situations the same way" (boyd 'It's Complicated' 15). During the twilight of the cyberspace era, observers were, in other words, beginning to identify that the complex relationship between platforms and individuals could give rise to an array of different reading-writing practices in online spaces.

Just as Turkle's work proved influential because it offered the first cogent analysis of MUDs and chatrooms, Lejeune's work coincided with another series of technological and cultural shifts that would be conceptually amalgamated under the banner term 'Web 2.0' – which coincides with the period I term the 'SNS era'. In some sense, the distinction between 'Web 1.0' and 'Web 2.0' was largely artificial, based on the evidently false assumption that the early internet did not provide the technical capacity to support user interactivity. In Graham Cormode and Balachander Krishnamurthy's assessment, for example, the "typical [Web 1.0 model supposed] that all visitors are read-only, and all content and comment is provided by the site owners", while on Web 2.0 platforms "there is a co-mingling of commentators and creators" (Cormode and Krishnamurthy). Such a definition fails to take into account the limited variety of two-way communicative platforms available to early internet users and which served as the basis for notions of 'cyberspace' as an interactive arena. It may be more accurate to suggest that 'Web 2.0' served to encompass a vast number of subtle shifts, changing web user demographics, and technological improvements that altered the nature of that interactivity.

The rise of Web 2.0, for example, coincided with the emergence of increasingly affordable home broadband connections, which led to the number of web users doubling from 1999 to 2005, to encompass half of the population in developed nations ('Individuals using the Internet 2005 to 2014'). As the population of web users broadened, later adopters, who were largely comfortable with "existing social bases of identity or conventional constraints on social interaction" (Wynn and Katz 298), then began to exert a stronger influence in determining how online communication services and conventions would form to best serve them. As danah boyd has suggested, the rise of Web 2.0 marked a move from a conception of the web as the domain of "self-

identified geeks, freaks, and queers” who “challenged the status quo” to the web as the domain of “the status quo” (boyd ‘Am I a Blogger?’ 206). This is a somewhat questionable statement, considering that the early web was inaccessible to many marginalised users (Nakamura 45); nonetheless, it suggests that, as the composition of web users began to map more closely the demographics of the broader population, the unusual conventions of cyberspace began to be challenged by users interested in more familiar forms of self-writing and identity work.

Following the work of Lejeune, and the growing prominence of the weblog as a medium for online sharing, new media scholars began to identify similarities between web platforms and older medium forms that had previously been overlooked by cyberstudies scholars. Lejeune’s study, performed when there were less than a hundred French-language online diaries in existence, served to firmly situate the migration of self-writing online in terms of a centuries-long process of gradual technological change, as opposed to as a radical break with the past. Lejeune notes, for example, that, “Writing for oneself in a notebook is not a ‘natural’ situation that is somehow changed by the advent of new media [and] the computer is no more artificial than the notebook. It merely changes the relationship with writing” (Lejeune 310). This acted as a riposte to early cyberstudies scholars who initially presented a dichotomy of choice for individual reader-writers faced with the new medium: to accept the norms of ‘cyberspace’ and to be shaped by them, or to refuse them and, in doing so, refuse to make use of digital networking technologies (Barlow, Perry, Birkerts, Kelly and Slouka 37). As Graeme Davison contends, this dichotomy was pervasive because it was shared even by those who fundamentally disagreed about the merits of ‘cyberspace’: “The academic world often seems to be divided between techno-freaks and Luddites, those who unreservedly welcome the new technology and those who try to hold it at bay,” argued Davison in 1997, noting that even those who were skeptical of new technologies tended to adopt a deterministic viewpoint (Davison).

Lejuene’s work, then, served to change the nature of theorising about how the truth-value of online selves might be interpreted, by drawing it back to existing frameworks utilised for assessing how selves are constructed in offline self-writing contexts. In 1995, Hugh Miller predicted this directional shift, suggesting that “electronic selves could be developed in a different social context (continuing the extension of the social world from the hamlet to the city to the global village) but [...] many of the basic issues, moves and processes that go on would be the same as they always were” – in essence, arguing for a

mode of scholarship in which the social processes and intentions of web users were more seriously taken into account when understanding what happens online (Miller).

One of the points of departure for post-Lejeune scholars was the recognition, often alluded to but rarely directly addressed by early cyberstudies scholars, that the web might not necessarily constitute a medium in its own right, but a medium of mediums. The rise of the Web 2.0 era corresponded with the rise of ‘building block’ technologies that significantly lowered the cost and time of development of web applications, enabling a profusion of user-generated content services beginning around 2003, each with unique affordances designed to solicit particular modes of sharing from users. This emerging superabundance of online sharing contexts around this period in some ways presented a challenge for scholars, insofar as it problematised broad accounts of online interaction in which ‘the web’ as a whole was presumed to have a particular effect on users. It began to grow increasingly unclear, for example, as to whether philosophies and theories of interaction in ‘cyberspace’ were intended to apply to the web in general, or only to particular online contexts; if the latter, it seemed as though it would become increasingly difficult, in the face of platform diversification, to construct a coherent framework to encompass the nature of online communication in general. Instead, it appeared as though the profusion of online sharing contexts necessitated a more nuanced approach to scholarship, in which particular online platforms could be examined in terms of the interplay between specific sets of affordances and the conventions developed between particular groups of individuals drawn to particular writing practices. As boyd articulates, “What matters is not the particular social media *site* but the *context* in which it’s situated” (boyd ‘It’s Complicated’ 39).

In terms of assessing the truth-value of selves created in online environments, this ‘post-cyberspace’ approach suggests that notions of ‘white lying’, ‘identity play’, acceptable exaggeration, coherence and consistency are heavily context-dependent, and differ depending on the online platforms employed by the user. In the early web era, as the range of platforms and communities were relatively few, the freedom of early-adopters to gravitate toward online services suitable to their offline practices was limited. This lack of platform choice accounts, to some degree, for the persistence of the ‘take it or leave it’ dichotomy tacitly perpetuated by scholars during the early web period, as early users were forced to shape their practices around the affordances of the smaller number of online services in existence, as well as the conventions that emerged around the communities utilising those platforms.

One of the issues examined, in the early years of the shift away from generalised conceptions of the web as a ‘cyberspace’ for anonymous identity play and toward a more inclusive approach to framing online identity work, was the importance of defined contexts for online sharing. Overlapping with the tail end of the heyday of MUDs and chatrooms of ‘cyberspace’, for example, was the emergence of the personal homepage as a tool for self-writing, and an examination of this nascent medium enabled scholars to begin to dispel sweeping claims made about the nature of online identity construction. Created using tools provided, often freely, by prototypical social media services like GeoCities – the third most-visited site on the web in 1999 (‘Yahoo! buys GeoCities’) – homepages were characterised by a metaphor that was both spatial and print-based: a ‘home’ in cyberspace, but one that consisted of ‘pages’ and so could be theoretically repurposed to contain more traditional forms of print-based self-writing. These characteristics clearly differentiated the homepage from chatrooms and MUDs, which were grounded in more overtly spatial or conversational metaphors, and scholars noted that homepages were being utilised as spaces for modes of self-presentation that differed from those modes employed in anonymous chat spaces (Kennedy ‘Technobiography’ 128).

Tellingly, scholars studying the content of homepages during the late 1990s and early 2000s tended to arrive at different conclusions regarding how identity was constructed and conveyed within them, which suggested that the medium was open to a range of possibilities for forms of identity work and that different norms of use emerged around different communities of users. While Helen Kennedy noted that the homepage creators she observed showed few signs of wanting to hide aspects of their embodied identity (‘Technobiography’ 128), for example, John Killoran found a “surprisingly high degree of anonymity” in the hundred homepages he sampled, with 43 percent of users not revealing their full names (Killoran ‘The Gnome’ 68). In a review of the literature on personal homepages in 2002, Nicola Döring outlined a series of ‘dimensions of homepage use’, which strongly suggested a diverse array of motivations and techniques for the construction of homepages (“intrapersonal versus interpersonal”, “categorical, relational and narrative”, “intrinsic versus extrinsic”, and “technologically simple versus sophisticated”), as well as a wide variety of modes of reader assessment (Döring). This worked to problematise prescriptive accounts of online identity work by drawing attention to the range of expressive possibilities of homepage construction.

A core issue with Döring’s multi-dimensional model of homepage reading/writing, however, was that the lack of established conventions could

lead to the potential for misreadings when the model implicitly adopted by a homepage author was not shared by his or her audience. In other words, while efforts were made by scholars to ensure that ‘cyberspace’ reading-writing practices in chatrooms and MUDs were tightly controlled, the same was not true of homepages. In her review, Döring referred to studies in which homepage creators were embarrassed to realise that their audience was broader than intended, or repeatedly misunderstood how readers were perceiving their self-presentation (Döring). More pertinently, however, the lack of clear and established conventions presented a problem of engagement, insofar as homepage creators would routinely struggle to determine how to present themselves online – amongst early homepage creators, “*I don't know what I should write!!!*” was a persistent and repeated refrain (Döring). As Killoran suggests, while the homepage form ostensibly liberated web users from Turkle’s prescriptive and restrictive conception of ‘virtual identity’ by providing a broader set of options for how to perform identity online, this freedom presented a “discursive challenge of public autobiography for formerly private citizens” (Killoran ‘The Gnome’ 80).

Early homepage creators, unused to writing about themselves and publishing to a theoretically global audience, drew on “past genres as heuristic cues, as starting points, as frameworks [but] struggl[ed] to deploy them creatively” (Killoran ‘The Gnome’ 80). When faced with a literally blank (web) page and invited to fill it with autobiographical content, users found it difficult to ascertain what was worth sharing, lacking the heuristic cues that might grant them the confidence to meaningfully self-disclose, and so often shared nothing at all, resulting in a plethora of pages permanently ‘under construction’ and devoid of personal content (Killoran ‘The Gnome’ 74) or “pre-fabricated poses” copied from others (69). The freedom of the personal homepage as a form, granting users the ostensible ability to share whatever they pleased, resulted in users confronting the “very presumption of public monologue—the temerity of presenting oneself without validating cues, as if in response to questions that nobody really asked” (77). In the personal homepage, then, regular web users were confronted with a form that ostensibly enabled radical self-disclosure, but that did not clearly present users with either affordances guiding or encouraging them toward particular self-writing practices.

