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**The Gaze and the Other on Social Media:
Reexamining Existence as Human Beings in the Digital Age**

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5/1/2023

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Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I give an ontological analysis of human interaction on social media and explore whether the advent and usage of social media created an existentially favorable situation for human beings. My main points are that 1) the use of social media and making a post there would be existentially problematic from Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective although, in reality, some people seem to lead satisfying lives by using social media; 2) the social media companies as curators have an existentially negative impact on social media users although every user could still feel they behave autonomously when on social media. The crucial notions I often employ in this paper are "presentation of the self," "the gaze," "objectification," "consciousness," "others," and "freedom." Whenever I say "existentially problematic," I focus on that humans are not treated as human beings or their humaneness is disregarded.

With the advent and development of smartphones, we now use social media as a part of our daily lives. People watch YouTube videos instead of TV and watch movies on Netflix or Amazon Video. Instead of reading fashion magazines, young people follow celebrities or so-called influencers on Instagram and check the trend in fashion. People communicate through WhatsApp and Messenger. Teenagers create their own videos and post them on TikTok. When their posts go viral, they might gain great pleasure. On the other hand, their posts could get flamed if they make socially problematic posts. Some people may have multiple accounts on a single social media application and use them differently depending on their purpose. For example, a high school boy posts his dancing video on Instagram through his "dance account" while he complains about the amount of homework through his private or for-his-high-school-friends account. Social media now

plays a fundamental role in our everyday life and is a major digital space for human interaction.

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My ultimate motivation comes from my concern about the use of social media as a way of self-expression along with the social trend of emphasis on individuality. I experienced the easy use of social media and how human interaction takes place differently from face-to-face settings. About 12 years ago, when I was around 12, almost no one had smartphones or even cell phones. When I was 16, almost every classmate had their own smartphone and used social media such as Twitter and YouTube. Some made posts about hanging out with friends on their private social media accounts and some created so-called fan accounts to follow their favorite artists and built a new relationship with those who they had never met before. They had “online friends” besides “real friends.” Although now we can communicate with friends through social media basically whenever and wherever we are, this seems to me that people are obliged to be around other people almost all the time and their private time was significantly reduced and devalued.

I was and probably still now am skeptical whether my friends are willing to show their part of their private lives to other people. In a broader sense, I wondered if using social media would be beneficial for humans or fulfill our lives. So-called influencers, including YouTubers, seem to live satisfying lives by doing what they want and I heard young people, even elementary school students, dream of becoming influencers in the future. But, does gaining attention from other people bring them only satisfaction and mental pleasure? Does exposure to other people whom you have never met make them feel awkward as they might feel “being watched” by anyone? Additionally, do

influencers really do what they want to? Aren't they making an effort to maintain their "images" so that they could meet their viewers' or followers' expectations while disregarding their own interests? If so, is using social media existentially problematic? Since social media is now a part of our daily lives, answering these questions is associated with our contemporary way of living, which is why I write this paper. 5

What is in my mind when I say "social media" is "static social media", following the distinction Michael Lopato (2015) draws between static and dynamic social media. Lopato writes that "static social media consist of any content which is updated by a user and posted to any sort of virtual bulletin board – whether this information is distributed to the general public at large or to a small group" (Lopato, 2015, p.196). Static social media includes YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. I do not assume dynamic social media, which "consist of any website or structure where content, usually private or semi-private in nature, is shared with at least one specific Other with the expectation of a quick and personal response" (Lopato, 2015, p.197). Examples of dynamic social media are email, messaging, Skype, etc. Also, I disregard the functions of static social media which are common in dynamic social media, such as chatting and direct messaging. Thus, I pay attention only to the functions of static social media such as making and viewing a post.