In examining the nature of identity work on the early web, scholars have noted that deciding what to share on a personal homepage was challenging even for early adopters, who were unable to properly grasp how to best utilise the medium. The notion of ‘rhetorical situations’ – the combination of an exigence,

a receptive audience, and a clear set of constraints that draw rhetorical discourse into being (Bitzer 6) – has been adopted by new media scholars to explain how online platforms either fail or succeed at soliciting disclosure. As Killoran has noted, individuals are more likely to disclose personal information if there is a clear “fill-in-the-blank” (Killoran ‘Rhetorical Situations’ 280) context in which specific information is overtly solicited, a receptive audience exists for it, and sharing is likely to result in a desired reader reaction. In contexts in which individuals are given too much choice about what to share and how to share it, and are not sure how that information will be interpreted (as with early web chat services enabling freewheeling identity-play), individuals are more likely to resist divulging information about the self. In the personal homepage, the freedom to construct one’s own context for sharing proved, in practice, to act as a burden.

The emergence of the online diary – or ‘blog’ – as a medium, then, can be seen in the context of multiple converging trends in scholarship and technological change. A gradual softening of the utopian vision of the web as a space for “Dionysian excesses of identity play” (McNeill 65) gave way to users attempting to exploit the personal homepage as a medium for online identity work, but struggling in the absence of shared conventions. This resulted in a somewhat surprising outcome that is, nonetheless, obvious in retrospect: the transposition of print-based forms of self-writing to the online space, which furnished new web users with a familiar context for reading, writing, and interpreting the truth value of selves presented online. As Andreas Kitzmann noted in 2003, after comparing the content of particular online diary entries to entries from handwritten diaries a hundred or more years prior, “diaries to be found on the Web, such as those posted on Diarist.net or Opendiary, do not seem significantly different from diaries written decades, or even centuries earlier” (Kitzmann 54). The ostensible similarities between online and conventional handwritten diaries, which had hitherto long acted as “sites of self-construction, self-expression, and self-exploration” provided a context in which users could readily engage, in digital, networked form, in a “process of self-monitoring [that was already] adapted to the rhythms and demands of individualism, capitalism, nationality” (Kitzmann 52).

Viewed in the context of the disembodied, multiple, playful postmodern conception of cyberspace identity promulgated by early cyberstudies scholars, this direct transposition of an older form of self-writing – the handwritten diary – into the online space could be seen as regressive, insofar as it represented the privileging of an Enlightenment mode of identity in which the self is regarded

as unified and centered, reflected upon and articulated – an “isolated, focused and internally driven agent of history, will, and power” (Kitzmann 53). Indeed, the transposition of the diary form to the online space could be seen, in some sense, as a response to anxieties surrounding postmodern notions of networked selfhood: by engaging in a familiar textual practice on the web, users could secure a space for seclusion and self-reflection online, ensuring a sense of continuity between online and offline modes of identity work that might arrest the fear of a looming “displacement of the page by the screen” (Birkerts 3). A return to the diary in a networked form could be seen as a means for web users to respond to the anxieties and insecurities provoked by the perception of cyberspace as leading to a “crisis of boundaries between the real and the virtual” (Shields 7); by reasserting the primacy of Enlightenment notions of selfhood and in so doing rejecting the ‘death of the old’, the online diarist could feel empowered in the face of technological changes that might otherwise be perceived as threatening.

The emergence of the blog as a medium, however, also served to covertly challenge Enlightenment notions of selfhood. By drawing an offline reading/writing practice online, practitioners could ostensibly reproduce the ‘same’ written work as that produced in their offline handwritten diaries, but “crucial differences” could be seen to exist in the “material and experiential conditions of the mediated expressions” (Kitzmann 55). In fact, while at first glance online diarists were simply ‘digitising’ an existing form of self-writing, “on second thought [the structure of computer mediated communication] is the total opposite of the conditions that led to the development of the personal diary, which is based on a different notion of time (delay, maturation, and accumulation) and of communication (deferred or exclusive, that is, based on secrecy)” (Lejeune 301).

The implications of these differences was, in some sense, initially downplayed by early online diarists, as well as by some academics who viewed the emergence of the online diary form as evidence that ‘life on the screen’ did not inherently ‘carry theory’ in the way Turkle and early cyberspace evangelists suggested. This reactive position is exemplified in the work of Esther Milne in 2003, who noted that strong similarities exist in terms of how a writer implies presence in letters, postcards and email, and that this evidence offered “a certain resistance to early cyberculture narratives in which the subject was liberated from the exigencies of materiality” (Milne). This position could be taken to encompass the work of the blogger, or the blog reader, who was presented with a medium that enabled one to bring their offline reading and writing practices

online, including reading frameworks the reader/writer could use to evaluate the truth-value of the selves presented in online spaces. Milne's suggestion that 21st century online writing practices might be more similar than different to nineteenth century written correspondence acted as a corrective to constructions of cyberspace as a zone in which conventional reading/writing practices did not apply. Moreover, Milne provided a valuable insight into how earlier reader/writers worked to convey selfhood, noting that presence was performed in nineteenth century epistolary culture "by a complex interplay between absent letter writers, face-to-face meetings and the material, epistolary system that renders problematic a strict dichotomy between embodiment and disembodiment" (Milne).

In a crucial sense, Milne's 'historicised critical media' theory suggested that 'cyberspace' did not serve as a useful construct, insofar as individuals had long constructed selfhood across disparate media forms with radically different properties, and readers had long been tasked with assembling those media forms to assess the truthfulness of writers' claims about the self. To take a historicised critical media perspective, web communications technologies were simply additions to an already varied assortment of media forms that individuals could use to convey presence, with individuals tending to work with the tools available to construct shared illusions of presence that are tied to an embodied self, rather than taking advantage of the limitations of a medium to engage in radical identity-play. The conventions that emerge around communications technologies, according to this perspective, are at least as important as the affordances of the technologies themselves. While it has long been possible, for example, to take advantage of the technological affordances and limitations of the postal service to engage in identity play (by constructing a pseudonymous 'second self' when writing letters), the norms that have emerged around epistolary culture do not normalise this practice; so, too, it could be supposed that web users would tend to make use of web technologies to support reading and writing practices which could support existing notions of embodied identity, even if doing so meant working around technological limitations in order to satisfactorily perform presence.

The emergence of the blog as a popular form of online communication served to bolster the position adopted by historicized critical media theorists, insofar as the connections between the online diary and its antecedents were rendered explicit. The 'rhetorical situation' presented to the online diarist was ostensibly the same as that suggested by Foucault, who noted that, in the act of keeping a handwritten diary, "A relation developed between writing and

vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent” (Foucault ‘Technologies of the Self’ 28). This conception of diary-keeping does not necessarily preclude overt identity play or ‘white lying’, but it does serve to render the playing of such games challenging than on MUD and chatroom platforms, insofar as attempts at ‘cyber-passing’ in the online diary format require a longer-term commitment from the writer than in the anonymous chat spaces of cyberspace. While identity-play in cyberspace environments could be seen to provide immediate gratification for some users, who could use language to immediately “make things happen” in real time (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 646), to construct a fictionalised identity on an online diary required maintenance, as the user was expected to return to the blog on a regular basis and provide an ongoing account of events.

Crucially, the broad adoption of online platforms in which individuals were encouraged to adopt an Enlightenment conception of selfhood may have reflected the fact that maintaining multiple ‘virtual’ identities can be exhausting. As Kang noted in 2000, a reluctance to engage in ‘serious transmutation’, in the form of maintaining a “portfolio of [...] parallel, multiply racialized (and differently gendered) identities” is “not surprising” (Kang 1182) when it is understood that simply maintaining one’s ‘embodied’ identity alone is work and “maintaining multiple identities is more work” (Kang 1183). The diary as a form, whether online or offline, renders identity play especially challenging, as the writer must ensure their attempts at transmutation or ‘passing’ are stable and coherent across an expanding archive of entries that a reader can access to cross-check against recent claims. As Lejeune notes, attempts at maintaining a ‘white lie’ in the diary format require increasing fastidiousness over time, as the diarist must ensure that they do not contradict themselves or inadvertently reveal that their identity has been fabricated. Moreover, as soon as the ‘cyber-pass’ fails and this failure is recognised by a reader, the entire transmutative exercise is rendered unsuccessful: “As for the praiseworthy efforts to change other people’s names [in an online diary], they collapse like a house of cards once your own identity is revealed”, Lejeune writes, by way of example (Lejeune 315).

2.2: Complications in the weblog era: the resurgence of of cyberspace era identity play on blogs

The affordances of the weblog did not entirely prevent users from using the form to engage in cyberspace era identity play. The ability to anonymously construct online diaries on emerging blogging platforms like Blogger, Livejournal or Wordpress, ensured that users with a high level of commitment to identity-play could still engage in ‘serious transmutation’. This was true, even as the adoption of the online diary form resulted in the normalisation of more traditional reading practices in online spaces. This could be seen as giving rise to a transitional period in which the affordances of newer online communication platforms appeared to provide enough informal ‘checks and balances’ to give an impression that users’ stated identities were authentic, but too few to categorically prevent deception. As Lauren F. Sessions has noted, coinciding with the emergence of Web 2.0, but before the rise of more sophisticated SNS platforms like Facebook, the web was neither ‘disembodied’ nor ‘full embodied’ (Sessions), insofar as the relationship between users and their corporeal selves remained tenuous. This lack of an unequivocal 1:1 relationship between users’ ‘online’ and ‘offline’/embodied selves sometimes resulted in frustrated attempts to ascertain the truthfulness of claims made by bloggers during this period. Moreover, the confluence of emerging reader assumptions around online credibility, coupled with the lack of sophisticated technical infrastructure to prevent identity fraud, led to a situation in which, as Folk and Apostel note, “elaborate blog hoaxes” became so widespread that a term had emerged to describe them: ‘false identity flogs’ (‘fake blogs’) (Folk and Apostel 241).

During this ‘weblog era’, nascent strategies emerged in which readers, faced with the possibility that a blogger might be engaging in identity play, could attempt to read critically to register inconsistencies, or would use other online services to cross-check claims. However, the crude state of these platforms often rendered such strategies ineffective. In 2006, Tara Brabazon referred to ‘the Google Effect’ to describe attempts made by readers during this period to verify the authenticity of information presented on blogs, often mistakenly assuming that entries that appeared at the top of Google search results were more likely to be truthful (Brabazon 158).

Notably, this period coincided with a broader discussion of how the truth-value of selves presented in print contexts should be interpreted and vetted. In 2006, *A Million Little Pieces*, James Frey’s bestselling 2003 memoir, was revealed as heavily falsified, generating an interrogation of the nature of the

implied 'contract of truth' between writer and reader. As web users were navigating the transition from cyberspace to the SNS era, this attempt to police the limits of identity play in different contexts could be seen to serve a practical purpose: establishing a template for what constituted going 'too far' when writing the self, which could be used to shape conventions for life-writing on online platforms. As Timothy Aubry suggests, though literary hoaxes were far from new, the complex response to the revelation of Frey's hoax served to draw to the surface the fact that "contradictory concepts of truth [existed] within contemporary culture that Frey had been hoping to negotiate for his benefit" (Aubry 155), which could also be seen to apply to those writing in online spaces. Writing for the *New York Times* about the hoax, critic Michiko Kakutani argued that "Frey's embellishments and fabrications in many ways represent the logical if absurd culmination of several trends that have been percolating away for years", which included "our culture's enshrinement of subjectivity", brought about and exacerbated by online writing platforms which rewarded writers who were "entertaining, snarky or provocative" at the expense of being truthful (Kakutani). Reactions to Frey's hoax, in other words, were complicated by the fact that many of Frey's readers were themselves engaged in the practice of publishing self-writing to an ostensibly global audience, and were themselves struggling to negotiate how to best manage deception in aid of self-revelation in a context that demanded authenticity.

Attempts to resolve this new set of conflicting demands – to construct an idealised online persona in order to entertain or appeal to readers, while regarding critically the attempts of others to do the same – were fashioned by Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons, who posited the existence of multiple forms of selfhood: the 'possible' self (the idealised self containing qualities one strove to possess), the 'actual' self (the self expressed to others at present), and the 'true' self (existing psychologically in the present, but "not fully expressed in social life") (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons 34). In some ways, this framework, established in 2002, was still rooted in a 'cyberspace-era' notion of the web as providing a space for individuals to deceive in aid of revealing the 'true' self to others. However, in the context of the transitional weblog era, in which online platforms and users were gradually moving toward a more direct 1:1 relationship between an individual's online and offline/embodied selves, the concept of the 'true' self manifested differently in online environments. While in entirely anonymous cyberspace chat rooms or MUDs, identity play could more readily take the form of the production of "decontextualised, incorporeal, genderless, raceless and ageless" subjects (Milne), the blog form implicitly

required the writer to prove their authenticity to readers by providing enough context about their embodied selves for the reader to cross-check their claims. This burden of proof placed on online diarists can be seen as leading to a more complex series of negotiations, in which the blogger could only engage in identity-play if they could first convince readers that they were not deceiving them.

Even if a blogger's ability to engage in radical transmutation *was* successful, their ability to role-play as a part of larger explorations of personal identity (writing from the perspective of their 'true' self) grew increasingly difficult as their audience expanded, as a growing cadre of readers would rigorously attempt to police the verifiability of identity claims. Folk and Apostel note the 2011 example of 'A Gay Girl in Damascus', a flog ('fake blog') purportedly written from the perspective of a lesbian Syrian-American, whose claims were read with deeper skepticism by some readers even as they were accepted as credible by journalists who used the blog to report on events in Syria (Folk and Apostel 242). Eventually, deep cross-checking of past entries provided one reader with enough information to disprove the identity claims made by the writer. Interestingly, however, in the case of 'A Gay Girl in Damascus', the blog author (actually a straight American male) explicitly signposted in an early entry that the blog was to exist as a space for identity-play, and that, "This blog will have what may sometimes seem likely deeply personal accounts. And sometimes they will be. But there will also be fiction" ('Amina Arraf's Attempts At Art'). Moreover, when the 'hoax' was revealed, the author argued that, "I never expected this level of attention. [...] I feel that I have created an important voice for issues that I feel strongly about" (West-Newman and Sullivan 102). This maps closely to claims made earlier by James Frey, who argued in 2003 – after the publication of *A Million Little Pieces*, but before his own 'hoax' was revealed – that "I've never denied I've altered small details" (E&P Staff).

Reactions to both 'A Gay Girl in Damascus' and *A Million Little Pieces*, then, are revealing of the strong expectations felt by readers, who determine the nature of an implied contract of truth primarily by reference to the medium or genre they are reading. The 'unmasking' of both authors indicates the strong expectation felt by readers of an implied 1:1 relationship existing between the self constructed on a blog and in a memoir, and the writer's embodied self. Even in the face of clear disclaimers made by a blogger or memoirist that their written work is designed to exist as a space for transmutation or personal explorations of the writer's 'true' identity, overarching genre-bound

assumptions of authenticity can result in the feeling of the reader being hoaxed when such expectations are challenged.

As Kang predicted in 2000, environments in which ‘transmutation’ can be practiced online would eventually come into conflict with ‘integration’ environments – the former, environments of role-play, and the latter those in which an individual’s ‘real-world’ racial, gender or other embodied traits were authentic (or assumed to be). In the case of ‘integration’ environments, reading practices were bound in a reader’s expectation that “the racial [or other] signal broadcast in cyberspace is the same [...] signal broadcast in real space” (Kang 1195). What was threatening about online diarists engaging in transmutation, even when such transmutation was signposted, was that fictionalisation of the self worked to reduce confidence in other supposedly genuine accounts of selfhood, by raising the possibility that the authors of those blogs, too, might be cyber-passing (Kang 1195). In response to ‘A Gay Girl in Damascus’, for example, journalist Kira Cochrane noted that “there are worries that this will undermine the lesbian blogosphere – creating a question mark over all who write about gay issues online” (Cochrane 8). This strongly reflected Kang’s assertion that the web would eventually split into zones of acceptable practice, in which, “A particular cyber space [...] cannot be simultaneously zoned for both integration and transmutation because of their conflict on authentication” (Kang 1195). However, it is telling that such concerns also apply to writers of memoir, who have been accused of corrupting the form by fictionalising components of the work (Steinberg 142). As Steinberg has noted, the desire on the behalf of readers to ensure that written work is decisively ‘zoned’ as either ‘fiction’ or ‘non-fiction’ is often at odds with writers seeking to challenge those same boundaries in order to convey their subjective ‘aesthetic truth’ (Steinberg 142).

3: The ‘SNS era’

3.1: The ‘SNS era’: the prohibition of identity play and the privileging of the ‘authentic self’

The more recent emergence of Social Networking Services can be viewed as an attempt to resolve outstanding issues regarding the ‘contract of truth’ that remained pervasive as web users migrated from anonymous cyberspace platforms to weblogs as primary sites for online self-writing. In broad terms, SNSs – which include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, as well as now defunct or abandoned proto-SNS services like MySpace or Friendster – can be conceptualised as proprietary platforms enabling users to “present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 1143). While the specifics of each service vary, two key affordances are shared across most SNS platforms: a semi-static ‘profile’, which lists information about a user, and ‘feed’ of ‘status updates’, which enable users to offer short-form ‘in the moment’ disclosures (or ‘micro’ blog entries) that are displayed to others in real time. These two affordances are supported by a ‘social graph’ structure in which users can create links between other users in order to view updates or to designate the nature of pre-existing relationships between them.

The development of these platforms over time is telling. From 2002 to 2008, van Dijck notes, “these sites were commonly run as community spaces, primed to facilitate *connectedness* between people” (van Dijck ‘Performing the Self’ 200), while boyd and Ellis defined SNS platforms in 2007 as, “[W]eb-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd and Ellison 201). During this early period, SNS platforms can be seen to have emerged as digital manifestations of printed directories or address books, providing up-to-date information about individuals to facilitate offline interaction. A story about Facebook, published in *The Harvard Crimson* the week following its launch in February 2004, draws attention to the simple structural conceit of the service, which remains roughly unchanged even as the service has expanded its reach: “The website combines elements of a standard House face book with extensive profile features that allow students to search for others in their courses, social organizations and

Houses” (Tabak). Services like LinkedIn, meanwhile, are designed to approximate “a system of access and control that mirrors that of the professional world, thus reproducing an ‘online Rolodex’” (Papacharissi 208). Even as SNS platforms have subsequently introduced additional functionality replicating chat platforms and blogs, the fact that SNSs were initially structured around the conventions of directories manifests in a focus on mapping relationships between registered users in a way that previous online platforms did not.

Over time, SNS platforms have shifted slightly in direction, even as their basic architecture remains unchanged. “After 2008, most corporate [SNS] site owners shifted their focus from running community-oriented platforms to monetizing *connectivity* by maximizing lucrative data traffic between people, things and ideas,” writes van Dijck. “Along with this shift came a change in platforms’ architectures; rather than being *databases* of personal information they became tools for (personal) *storytelling* and *narrative* self-presentation” (van Dijck ‘Performing the Self’ 200). This shift manifested most clearly in a privileging of a feed of status updates from other connected users as the primary mechanism for engaging with content on SNS platforms, even as profiles remained available as secondary mechanisms for accessing biographical information.