As primary resources for this paper, I use Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1956), and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (2009). By employing a dramaturgical approach, Goffman gives an explanation of face-to-face human interaction as the presentation of self. His argument seems to capture the fundamentals by pointing out that humans behave differently based on the people they interact with by making up a certain self. Sartre

famously dealt with the issue of the gaze of others, which indicates that human existence is threatened because we are treated as objects although we are conscious beings. Based on Sartre's argument, I give an ontological analysis of human interaction both in face-to-face settings and on social media and an answer to the question of whether the use of social media is existentially problematic. Debord builds his argument based on the development of media and criticizes a society where everything becomes representations including human relationships. His argument of the spectacle is useful to analyze human interaction from the perspective of social media companies as curators and implies that people are inevitably alienated in the society of the spectacle and on social media, which would cause the problem of subjectivity impairment. 6

For secondary resources, I employ Bernie Hogan's "The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online" (2010) and several scholarly essays from *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism* (2017). Hogan attempts to apply Goffman's argument to the social media context. He builds his argument based on Goffman and shows the applicability of Goffman's framework primarily by taking the notions of "performance" including where performances are conducted and "the audience" as those who see performances. He draws a distinction between performance and exhibition and points out that an exhibition entails a third party, a curator, besides the audience. In *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, several authors applied and developed Debord's argument on the spectacle to adjust to a contemporary situation. For example, Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano coined the term Spectacle 2.0, which is the current version of the spectacle reflected upon information technological advancement.

Raffaele Sciortino and Steve Wright show the applicability of Debord's work by focusing 7 on Facebook and the connection between paying advertisement fees to social media companies and posting as unpaid work.

In Chapter 1, I primarily introduce Goffman's argument and apply it to social media. In the context of social media, I define two terms: digital and corporeal others. Digital others indicate other people who appear without bodies such as an account while corporeal others mean those who appear with physical bodies. Using this distinction, in Chapter 2, I emphasize the function of the gaze on social media while employing Sartre's ontological approach. In Chapter 2, by integrating Goffman and Sartre, I analyze making a post as a form of the presentation of self and the influence of the existence of other people on social media from an existential perspective. In Chapter 3, by introducing Debord and integrating him with Sartre, I explore the function and the influence of the curator of social media and the problem of the impairment of subjectivity. As a way to apply Debord's argument to the social media context, I coin new terms: neo-psuedoworld and sub-spectacle. By neo-psuedoworld, I mean a world that is alternative to the real world and where people can only behave in predetermined ways. Sub-spectacle, represented by a social media account, is a spectacle, which is a social relation mediated by images, of a larger spectacle. In other words, social media per se exists as the spectacle, and social media accounts are the spectacles on social media.

As a conclusion of Chapter 1, I argue that the distinction between corporeal and digital others shows that the existence of the other is not both spatially and temporally constrained with a poster. This is a crucial difference between human interaction in face-to-face settings and on social media. I end Chapter 2 by claiming that making a post is a

self-objectification, which is problematic because humans are treated as objects. Then, I 8
show that posters are more exposed to the gaze of others on social media than in the real
world because the other is always present. In Chapter 3, I conclude that I show that every
social media user is inevitably alienated and objectified by social media companies and
their subjectivity is also unavoidably impaired. However, people can still behave as
subjects while recognizing their own subjective ends and use social media as a proper
means to achieve such goals. As an overall conclusion, I argue that we might face a
challenging situation where we could have great tools to achieve our own goals, but we
easily feel existential anxiety in our everyday life. We call into question our *raison d'etre*
as humans as conscious beings.

The purpose of Chapter 1

In this chapter, I primarily focus on how people present themselves on social media and how they appear and exist on social media. The term “social media user” includes everyone who uses social media and a poster who makes a post and a viewer who views a post. Actually, a person can be a poster and a viewer simultaneously, but I distinguish them since they have different functions in terms of human interaction. To explain and analyze human interaction on social media, I employ Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach, which describes human interaction in real life by using a dramatical metaphor. By understanding his argument, I expect to apply it to the social media context and understand how people interact and present themselves on social media while highlighting the difference between human interaction in face-to-face settings and on social media.

I start my argument with Erving Goffman's dramaturgy. He wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and articulated how people behave when confronted with others by employing the dramaturgical approach. Dramaturgy originally referred to the theory of a composition of drama and representation of main elements. Goffman applied this theory to sociology and used a theatrical metaphor to explain human interaction, arguing we present ourselves to others like an actor playing a certain role and trying to give a specific impression to the audience, which I later call the dramaturgical others. Thus, in this book, Goffman articulates how people behave in the presence of others or when paying attention to the existence of others. Reflect on how you behave differently depending on the people you interact with throughout the day. In the morning,

you might say good morning to your family with pajamas on and messy hair. Before you go to work or school, you might fix your hair and change your clothes. You use slang when you talk with your friends but formal language to your boss or clients. It might sound strange, for example, when you say “would you please pass that pen” to your friends and “hey yo, what’s up” to your boss. In this sense, we play a certain role or present a particular self depending on the others we meet. The validity of Goffman’s employment of dramaturgy lies here and describes the phenomenon of how people present themselves to others. 10

Presentation of self in Goffman’s dramaturgy describes human interaction between performers and the audience. Performance is the presentation of self and the audience are those who observe performance. Goffman introduces the notion of “front,” which means “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman, 1959, p.22). He describes the way humans behave differently depending on people they interact with as putting a different front. The impression is the central concept and assumption of Goffman’s dramaturgy since he assumes that maintaining impression is human’s fundamental motivation to put a different front depending on people we interact with. We want to deliver a particular impression to match other people’s expectations. When you talk with friends, you put a specific front to deliver a specific impression, such as an easy-going person. Therefore, Goffman’s presentation of self is that performers put a certain front depending on the audience to deliver a certain impression to match their expectations.

Goffman’s dramaturgy seems to be applied to human interaction on social media. Technology has been advanced since Goffman’s time and now human interaction takes

place both in person and in the digital world. Social media seems to be designed to encourage people to create their desired selves to show them to others. They create or show their desired selves basically by making posts as well as accounts. In this sense, Goffman's dramaturgical approach and thus his effort to describe human interaction under the conditions of the presence of others seems to be employed in the social media context.

In "The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online," Bernie Hogan applies Goffman's approach to the social media context. He shows the applicability of Goffman's framework primarily by taking the notions of "performance" including where performances are conducted and "the audience" as those who see performances. He draws a distinction between performance and exhibition and points out that an exhibition entails a third party, a curator, besides the audience. Hogan points out that self-presentations are exhibitions since both curators and the audience observe them. I'm sympathetic with Hogan's view of presentation of self as exhibition since the curator aspect seems to be unignorable influence on social media users. Therefore, Goffman's argument can be applied to the social media context, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter.

Goffman's presentation of self

Goffman starts his argument by assuming that "when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation" (Goffman, 1959, p.15). We have an intention in our behavior when confronted with others. For instance, when I have a job interview, I use formal language and wear a

suit to deliver the impression that I'm clean, sincere, and sophisticated. Goffman calls people playing a certain role in daily life "performers" and defines a "performance" as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman, 1959, p.22). He then mentions "the audience," "observers," or "co-participants" as those "who contribute to other performances" (Goffman, 1959, p.16). Therefore, as a performer, I perform by using proper and formal language and wearing a suit in the presence of my boss as the audience.

"Performance" can be labeled as a "front," which is "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman, 1959, p.22). For Goffman, everyone always puts on a front when interacting with others. It might be easy to imagine a masquerade ball where every participant wears a mask. Putting a front is like wearing a mask and human interaction in the real world is like interacting at a masquerade ball. "Front" involves or is the cause of the impression that the audience receives. As he says "intentionally or unwittingly," the impression is both intentionally given and unwittingly given off. For example, when I worked as a tutor at a cram school and taught math to elementary school students, I used informal language rather than formal language. I talked softly and reacted to them a bit exaggeratedly. I intended to give the impression that I was not as rigid as their schoolteachers but not a friend-like person, which is the impression I designated. However, they might think of me as a friend who behaved like a brother or a teacher who was trying to control or manipulate them, which is the impression given off regardless of or beyond my intention.