The popularity of SNS platforms far surpasses that of weblogs, which in turn surpassed the popularity of cyberspace-era environments. Over time, platforms and communities from past eras often persist, but network effects tend to draw users toward the most active communities of practice. Facebook, as the most popular SNS platform, is also the most popular user-generated online service yet established, with over one billion daily active users as of December 2015 (Facebook ‘Company Info’). As a demonstration of the popularity and ‘stickiness’ of the SNS, in a 2012 study of US undergraduates, participants reported spending over an hour a day on Facebook, with 80% logging onto the platform multiple times daily (Manago, Taylor, and Greenfield 375-376). As a service designed and utilised for emotional self-disclosure in a semi-public setting, for recording significant milestones, for media sharing and for informal private ‘chatting’, Facebook can be employed to supplant telephone communication, email, SMS, private journaling, as well as the maintenance of a ‘shoebox’ of an individual’s most cherished photographs and correspondence. Moreover, at a decade old, Facebook can be regarded as an established focal point for online interpersonal communication, both addressing and creating demands “for social connection and self-performance” (McNeill ‘There Is No ‘I’ in Network’ 66) while enabling the production of “everyday autobiographies” in

which every user is ostensibly granted the agency to narrate their present (Smith and Watson 14).

The emergence of SNS platforms like Facebook can be viewed from the perspective of web users – and platform creators – seeking to resolve outstanding tensions around zoning and the nature of ‘contracts of truth’ in online environments. While blogging platforms emerged from handwritten diaries, and implicitly encouraged reading and writing practices rooted in an Enlightenment mode of identity, in retrospect these platforms did not offer sufficient protection from individuals seeking to subvert reader expectations and engage in ‘serious transmutation’ or identity play, even as blogging platforms rendered identity play more difficult than on cyberspace-era platforms. As a response, the most used SNS platforms are distinguished by an increased focus on identity verification, and a structure of ‘gated’ access in which users must demonstrate a relationship with a user before gaining access to their updates or being able to reply to them.

On LinkedIn, for example, users must explicitly mark the nature of their professional relationship with another user, or can be introduced by a common connection, thus transferring the “protocol, routines and formalities of [offline] professional interaction” into an online context (Papacharissi 208). Facebook, similarly, adopts a ‘friending’ protocol, in which a user’s request to establish a connection with another user will only succeed if the requested user reciprocates – mimicking the informal bilateral structure of ‘offline’ friendship. On other SNS platforms, however – like Twitter or Instagram – a unilateral ‘following’ protocol is employed, in which users may connect to other users without reciprocation, which renders these platforms ‘ungated’ unless a user decides to activate additional privacy measures. ‘Ungated’ platforms can be viewed as more similar to cyberspace-era spaces, insofar as they can allow users to decide whether or not to present pseudonymously, and can facilitate interactions with strangers. On such ‘ungated’ SNS platforms, many of the issues of cyberspace identity play persist in some form, as users are required to navigate how to establish the truth-value of claims in an environment in which users can impersonate others or construct false personas (Atkinson and DePalma 192).

Gated SNS platforms, like Facebook, however, are unique, insofar as they provide a new set of compromises in comparison to cyberspace chatrooms or blogging services, placing additional constraints on the freedom of users’ identity claims in order to establish a ‘nonymous’ environment for all users (Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 1818). In Kang’s conception of zones of practice (Kang 1131), Facebook is firmly delineated as a zone for integration, in which a

1:1 relationship between an individual's online and offline identities (including race and gender) is mandated through a series of affordances and restrictions. While, in some ways, an SNS platform like Facebook is superficially similar to a blog aggregator – presenting micro-blog posts (status updates) in a roughly reverse-chronological feed to other users – the user implicitly relinquishes the freedom to engage in identity play on Facebook as a trade-off for the knowledge that other users are not engaging in identity play. On Facebook, this initially takes the form of new users being prompted to complete their profile, in which a recent portrait photograph and basic demographic information is solicited, as well as connections to existing organisations (universities, schools, or workplaces). This profile subsequently acts as an initial reference point for other users looking to assess whether the user is who they profess to be, with more accurate information increasing the likelihood of friends, colleagues and family members recognising the profile as legitimate and subsequently reciprocating 'friend requests'.

As danah boyd suggests, this process of 'identity creation' differs considerably from that required of new users in cyberspace-era MUDs or chat rooms, in which, "The process of creating an avatar and selecting virtual characteristics require[d] tremendous reflection" (boyd 'It's Complicated' 41), with a new user required to directly confront the constructedness of their 'new self'. By contrast, on Facebook the self-reflection required to begin participating is minimal, as the user is tasked with disclosing factual information about themselves in manageably small chunks over time. This may partially explain what makes Facebook such an accessible platform: as the rhetorical situations soliciting disclosure from users on the SNS are resolutely 'quotidian' (Killoran 'Rhetorical Situations' 280), users are rarely forced to confront the entirety of the selves they construct on the service. Instead, the image of themselves is constructed piecemeal, through the uploading of individual photographs, short accounts of recent events, and individual interactions with other users. To a 'reader' of another Facebook user's timeline or profile, an image emerges of the 'writer' as the aggregate of their actions on the SNS over months, years or decades.

In addition to the low level of self-reflection required to begin creating a Facebook profile, users are rarely burdened with providing evidence of their identity claims in order to guarantee the authenticity of those claims. Instead, Facebook's 'social graph' structure creates a context in which a user's identity claims must be validated by other users in order to grant those claims legitimacy. The 'policing' of identity claims on Facebook takes place in a granular fashion,

usually at the point at which any claim might be seen as intersecting with another user's claims. Just as 'friending' is a bilateral process, so too are claims of a user's membership of groups and organisations, which rely on a request and acceptance structure, with another user's confirmation of a claim required to confirm the association.

Of course, this structure is not infallible. As claims are made more broadly and this association policing becomes looser, users can subvert the affordances of Facebook to engage in benign identity play, by working with another to validate false identity claims about their relationship, location or family status (boyd 'It's Complicated' 45). On other occasions, those with access to another user's Facebook account can use that access to temporarily impersonate the user until the victim recognises what is occurring and engages in an account recovery procedure (boyd 'Am I a Blogger?' 139-140). On the whole, however, the scope for seeding seriously misleading personal information is low, as the accumulation of bilaterally verified identity claims on Facebook will either rapidly reveal a new user as a hoaxer, or as the embodied individual they profess to be. As Ben Grosser argues, it is the volume of information that Facebook requires of users that acts as the platform's primary identity authentication mechanism: "The more one's personal details are shared with the world, the harder it is to retrieve or change them without others noticing – and thus being drawn to the contradictions such changes might create" (Grosser). Moreover, as McNeil has suggested, on Facebook identity claims are rarely accepted as truthful on their own; rather, the 'I' on Facebook "becomes significant only through its network connections", such that, "Users rely on their network of friends to verify their identity" (McNeill 'There Is No 'I' in Network' 72). If a facetious identity claim is accepted by an individual's connections, therefore, it follows that these other users are likely 'in on the joke', rather than the victims of a hoax. By establishing online selves as co-created by users and their friends, family members, or acquaintances, Facebook enables users to engage in superficial forms of identity play while making it difficult for users to engage in sustained transmutative performances.

The difficulty of engaging in radical identity-play on Facebook is well-illustrated by reference to the 2010 documentary *Catfish*, in which a user manages to subvert the conventions of the SNS in order to fabricate an entire transmutative identity on the service. While the documentary superficially suggests that Facebook can be used to engage in deep identity-play, it draws attention to how usual and difficult it is to utilise an anchored SNS to construct and maintain a constructed identity. The challenge is far greater than on a

chatroom, blog, or non-anchored SNS, as Facebook's social graph structure necessitates an individual construct an entire network of false identities – what van Dijck refers to as a “complete Facebook reality” (van Dijck ‘Facebook and the Engineering of Connectivity’ 146) – in order to generate the impression that a constructed individual is situated within a co-constructed life narrative. In the case of the hoaxer at the heart of *Catfish*, identity play on Facebook served a similar purpose to that identified by Turkle in the 1990s – to explore multiple aspects of the self, try on new identities, and experience the ‘relief’ of escaping one’s embodied selfhood (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 632). For *Catfish*’s hoaxer, serious transmutation involved more than simply creating an anonymous account and ‘typing selves into being’ – instead, it involved creating twenty false profiles linked to multiple mobile phone numbers and directly “undermin[ing] the site’s directive usage rules by stealing profiles and photographs from other members” (van Dijck ‘Facebook and the Engineering of Connectivity’ 146). Moreover, attempts at ‘catfishing’ or hoaxing are growing increasingly difficult to sustain on Facebook, as increasingly sophisticated pattern recognition and machine learning techniques are employed to identify and halt suspected fraudulent activity (Cevahir).

3.2: Notions of ‘authenticity’ on anchored SNS platforms

The challenges of self-writing on indecisively-zoned online platforms helps to explain the continued growth of anchored and gated online communities like Facebook. Compared to cyberspace-era platforms, as well as indecisively-zoned SNSs, Facebook is unique in mandating ‘authenticity’ in a user’s self-presentation, which is achieved by exerting control over which types of identity claims should be encouraged or discouraged, and which should be read by others as truthful.