Also, people have multiple fronts and thus we can select a “front” which would suit the situation. You may put on a front for interacting with friends and another front for your boss. Goffman specifies “front” as “personal front” which refers to the ideas of expressive equipment “that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes” (Goffman, 1959, p.24). “Personal front” consists of “appearance” and “manner.” “Appearance” is a stimulus which tells people a performer’s social function and “manner” is a stimulus which informs us of “the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation” (Goffman, 1959, p.240). Consistency between appearance and manner is expected. Thus, we expect the difference in social status among individuals will be expressed by the congruent differences in individuals' behavior and roles. For example, when we see a person wearing luxurious clothes, we might expect him or her to behave selfishly, arrogant, or unsympathetic. However, we might feel a bit surprised if he volunteers every weekend at an orphanage and has fun with the children.

In the process of choosing a certain “front” and thus presenting a certain self, Goffman points out that an individual 1) engages in activities that are “concealed from the audience and that is incompatible with the view of his activity which he hopes they will obtain”(Goffman, 1959, p.45), 2) corrects errors or mistakes before the performance takes place, and 3) will tend to show only the end product to the audience. Take, for example, a novelist. He will only show his completed novel to a publisher and won't submit a half-written one. He would modify and correct the plot or grammatical errors before submitting and doesn't often show readers or a publisher his efforts of writing.

These notions imply or are examples of how people pay attention to others and modify their behavior. 14

I'll introduce the concept of "backstage" as a related concept to performance. Goffman says backstage is "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performer is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman, 1959, p.112). In the backstage, performers, such as actors, put on makeup and get dressed to fit themselves into a role they'll play, and thus performers do expect that "no member of the audience will intrude" (Goffman, 1959, p.113). In this sense, backstage is a place where performers prepare for their presentation to the audience or others, and is hidden from the audience or others in general. In other words, in the backstage, performers do the work necessary to maintain appearances. Goffman, certainly, mentions the "frontstage" as opposed to the backstage. The frontstage is where the performance is given, thus performers expect their actions will be watched by the audience and the impression to be delivered.

Next, I will explore the notion of the "audience." To briefly recapitulate the characteristics of the dramaturgical audience, its members 1) observe and make a single consistent demand on a performer, and 2) are assumed to be continuously present to a performer, and thus they are placed in the same spatio-temporal locus with a performer.

The key underlying assumption of the audience is the spatio-temporal condition. Both performers and the audience are supposed to be confined to the same time and space as Hogan (2010) points out. Goffman describes:

[W]hen a performance is given it is usually given in a highly bounded region, to which boundaries with respect to time are often added. The impression and understanding fostered by the performance will tend to saturate the region and the time span, so that any individual located in this space-time manifold will be in a

position to observe the performance and be guided by the definition of this situation which the performance fosters. (Goffman, 1959, p. 106)

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The articulation of situations where both performers and the audience are placed presupposes that the interaction happens in face-to-face settings. This shows that the dramaturgical understanding of the presentation of self and the existence and influence of the audience cannot fully be applied to the social media context since human interaction on social media doesn't happen in a face-to-face setting in the real world. Rather human interaction on social media occurs through social media accounts as representations, and thus people don't recognize other people's faces. However, the presupposition of vis-a-vis human interaction alongside temporal-spatial confinement in Goffman's dramaturgy is worth noting to understand the characteristics of the audience, which is useful for later analyzing the difference between the audience and others on social media.

The audience refers to people who observe and monitor a certain performance while they are targets toward whom a performer directs his or her front. As I mentioned above, a front is a selective element which a performer presents to give the desired impression. With this notion, Hogan indicates that "the audience makes a single coherent demand on the individual" (Hogan, 2010, p.378). Therefore, human interaction is explained in dramaturgical terms such that the audience expects a performer to act and present himself in a certain way, and a performer sets a front to deliver a desired impression to the audience. Thus, the interaction seems reciprocal and the existence of the audience seems a precondition of the presentation of self or the act of setting a front. If there is no audience or others, a performer doesn't need to convey a certain impression by putting on a front. Therefore, it could be said that the audience has the gaze in a philosophical sense.

The philosophical gaze is different from the ordinary gaze in terms of its function. 16

The gaze in an ordinary sense refers to the cognitive function to maintain the eyes on a fixation point. In psychology, the gaze is often associated with emotions as Adams and Kleck point out that “both gaze behavior and emotion have been found to be associated with the behavioral motivations to approach or avoid” (Adams & Kleck, 2003, p.644). Thus, the psychological gaze not only functions to look at something but to convey emotions or other information. On the other hand, in philosophy, the gaze is also not merely the action of the look. Around the early 20th century, philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Merleau-Ponty argued about the gaze of others. Although their conceptions of the gaze differ, the philosophical gaze focuses on individuals’ awareness and perception of others’ existence. Therefore, in the dramaturgical context, a performer is aware of the existence of the audience and intentionally designs his behavior, thus putting on a certain front to deliver an impression.

Thus, as for dramaturgical human interaction, people are performers and confront other people as the audience while they selectively choose their fronts to deliver and manage an impression they want to give. They take care of their appearance and set up their front backstage where the audience cannot easily intrude. Performers notice that the audience has a single coherent demand and observe it. Based on this description of human interaction, I’ll analyze human interaction on social media.

Applying Goffman's presentation of self in the social media context is not a brand-new approach as I briefly mentioned before. Bernie Hogan, in "The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online," attempts to give an account of human interaction on social media by using Goffman's framework. Although Goffman is not a media scholar, Hogan thinks that his "dramaturgical approach is frequently considered a useful foil for understanding the online presentation of self" (2010, p.379). He points out that several articles refer to Goffman and explain the online presentation of self. Hogan argues that "a common thread running through these articles is that individuals would employ impression management (or the selective disclosure of personal details designed to present an idealized self)" (Hogan, 2010, p.379).

Putting a "front" is a common activity on social media. Using social media indicates that users potentially or rather inevitably interact with others. A typical case would be a person who has multiple social media accounts and uses them differently based on his purpose or intention. For example, a high school boy posts his dancing video on Instagram through his "dance account" while he complains about the amount of homework through his private or for-his-high-school-friends account. In this case, he presents himself as a dancer and a high school student, thus playing different roles. Therefore, "a dancer" and "a high school student" are his "fronts." By using different accounts, he manages the impressions he intentionally gives. Through a dancer account, he intends to give the impression that he loves dancing or wants to meet those who love dance. On the other hand, he gives the impression that he does not like his math teacher

through a for-his-high-school-friends account. This case applies to those who make posts 18 on social media. As long as people acknowledge that their posts are viewed by others, although every social media user either consciously or unconsciously understands this, they put a front on themselves, thus presenting a certain self to others.

Let me clarify the difference between presenting a self and playing a role.

Presentation of self includes the following actions: setting and choosing a front, having the intention to deliver a certain impression, and managing one's appearance. Playing a role also entails all three actions. Both presentation of self and playing a role entail that people or performers notice the demand which other people or the audience have toward them. However, while the presentation of self indicates showing one's ideal self, playing a role shows that one fits into a predetermined concept or image. For example, when you work at a cafe as a cafe waiter, you change clothes and behave as a cafe waiter so that customers can recognize you as a cafe waiter without mistakes. However, playing a cafe waiter does not necessarily mean that a cafe waiter is this person's idealized self, although it can coincide. Therefore, while the presentation of self entails showing an ideal self, playing a role involves fitting oneself into a predetermined image or concept.