The strategies available for Facebook to coerce certain types of disclosures are driven by their control over the algorithms that determine which status updates reach other users, providing the SNS with leverage to implicitly instruct users how to ‘correctly’ write on the platform (McNeill ‘There Is No ‘I’ in Network’ 73). Facebook’s power over users is rarely exercised overtly; rather, if a user publishes updates that do not contain the disclosures Facebook wishes to coax, the user will simply find those updates receiving low engagement from others in their network. As Facebook’s interface does not provide users with sufficient information to identify why a post is performing badly, the user is

unable to gauge whether the SNS's algorithms are responsible for hiding that update from others, or whether others are viewing the update and finding it unsatisfactory. In order to ensure that Facebook's algorithms will display their updates to others, then, users must engage in a process of trial and error, modeling their disclosures on the interactions that receive the most 'Likes' and positive responses within their network. In this way, the user is engaged in a continuous process of their disclosures being 'graded', both by those within their network, and by the SNS's algorithms themselves. This system of feedback is both challenging and compelling. After all, the presence of engagement metrics provides an apparently objective measure of the quality of the work produced, rewarding the user for 'good' self-writing and giving the producer of 'bad' self-writing an indication that they should modify what they disclose. The feedback mechanisms provided by SNS services may also explain why they have managed to attract such large user bases. After all, as Killoran has noted, individuals "not already 'authorized' for autobiography by fame or social standing" struggle with public self-presentation, and are liable to lack confidence unless provided with strong and continuous guidance (Killoran 'Rhetorical Situations' 279). Services that can provide user with rapid public evaluation of their attempts at self-writing, then, are those most likely to encourage further responses, by ensuring that users are not burdened with the responsibility of continuously attempting to assess the value of their own work (Killoran 'Rhetorical Situations' 283). In the realm of self-writing, this rapid feedback system is unique to SNS systems. After all, the writer of a handwritten diary may write with some faint consciousness of a potential future audience, and the writer of a weblog with some expectation of a semi-regular audience response; on Facebook, however, the user is engaged in a continuous system of positive and negative feedback.

Of course, the conceit that Facebook encourages the sharing of an individual's 'authentic' self is problematised by these very feedback loops, which, as Barash et al. suggest, promote the playing of an "impression management game" (Barash, Ducheneaut, Isaacs and Bellotti 207). In some ways, playing this 'game' encourages a form of increased self-awareness, as users are forced to preempt how the image of themselves they present on the SNS may be received by others, measuring their intention against the qualitative and quantitative response they receive (207). Facebook researchers have noted that users have complex and varying understandings of what feedback on SNS platforms means, especially 'Likes', which serve as "Lightweight, one-click [affirmative] feedback actions", but that a low number of positive responses

does tend to act as a “cue to the poster that their specific post was not agreed with or deemed acceptable in some way” (Scissors, Burke and Wengrovitz 1501). From a random pool of Facebook users, over half (51.1%) of users who were cognizant of feedback reported that they didn’t receive ‘enough’ Likes, resulting in them ‘feeling bad’ or ‘underwhelmed’ when their baseline was not met (1501). In response, these users reported that they engaged in strategies to modify the style or content of their updates to receive more Likes, or lowered their expectations (1501). Those with low self-esteem, moreover, were more likely to modify their disclosures in an attempt to receive more Likes (1501).

Such research reveals how rapid social feedback mechanisms serve to encourage writers to continuously revise how they textually construct themselves on SNS services. This process of revision, however, raises questions about how the truth value of constructed selves should be assessed on Facebook and similar services. After all, while Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg argued in 2010 that, “You can’t be on Facebook without being your authentic self” (McNeill ‘There Is No ‘I’ in Network’ 68), Facebook’s reward mechanisms and algorithmic ranking call into question what kinds of updates are called forth and what kind of interactions are rewarded. If cyberspace chat platforms afforded users the ability to obscure their embodied identity in order to confidently share subjective or emotional truths, Facebook’s trade-offs establish a very different environment in which a user’s embodied identity is known, but users are encouraged to play an ‘impression management game’ to ensure their writing is highly ranked and receives ‘enough’ Likes. The purely user-generated rapid feedback component is not especially novel, considering that individuals routinely engage in non-written social exchanges in which they must engage in continuous impression management, modifying their behaviour in response to social cues (Barash, Ducheneaut, Isaacs and Bellotti 209). However, Facebook *is* unique in that it offers “perpetual contact” (Barash, Ducheneaut, Isaacs and Bellotti 207) with one’s social network, displacing other social activities and other forms of reading or writing (Turkle ‘Reclaiming Conversation’ 10). Moreover, Facebook is not simply a communication infrastructure platform, akin to a telephone or postal service, designed purely to facilitate the transfer of information between multiple individuals. Rather, Facebook’s algorithms and design decisions continuously alter how users’ updates are received by others, such that the company itself can be said to play an active role as an intermediary, coercing, enabling or restricting particular types of discourse.

As has been revealed throughout this exegesis, the concept of ‘authenticity’ is fraught. In previous sections, I have explored the tension

between individuals in resolving ‘contracts of truth’ while reading and writing in cyberspace environments, blogs, and memoirs. On SNS platforms, however, there is another ‘contract of truth’ in addition to that negotiated between individuals – a contract between users and the company that provides the SNS service itself. While communication services have historically charged users to send messages, and so, generally speaking, have little vested interest in what is communicated, Facebook’s business model is to provide the communication platform for free and to subsequently ‘monetize’ user activity by serving targeted advertising. With this in mind, Sandberg’s claim that Facebook encourages users to be ‘authentic’ is especially problematic, as Facebook “fails to question the limitations of that concept or its foundations (who determines ‘authenticity’? Who has access to it?)” (McNeill 68). Moreover, it is worth considering that, in order to demonstrate ‘authenticity’, users must work within the bounds of Facebook’s platform, which constricts the kind of self-writing that may be produced and how it may be responded to. Zadie Smith has argued that this establishes a conceptual model in which individuals must reimagine themselves as “a set of data on a website”, such that, “Everything shrinks. Individual character. Friendships. Language. Sensibility” (Z. Smith 59-60). The implications of this model are especially noticeable when the SNS’s database structure explicitly marks certain kinds of identity claims as invalid. Until 2014, for example, Facebook forced users to mark their gender identify as either ‘male’ or ‘female’, preventing transgender users from either expressing a more nuanced gender identity or opting not to disclose (Grosser). Similarly, Facebook’s ‘real name policy’ has served to delegitimise the identity of some users – “from drag queens to Vietnamese pro-democracy activists” (Hassine and Galperin) – whose identity is not linked to the name appearing on their “credit card, driver’s license or student ID” (Levy). Nonetheless, this database structure is effective when it does not overtly restrict identity claims, as it enables Facebook to guide users toward particular forms of communication by implementing features that simultaneously expand and limit the information a user may share. Notably, as users are unable to view the model of themselves that is provided to advertisers, they lack insight into why this data is being coerced by the SNS, but will regularly supply the desired information if the new ‘rhetorical situation’ is compelling and adequately facilitates communication between friends.

In theory, it is possible for the needs of users to align with the goals of the SNS. For example, users may consider having their activity monitored, compiled and assessed an acceptable tradeoff for free use of the social network

service. Notably, however, Stutzman, Gross and Acquisti have suggested that users are largely unaware of the concessions they are making, and are unaware of the presence of ‘silent listeners’: “Facebook itself, third-party apps, and (indirectly) advertisers” (Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti 7). While increasingly cognizant of limiting access of their updates to select audiences, users appear less conscious of the fact that even supposedly ‘private’ correspondence on the SNS is subject to surveillance and data collection. Often, this information asymmetry enables Facebook to display ads as if ‘by magic’ (Lanier 113), as users are unable to properly track how the SNS has managed to ascertain information about them. Stutzman et al. provide the example of an advertiser being able to successfully micro-target their ‘sponsored’ Facebook updates to reach pregnant Italian women, even if those users have not yet publicly disclosed their pregnancy (Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti 28).

The concept of Facebook as a panoptic surveillance space is illuminating. As McNeill has noted, Facebook’s structure, which encourages both continuous sharing and the collaborative construction of life narratives, encourages the calling-into-being of a form of a posthuman collective consciousness, or a ‘hive mind’ (McNeill 74), which requires a user grant the network itself the ability to act the “primary editor of his or her life story” (McNeill 76-77). In practical terms, this occurs in a number of ways. One mechanism is for Facebook to enable users to share ‘incidental’ data about others in their network – for example, ‘tagging’ friends in photographs or tagging their geographic location (Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti 27). The sharing of incidental data is a core component of the SNS, as it renders it difficult for privacy-seeking users to avoid their actions being assessed by Facebook, even in contexts in which the individual is ostensibly ‘offline’ or would not supply such information themselves. Gradually, these ‘tagging’ processes have been automated using machine learning techniques, such that the SNS can now recognise the faces of users in photographs and refine its model of an individual based on who they are pictured with or where they are pictured (Zhang, Paluri, Taigman, Fergus, and Bourdev). Another strategy employed by Facebook is to passively monitor a user’s online behaviour to generate data points that may be passed to silent listeners without that information ever appearing publicly, or to use the information disclosed in ostensibly private communication between users to help build the broad profile of the user that will be used to sell advertisements (Stutzman, Gross, and Acquisti 28). These strategies for developing a ‘monetizable’ model of users can be understood in the context of other panoptic surveillance systems, in which an individual moving through a series of ‘public’

spaces loses control over how their actions may be collated, interpreted, and potentially acted upon (J. Cohen 137).

As Cohen has noted, it is not necessarily the surveillance process itself that endangers or eliminates privacy. After all, individuals who move through cities are routinely captured on CCTV, but that captured footage is rarely acted upon – at least at present. Rather, “The real danger to privacy comes from databases” (J. Cohen 138), as the systematic accumulation of data about an individual renders it possible to systematise difference and prevent unsystematised difference from occurring. In Cohen’s assessment, there are two components of effective surveillance. The first, transparency, involves the construction of systems in which personal information is channeled to the surveyor, who may capture and study this data in order to understand and predict an individual’s behaviour (J. Cohen 137-138). The second, exposure, involves the construction of systems in which an individual recognises he or she is being viewed (J. Cohen 138-142). Drawing the two together, it can be said that, “Transparency alters the parameters of evolving subjectivity by imposing normalizing categories and distinctions; exposure alters the capacity of places to function as contexts within which identity is developed and performed” (J. Cohen 141).