It might be controversial to consider that those who only have social media accounts but have never made any posts also put a certain "front." I acknowledge that some people merely have social media accounts and have never posted or commented on others' posts. They often only view others' posts. I do not conceive of those who have social media accounts but have never made any posts or comments on others' posts as presenting themselves although some might argue that at the moment when they made social media accounts, they are present on social media. Their presence possesses the

“gaze” which objectifies people using social media, which I’ll describe specifically in Chapter 2. However, they do not put a certain front or even intend to give a specific impression to others. For Goffman, an impression is always both given and given off, and associated with the act of putting a front. On Instagram, once people view someone’s “Story,” which is a kind of post that disappears in 24 hours; the poster can check who viewed her post. In this sense, although viewers’ presence may have an influence on the poster in terms that she feels being watched, they do not seem to put a certain front when they see posts or give any impressions to the poster except for watching the posts. Therefore, in the social media context, the action of presenting the self includes 1) making a post and 2) reacting/responding to others’ posts such as by commenting or clicking on “Like.”

So far, I consider the presentation of self on social media to be represented by making a post and reacting/responding to others’ posts. Here, I’ll explore the possibility that having a social media account, especially making a profile, is also a sort of presentation of self. A social media profile often includes a profile picture, username/ID, and biographical information. If a person has not made any posts previously, these three elements are the primary information that would give impressions. I do not consider the case that individuals who have a social media account but have not made a significant change to their profile and made any posts and comments as a presentation of self. By non-significant change to a profile, I mean that they do not change the profile picture from the default setting or add any description to the biography. I do not think such a case is a presentation of self since they do not put a certain front or even intend to give a specific impression to others.

recognize this is the same case with making a post. The act of putting a description on a profile biography and/or changing a profile picture from the default setting seems to happen only when people intend to show a certain aspect of themselves. For example, Roger Federer, who is a retired legendary Swiss tennis player, sets his profile picture as a tennis player holding a tennis racket and puts a description on his biography as a pro tennis player on his Instagram account. His profile gives the impression that he is, exactly as he was, a professional tennis player even though we ignore all his previous posts. In this sense, even putting information on one's social media profile is a kind of presentation of self. Therefore, by the presentation of myself on social media, I include, (1) making a post, (2) commenting and/or reacting to others' posts, and (3) having a non-default setting profile. These three acts are compatible and I expand my argument based on these categories but primarily focus on (1).

The effort to maintain the coherence of "appearance" and "manner" is also seen in the social media context. Let us back to the example of a high school student who has multiple social media accounts, the dancer and for-his-high-school-friends accounts. When he uses his dancer account, he highly possibly makes posts related to dance although he might mistakenly post a photo that he originally intended to do on his for-high-school-friends account. It doesn't matter whether he intentionally or effortfully makes posts related to dance on his dance account. The act of posting only related to dance indicates that he is maintaining his appearance, which is impression management. He might also notice that his followers expect to see dance posts. Or even he assumes that anyone who views his posts likes dancing. By understanding others' expectations,

although it might be merely his assumption, he will be further concerned about making 21
only dance-related posts and making them look better. He keeps making an effort to
maintain his intended impression.

Therefore, as Hogan points out, impression management is common on social
media. What is unique about social media is that posts are recorded. In other words, while
performance is not recorded in a dramaturgical context since Goffman seems to assume
that the dramaturgical audience merely sees performances with expectation toward
performers in the face-to-face setting, posts are recorded on social media except for a few
cases. In this sense, although it might be correct to say that people put a front on social
media, it might be incorrect to argue that people “perform” on social media in a
dramaturgical sense. Hogan says:

Once a performance has been recorded, the nature of the performance has altered.
It may still be a presentation of self, and undoubtedly it continues to signify an
individual. However, it no longer necessarily bounds the specific audience who
were present when the performance took place. Instead, it can be taken out of a
situation and replayed in a completely different context. (Hogan, 2010, p.380)