Facebook is an effective surveillance space precisely because these transparency and exposure mechanisms are partially decoupled. For example, while users are aware of being continuously exposed, their primary fear tends to be of exposure to other users within their network, such that fears of privacy breaches fixate on unintended contacts (primarily parents, employers or teachers) viewing updates unintended for them (Scissors 1506). This fear of exposure, however, is unrelated to the transparency of these users to Facebook itself, as the company may access the entirety of the personal information users share, regardless of who they are attempting to share it with. Ironically, users are fearful of exposure to others within their network precisely because Facebook renders such privacy breaches obvious (an employer or parent cannot easily browse through an employee or child’s profile without leaving a trace), but are less aware of deep surveillance because the SNS itself cannot be surveyed. Facebook can subsequently construct a multitude of different spaces for ostensibly private communication, including closed message threads and ‘secret’ groups, to generate an impression that users are able to manage their exposure. However, privacy-seeking behaviours on Facebook will always fail, as the user’s actions are always transparent to the SNS itself, and can be made public at any time (Zimmerman), or simply collected and privately analysed. As

Cohen notes, this is representative of the structure of a successful surveillance mechanism, as “Transparency within surveillance society typically runs only one way; there is little public transparency about the algorithms and benchmarks by which people living in surveillance societies are categorized and sorted” (J. Cohen 137).

Facebook’s structure as a panoptic surveillance space calls into question the notion that its users may be straightforwardly projecting their ‘authentic’ selves on the SNS. As a service characterised by rapid feedback loops, in which users’ status updates are graded, both by other users and algorithmically by the SNS itself, Facebook serves as an environment in which identity is both performed and learnt through self-writing practice. This reveals two apparently conflicting demands: for a user to act ‘naturally’, while also learning to model the patterns of behaviour that are rewarded. These demands, however, can be understood as complimentary, as in a panopticon, according to Foucault, ‘authenticity’ has two components. On the one hand, a panoptic surveillance space functions as a ‘menagerie’, which makes it possible for the surveyors to act as ‘naturalists’ and “observe performances[of the observed,] to map aptitudes, to assess characters, to draw up rigorous classifications” (Foucault ‘Discipline and Punish’ 203). A panopticon, however, is “also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to try out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals” (Foucault ‘Discipline and Punish’ 203). The ability for a surveyor to coax surveyed subjects to modify their behaviour in a panoptic surveillance space is especially effective if individuals are unaware that they have been categorised. On Facebook, this can be achieved by ensuring that the actions of the SNS to alter behaviour are unverifiable, while encouraging users to identify the impetus for change are the result of social incentives (primarily ‘Likes’).

The algorithmic component of Facebook’s News Feed is the primary component of this strategy, in which status updates are ‘automatically’ ranked and displayed to, or hidden from, other users. As Frank Pasquale notes, the fact that, “Ordinary users can’t access, challenge, or try to adapt the code that Facebook uses to order their newsfeeds, except in the crude and stylized ways offered by the company” results in users being faced with only two courses of possible action: to accept algorithmic intervention, or to avoid SNS services altogether (Pasquale). However, as SNS systems like Facebook grow pervasive, the decision to ‘opt out’ becomes increasingly fraught. As van Dijck highlights, employers increasingly expect their employees to maintain their own active Facebook and LinkedIn accounts for the purposes of self-promotion and

business-related networking, such that individuals may find their job prospects diminished if they do not appear to have an account on popular SNS platforms (van Dijck ‘You Have One Identity’ 212). Similarly, the array of perceived employment and relationship benefits these platforms offer provides a strong social incentive for users to use them, even if they may find the panoptic nature of the services worrying. As Julie Cohen notes, “In return for its benefits and pleasures [...] the surveillant assemblage demands full enrollment” (J. Cohen 137).

The algorithmic ranking component of SNS services has been revealed as an effective mechanism for encouraging or discouraging certain forms of expression, in the process shaping what users view as ‘authentic’ behaviour. Users may suspect, for example, that posts in which others express a particular political opinion appear more than might be expected on their feeds, but lack the ability to decisively determine whether the SNS’s algorithm is skewing the content that is appearing along this dimension. Alternatively, Pasquale argues, the SNS’s algorithms may subtly promote or demote certain kinds of emotional display in a user’s feed: “Perhaps those who seem hypomanic will be brought down a bit. Or, if their state is better for business, perhaps it will be cultivated and promoted” (Pasquale). Foucault’s notion that power in a panoptic surveillance system should be both “visible and unverifiable” (Foucault ‘Discipline and Punish 201) is relevant here, as algorithmic ranking component serves as both the centerpiece of Facebook, as well as its least understood component. Crucially, it is impossible for users to access the criteria for how the algorithms sort posts – only to use existing information about Facebook’s business motives to hypothesise about what kind of content algorithmic sorting may preference. On several occasions, however, information has been made public about how Facebook’s algorithms are ‘tuned’, revealing that the SNS has been deliberately testing algorithmic changes designed to show updates to users to modify their emotional state (Sandvig), while leaks have suggested that internal teams may manually ‘inject’ or remove content from positions of prominence on the site (Nunez). More recently, following Facebook’s introduction of ‘reactions’, a feature enabling users to respond to status updates with a series of six responses, the Belgian police force warned users that this may serve as a tool by which the SNS was able to determine the emotional state of a user in order to more effectively place advertisements (‘Surfons Tranquille: Facebook, nouvelle intrusion dans votre vie privée’).

As Jaron Lanier has argued, the motivation for Facebook to survey and modify the behaviour of users is primarily economic. “Companies like

Facebook organize many people's digital memories," he writes, "for the benefit of remote clients who want to manipulate what's put in front of those people" (Lanier 313). The imperative to collate and supply user information to advertisers, as well as to ensure that the advertising content that appears in feeds is engaged with, can therefore be seen as the primary drivers of what constitutes 'authenticity' on the SNS. Laurie McNeill makes this case forcefully, suggesting that the algorithmic narrative Facebook presents to users "shape[s] the identity performances of members, in effect telling them what they are or can be, and to whom. The Facebook narrative is one of consumption, of lives, products, services, and software – and the self that emerges is a corporate one. The subject of social networking sites, at least in Facebook's case, is positioned as consumer and product-to-be-consumed" (McNeill 78).

4: The future of online selfhood

If, as Turkle suggested in the early days of ‘cyberspace’, “life on the computer screen carries theory” (Turkle ‘Looking Toward Cyberspace’ 646), then the ‘theory’ Facebook carries may be Baudrillardian. In Baudrillard’s conception of screens and networks, we now live “with no halo of private protection”, characterised by “the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat... a pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence” (Baudrillard 133). As has been revealed, this networked conception of selfhood, in which the user responds to continuous social and algorithmic feedback in order to learn how best to shape their ‘authentic’ self, has emerged gradually, as the result of shifts in the theory and practice of online selfhood over multiple decades.

Through this exegesis, I have explored a fundamental tension for the writers and readers of online lives: between a desire to determine how one is perceived, and a desire for claims made about the self to be ‘truthful’. Tradeoffs between subjectivity and objectivity, however, are not made easily. On cyberspace platforms, the ability to engage in radical identity play may have rendered it trivially easy to deceive others from behind a veil of anonymity. However, as the final analysis of the selves constructed on SNS platforms reveals, a strong focus on ensuring that individuals represent themselves ‘truthfully’ can involve the imposition of restrictive models of ‘authenticity’ that can be used to shape, from above, what kinds of identity performances are permissible.

My creative work, *The Golden Age of Autobiography*, can be considered an attempt to look further, taking the present era as my starting point to explore the implications of possible future trends in online self-writing and self-documentation. After exploring a movement from cyberspace environments promoting a view of ‘self-as-subject’, toward SNS platforms in which ‘authentic’ selfhood is algorithmically and socially co-constructed, the question becomes: where to from here? *The Golden Age of Autobiography* examines a conceivable future in which an individual’s online representation is regarded as ‘complete’ – in which, in other words, the ostensible entirety of a user’s ‘offline’ experiences are recorded, uploaded to an online platform and subsequently made accessible to others.

The emergence of lifelogging technologies – in the form of ‘always-on’ cameras, microphones, and body sensors – present unique challenges for

individuals. Some of the most obvious concerns relate to privacy, and the privileging of externally-imposed, ‘objective’ accounts of events. If an audiovisual recording of every moment of an individual’s life is accessible, after all, it will grow increasingly difficult for individuals to construct self-identity through the selective and subjective revision of their own memories (Jensen 238). Moreover, if the data collected through a lifelogging device is passed to an online service for storage, organisation, or sharing, new opportunities emerge for third party ‘silent listeners’ to engage in mass surveillance. The fear of panoptic surveillance is, of course, a perennial trope of dystopian speculative fiction, from George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to Robert Sheckley’s *Watchbird* or Neal Stephenson’s *Spew*. However, as this exegesis has revealed, the substantial – and growing – user base of SNS platforms reveals that individuals are drawn to panoptic surveillance spaces even as they find the implications of such surveillance worrying (J. Cohen 137).

It is likely, too, that there will be new issues to deal with as the volume of personal data produced and shared by individuals increases further. If the user of a lifelogging system records ‘everything’, after all, novel strategies will need to be developed, by users and platform creators, to make sense of the quantity of information being shared. In some cases, this may result in increasingly sophisticated algorithmic ranking and analysis systems being put to work on an individual’s recordings in order to identify and highlight the most interesting or memorable experiences; in other cases, our reading practices may change as we learn to engage with an influx of comprehensively recorded lives shared across digital networks.

The Golden Age of Autobiography filters these issues related to the future of online selfhood through the lens of family relationships. The work is written from the perspective of a boy, JJ, attempting to conceptualise the life of his father, Jay, by viewing the father’s recorded memories through the ‘Memoriae’, a fictional lifelogging device. As he views the lifelogs recordings, in a continuous audiovisual ‘stream’ that has been time-shifted by twenty-eight years, JJ simultaneously attempts to write a biography of his father, which challenges him to determine how to give shape to the networked recordings to which he is privy.

At the heart of *The Golden Age of Autobiography* is the question of how individuals adapt their life-writing and reading practices in response to the unique constraints and affordances of the online platforms they use. In the novel, the Memoriae system is “known for its quirks”: once the device is turned on, it records continuously and cannot be paused. This represents an extension of the

SNS model of online identity, in which ‘authenticity’ is mandated through restrictions imposed by the proprietor of an online platform. Similarly, as with existing SNS platforms, the *Memoriae* acts as a panoptic surveillance system in which the personal information passing through it may be used by the platform proprietor to serve their own interests.

Structured in the form of a bildungsroman, the novel explores three generations of the Bungard family: the protagonist, the viewer of a recorded life; his father, a lifelogger; and the protagonist’s grandfather, the creator of the lifelogging platform through which the father’s memories are recorded and shared. The relationship between these characters serves to illustrate the conflicting desires of those who construct and utilise digital technologies of selfhood, as well as the uneasy pact that emerges between them.

Throughout the creative work, the protagonist and his father attempt to determine why they engage in lifelogging (as ‘viewer/reader’ and ‘recorder/writer’, respectively), despite being ambivalent about the practice. The father’s desire to record, archive and share his ‘authentic’ self is driven both by familial manipulation and a desire to ensure he leaves a ‘trace’, even as he simultaneously attempts to develop strategies to ‘hide’ from the recordings. The story’s protagonist, meanwhile, grows dependent on his continued engagement with his father’s lifelog, even as he suspects this engagement may be detrimental to his wellbeing. These challenges, in different forms, are already somewhat familiar to many users of SNS services, as they struggle with producing their own life narratives, and consuming the life narratives produced by others.

The near-future world depicted in *The Golden Age of Autobiography* is not a straightforwardly dystopian one. Instead, the creative work depicts how lives and relationships evolve around the unique constraints and affordances of different online ‘self-writing’ services.

Conclusion

The balance between objectivity and subjectivity in online spaces is an unsteady one, and it is unlikely that the present SNS era represents a final point of stability. From the perspective of our descendants, it is interesting to consider that the lives we construct online may be all we leave behind. How we decide to create ourselves online, and what we believe to be ‘truthful’, may eventually constitute our ghostly digital apparitions, long after we no longer exist to set the record straight for our readers or viewers.

This exegesis reveals that there are significant points of tension in deciding which online services we use to write or record ourselves, and how we use them. On the one hand, we may wish to evade surveillance and control how we are perceived, while on the other, we may be willing to accept panoptic surveillance systems if we believe such systems ensure that others present themselves truthfully.

In the future, it is likely we will be presented with services offering new sets of restrictions and affordances. *The Golden Age of Autobiography* explores the ramifications of adopting one hypothetical service for recording and sharing a life. Over the coming decades, we will likely be inundated with a multitude of others: hundreds or thousands of apps, services and connected devices offering different tradeoffs for online self-writing. The choices we make may profoundly affect the selves we construct, and the selves we leave behind.

Works Cited

- Amina Arraf's Attempts At Art (and Alliteration)*. 2007. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20110607195354/http://aminaarraf.blogspot.com/>>.
- Atkinson, Elizabeth, and Renée DePalma. "Dangerous Spaces: Constructing and Contesting Sexual Identities in an Online Discussion Forum." *Gender and Education* 20.2 (2008): 183–194. Print.
- Aubry, Timothy. "The Pain of Reading a Million Little Pieces: the James Frey Controversy and the Dismal Truth". *Auto/Biography Studies* 22.2 (2007): 155–180. Print.
- Barash Vladimir, Nicolas Ducheneaut, Ellen Isaacs, and Victoria Bellotti. (2007) "Faceplant: impression (mis)management in Facebook status updates". *Proceedings of the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. Palo Alto, CA: AAAI Press, 2007. 207–210. Print.
- Bargh, John A., Katelyn Y. A. McKenna and Grainne M Fitzsimons. "Can You See the Real Me? Activation and Expression of the 'True Self' on the Internet". *Journal of Social Issues* 58.1 (2002): 33–48. Print.
- Barlow, John Perry, Sven Birkerts, Kevin Kelly and Mark Slouka. "What Are We Doing on-Line?". *Harper's Magazine* 291.1743 (1995): 35–46. Print.
- Perry, John Perry. "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." *Electronic Frontier Foundation*. 1996. Web. 1 May 2016. <<https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>>.
- Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic. "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook." *Science* 348 (2015): 1130-1132. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication". Trans. John Johnston. *The Anti-Aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983: 126–134. Print.
- Bell, David. "Cyberculturetheorists." (2006): 1–176. Print.
- Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg elegies: The fate of reading in an electronic age*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994. Print.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation". *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1–14. Print.
- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation*. First MIT Press paperback edition. USA: MIT Press, 2000. Print.
- boyd, danah, and N.B. Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13.1 (2008): 210-230. Print.

- boyd, danah. "Am I a Blogger?." *Biography* 38.2 (2015): 303–306. Web.
- boyd, danah. "It's Complicated." (2013): 1–296. Print.
- Brabazon, Tara. "The Google Effect: Googling, Blogging, Wikis And the Flattening of Expertise". *Libra* 56 (2006): 157–167. Print.
- Buckingham, David. "Introducing Identity". *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media (John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning)*. Ed. David Buckingham. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008. 1-24. Print.
- Cevahir, H. Kerem. "Breaking new ground in the fight against fake likes". *Facebook Security*. April 18 2015. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-security/breaking-new-ground-in-the-fight-against-fake-likes/10152707147695766>>.
- Cochrane, Kira. "The weird world of the web hoaxers". *The Guardian* 15 June 2011: 8. Print.
- Coffman, K G, and A M Odlyzko. "Internet Growth: Is There a 'Moore's Law' for Data Traffic?." (2015): 1–45. Print.
- Cohen, Julie E. *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. Print.
- Cohen, Phil. "Recognizing in the Inferno That Which is Not: Reflections on Writing a Memoir". *History Workshop Journal* 74 (2012): 173-191. Print.
- Cormode, Graham and Balachander Krishnamurthy. "Key differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0". *First Monday* 13.6 (2008). Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2125/1972>>.
- Cover, Rob. "Becoming and Belonging". *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014. Print.
- Crystal, D. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.
- Davison, Graeme. "History and Hypertext". *The Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History* (1996). Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10033/20050726-0000/www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/articles/davison.htm>>.
- Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society". *Annual Survey of American Law* 1994:3 (1994): 471–490. Print.
- Döring, Nicola. "Personal Home Pages on the Web: a Review of Research". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 7.3 (2002) Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2002.tb00152.x/full>>.
- E&P Staff. "'Star Tribune' Raised Questions About Frey's Disputed Memoir in 2003'.

- Editor & Publisher*. 11 January 2006. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://www.editorandpublisher.com/news/star-tribune-raised-questions-about-frey-s-disputed-memoir-in-2003/>>.
- Ellison, Nicole B, Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe. "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12.4 (2007): 1143–1168. Print.
- Facebook. "Company Info". *Facebook Newsroom*. 2016. Web. 1 January 2016.
<<http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>>.
- Fetherling, George. *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001. Print.
- Folk, Moe, and Shawn Apostel. *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos: Evaluating Computer-Mediated Communication*. Hershey, PA : Information Science Reference, 2013. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 1977. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the Self". *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* . Ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. 16-49. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Self Writing" Trans. Robert Hurley. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1)*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1997. 207-222. Print.
- Grosser, Ben. "How the Technological Design of Facebook Homogenizes Identity and Limits Personal Representation". *Hz* 19 (2014). Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://www.hz-journal.org/n19/grosser.html>>.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century". Ed. Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-181. Print.
- Hassine, Wafa Ben and Eva Galperin. "Changes to Facebook's "Real Names" Policy Still Don't Fix the Problem". *Electronic Frontier Foundation*. 18 December 2015. Web. 1 May 2016. <<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/12/changes-facebooks-real-names-policy-still-dont-fix-problem>>.
- "Individuals using the Internet 2005 to 2014". *International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*. 5 May 2015. Web. 1 May 2016. <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2014/ITU_Key_2005-2014_ICT_data.xls>.
- "Internet Users". *Internet Live Stats*. 1 May 2016. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/>>.
- Jensen, Marvin D. "Memoirs and Journals as Maps of Intrapersonal Communication."

- Communication Education* 33.3 (1983): 237–242. Print.
- Jones, Reilly. “A Critique of Barlow’s ‘A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace’”. *Extropy* 8.2 (1996). 1 May 2016.
<<http://reillyjones.weebly.com/critique-of-barlow.html>>. Online.
- Kakutani, Michiko. “Bending The Truth In a Million Little Ways”. *The New York Times*. 17 January 2006: E1. Print.
- Kang, Jerry. “Cyber-Race”. *Harvard Law Review* 113:5 (2000): 1130–1209. Print.
- Kennedy, Helen. “Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research”. *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014. 25-41. Print.
- Kennedy, Helen. “Technobiography: Researching Lives, Online and Off”. *Biography* 26.1 (2003): 120–139. Print.
- Killoran, John B. “The Gnome in the Front Yard and Other Public Figurations”. *Biography* 26.1 (2003): (2003): 66–83. Print.
- Killoran, John B. “The Rhetorical Situations That Invite Us Online”. *Biography* 38.2 (2015): 279–284. Print.
- Kitzmann, Andreas. “That Different Place: Documenting the Self Within Online Environments”. *Biography* 26.1 (2003): 48–65. Print.
- Kupfer, Fern. “Everything But The Truth”. Associated Writing Programs Convention, Washington, L). C, April 14, 1996.
- Kupfer, Fern “Everything But the Truth?” *The Fourth Genre*. 2nd. Ed. Robert L. Root, Jr. and Michael J. Steinberg. New York: Longman, 2002: 291-293. Print.
- Lanier, Jaron. *Who Owns the Future?* Trade Paperback Ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014. Print.
- Lea, Martin, and Russell Spears. “Love at First Byte? Building Personal Relationships Over Computer Networks.” *Under-studied relationships : off the beaten track*. Ed. Julia T. Wood and Steve Duck. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995: 197–233. Print.
- Lejeune, Philippe. “Diaries on the Internet: a Year of Reading”. *On Diary*. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009. 299–216. Print.
- Lesk, Michael. “How Much Information Is There in the World?”. 1997. Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://www.lesk.com/mlesk/ksg97/ksg.html>>.
- Levy, Karyne. “Facebook Apologizes For 'Real Name' Policy That Forced Drag Queens To Change Their Profiles”. *Business Insider*. 1 Oct 2014. Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-apologizes-for-real-name-policy-2014-10?r=US&IR=T>>.
- Markoff, John. “THING; The Internet”. *The New York Times*. September 5, 1993. Web.

- 1 May 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/05/style/thing-the-internet.html>>.
- Manago, Adriana M, Tamara Taylor, and Patricia M Greenfield. "Me and My 400 Friends: the Anatomy of College Students' Facebook Networks, Their Communication Patterns, and Well-Being.." *Developmental Psychology* 48.2 (2012): 369–380. Print.
- West-Newman, Catherine Lane, and Martin Sullivan. "Becoming: identities". *Being Sociological*. 2nd Ed. Steve Matthewman, Bruce Curtis and Catherine Lane West-Newman. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- McNeill, Laurie. "There Is No 'I' in Network: Social Networking Sites and Posthumanauto/Biography". *Biography* 35.1 (2012): 65–82. Print.
- Mendelsohn, Daniel. "But Enough About Me". *The New Yorker*. January 25 2010. 68. Print.
- Meyer, Robinson. "Everything We Know About Facebook's Secret Mood Manipulation Experiment". *The Atlantic*. 28 June 2014. Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/06/everything-we-know-about-facebooks-secret-mood-manipulation-experiment/373648/>>.
- Miller, Hugh. "The Presentation of Self in Electronic Life: Goffman on the Internet." (1995). *Paper presented at Embodied Knowledge and Virtual Space Conference Goldsmiths' College, University of London, June 1995*. Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://www.douri.sh/classes/ics234cw04/miller2.pdf>>.
- Milne, Esther. "Email and Epistolary Technologies: Presence, Intimacy, Disembodiment". *The Fibreculture Journal* 2 (2003). Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://two.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-010-email-and-epistolary-technologies-presence-intimacy-disembodiment/>>.
- Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013. Print.
- Morrison, Aimée. "Facebook and Coaxed Affordances". *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014. 112-131. Print.
- Nakamura, Lisa. "Cyberace". *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014. 42-54. Print.
- Norman, Donald A. "Affordance, Convention, and Design." *Interactions* 6.3 (1999): 38–43. Print.
- Nunez, Michael. "Former Facebook Workers: We Routinely Suppressed Conservative News". *Gizmodo*. 9 May 2016. Web. 20 May 2016. <<http://gizmodo.com/former-facebook-workers-we-routinely-suppressed-conser-1775461006>>.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1949. Print.

- Papacharissi, Z. "The Virtual Geographies of Social Networks: a Comparative Analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld." *New Media & Society* 11.1-2 (2009): 199–220. Web.
- Parks, Malcolm R, and Kory Floyd. "Making Friends in Cyberspace". *Journal of Communication* 46.1 (1996): 80–97. Print.
- Pasquale, Frank. "The Algorithmic Self". *The Hedgehog Review* 17.1 (2015). 24 August 2015. Web. 1 May 2016. <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2015_Spring_Pasquale.php>.
- "Surfons Tranquille: Facebook, nouvelle intrusion dans votre vie privée". *Police Fédérale*. May 11 2016. Web. May 20 2016. <<http://www.police.be/fed/fr/actualites/456-surfons-tranquille-facebook-nouvelle-intrusion-dans-votre-vie-privee>>.
- Pilisuk, Marc. "Prisoner's Dilemma—A Study in Conflict and Cooperation". *Harvard Educational Review* 36.4 (1966): 542-546. Print.
- Rak, Julie. "Are Memoirs Autobiography? a Consideration of Genre and Public Identity". *Genre* 37.3/4 (2004): 483-504. Print.
- Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Revised Ed. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000. Print.
- Sandvig, Christian. "The Facebook 'It's Not Our Fault' Study". *Social Media Collective Research Blog*. 7 May 2015. Web. 1 May 2016. <<https://socialmediacollective.org/2015/05/07/the-facebook-its-not-our-fault-study/>>.
- Scissors, Lauren, Moira Burke, and Steven Wengrovitz. "What's in a Like? Attitudes and behaviors around receiving Likes on Facebook". *Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing* (2016): 1501-1510.
- Sessions, Lauren F. "You Looked Better on Myspace: Deception and Authenticity on Web 2.0". *First Monday* 14.7 (2009). Web. 1 May 2016. <<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2539/2242>>.
- (2015): 1–14. Print.
- Sheckley, Robert. "Watchbird". *Galaxy* February 1953. 74-95. Print.
- Shields, Rob. "Introduction: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories and Living Bodies." *Cultures of Internet: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies*. Ed. Rob Shields. London: Sage, 1996. Print.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Introduction". *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. 1-26. Print.

- Smith, Zadie. "Generation Why?". *The New York Review of Books* 57.18 (2010): 57–60. Print.
- Steinberg, Michael. "Writing Literary Memoir: Are We Obligated to Tell the Real Truth?". *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 1.1 (1999): 142-147. Print.
- Steiner, Peter. "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog". Cartoon, *The New Yorker*. July 5 1993.
- Stephenson, Neal. "Spew". *WIRED* 2.10 (1994): 91-95, 142-147. Print.
- Stutzman, Fred, Ralph Gross, and Alessandro Acquisti. "Silent Listeners: the Evolution of Privacy and Disclosure on Facebook". *Journal of Privacy and Confidentiality* 4.2 (2013): 7-41. Print.
- Sundén, Jenny. *Material Virtualities: Approaching Online Textual Embodiment*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. Print.
- Tabak, Alan J. "Hundreds Register for New Facebook Website". *The Harvard Crimson*. 9 February 2004. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2004/2/9/hundreds-register-for-new-facebook-website/?page=single>>.
- Terranova, T. (2000). "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy". *Social Text* 18.2 (2000): 33–58. Print.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011. Print.
- Turkle, Sherry. "Looking Toward Cyberspace: Beyond Grounded Sociology". *Contemporary Sociology* 28.6 (1999): 643–648. Print.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. New York: Penguin, 2015. Print.
- van Dijck, J. "Facebook and the Engineering of Connectivity: a Multi-Layered Approach to Social Media Platforms." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 19.2 (2013): 141–155. Web.
- van Dijck, José. "'You Have One Identity': Performing the Self on Facebook and LinkedIn". *Media, Culture & Society* 35.2 (2013): 199–215. Print.
- Van Gelder, Lindsay. "The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover." *Computerization and Controversy*. 2nd Ed. Rob Kling. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996. 533–546. Print.
- Voida, Amy, Wendy C Newstetter, and Elizabeth D Mynatt. "When Conventions Collide: the Tensions of Instant Messaging Attributed." *CHI Letters* 4.1 (2002): 187–194. Print.
- Whitty, Monica, and Jeff Gavin. "Age/Sex/Location: Uncovering the Social Cues in the Development of Online Relationships". *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 4.5 (2001): 623–630. Print.

- Winner, Langdon. "Peter Pan in cyberspace: Wired magazine's political vision". *Educom Review* 30.3 (1995): 18-20. Print.
- Wynn, Eleanor, and James E Katz. "Hyperbole Over Cyberspace: Self-Presentation and Social Boundaries in Internet Home Pages and Discourse". *The Information Society* 13.4 (1997): 297-327. Print.
- "Yahoo! buys GeoCities". *CNN Money*. 28 January 1999. Web. 1 May 2016.
<http://money.cnn.com/1999/01/28/technology/yahoo_a/>.
- Yang, Catherine. "Law creeps onto the lawless Net. Can regulation and liberty coexist online? Or will technology outwit the police?" *Business Week*. May 6 1996. 58. Print.
- Yagoda, Ben. *Memoir: A History*. Penguin, 2009. Print.
- Young, Kimberly S. "Internet Addiction: the Emergence of a New Clinical Disorder". *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 1.3 (1996): 237-244. Print.
- Zhang, Ning, Manohar Paluri, Yaniv Taigman, Rob Fergus, and Lubomir Bourdev. "Beyond Frontal Faces: Improving Person Recognition Using Multiple Cues". 2015. Web. 1 May 2016.
<http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~nzhang/papers/piper_camera_ready.pdf>.
- Zhao, Shanyang, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin. "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships." *Computers in Human Behavior* 24.5 (2008): 1816–1836. Web.
- Zimmerman, Jess. "Social media is our modern diary. Why do tech companies own all the keys?". *The Guardian*. October 22 2014. Web. 1 May 2016.
<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/21/social-media-tech-companies-user-privacy>>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm grateful to my supervisor Dr Ros Prosser, for her thoughtful advice and feedback on the creative component of this project, and to my co-supervisor Professor Amanda Nettelbeck, for working with me to refine the exegetical component through the twists and turns of its many iterations. Many thanks, also, to Professor Brian Castro, for offering early advice on the creative work.

Thank you to Sam van Zweden for offering her valuable advice on the exegesis, and to Veronica Sullivan for early reading, late proof-reading, and generally putting up with me in between.

Finally, thank you to my family – Michael, Jane and Siobhan – for your endless help and encouragement.