Since posts, which are presentations of self, can be recorded and viewed by anyone
anytime on social media, the recorded posts are in some sense independent of the posters.
As for Goffman, performance is conducted spatio-temporally in the presence of the
audience. Thus, when performers make a performance, the audience watches it
simultaneously and in the same space, where performers and the audience cognitively
recognize each other. In everyday life, people cannot behave exactly the same way as
they did before. Even a professional golfer might be unable to perfectly repeat a swing. In
a dramaturgical sense, performers cannot show exactly the same performance again
although they have chances to engage in the same performance.

However, on social media, the posters do not always recognize when their posts are viewed. In other words, once they make a post, a post, which is the presentation of self, is exposed to others and can be viewed anytime and anywhere. Therefore, in terms of posts being recorded and viewed by anyone anytime anywhere, making a post is unique to social media and not necessarily a “performance” in Goffman’s sense. In this sense, I assent with Hogan as he thinks the presentation of self on social media is self-exhibition. The discrepancy in time between when a post is made and viewed and in a place where posters make a post and where other people view posts is the byproduct of the recording function of social media.

In terms of the preservation of posts on social media, deleting can be a unique action of impression management. Impression management is conducted before showing the end product to the audience or anyone using a social media app both in terms of dramaturgy and social media. Goffman, also, seems to assume that all actions associated with impression management are conducted before showing to the audience, thus backstage, since performance is done spatio-temporally in the presence of the audience. On social media, such as Instagram, users would choose photos and/or videos and also edit them before posting. However, they can manage their impressions by deleting or even editing previous posts. For example, on YouTube, people can make modifications to previously posted videos, or on Twitter or Instagram, people may delete previous posts once later they find typographical errors or their posts do not satisfy their own criteria. However, these actions that are conducted after having presented to others do not necessarily guarantee that impression is not delivered. There is a chance that others see posts before the poster notices errors and makes modifications or deletes posts.

Therefore, in a dramaturgical sense, the act of deleting a post happens in the frontstage. 23

Although performers do such behavior in the frontstage, some in the audience may not notice the change but some do.

Unlike the dramaturgical presentation of self, the presentation of self as a post on social media continues to exist even when people do not use a certain social media app. In this sense, the presented self seems independent of the user as having a body or physical existence. The presentation of self as a recorded post is different from the dramaturgical presentation of self in terms of the association with one's own body and spatio-temporal confinement. In Goffman's dramaturgy, since performers do performance spatio-temporally in the presence of the audience, the presentation of self as performance happens at the same time the audience watches it. However, on social media, others on social media do not see the posts at the same time a user made them. Rather, others quite often see posts after a user made them. People see social media posts, for example, when they are tempted to see them or in their free time. I'll specifically describe the characteristics of the existence of others on social media but here I emphasize that the presented self on social media works independently of the user in the sense that an impression is given to others even when the user, as a physical being, is not present or not using the social media app.

The existence of others on social media from Goffman's perspective

So far, I focused on a poster's perspective and analyzed the presentation of self as posting on social media while applying and showing differences from Goffman's dramaturgy. I will now turn to shed light on other people on social media. As Goffman assumed the audience is made up of those who observe performances, on social media,

there are surely people who view a post. Other people or the audience are crucial counterparts to posters or performers since human interaction cannot be established alone. As the audience influences performers by having an expectation and through observation, other people on social media would possibly do the same to posters. I'll explore others on social media by comparing them to the characteristics of members of a dramaturgical audience.

Here, I'll explore others on social media by comparing them to the characteristics of members of a dramaturgical audience. Again, I assume others on social media to be people who possibly view one's account activity, such as making a post. Therefore, I don't merely confine others on social media as "followers" on Twitter and Instagram and "Subscribers" on YouTube, but anyone who possibly *views* a social media post. For example, on Instagram, even though you don't follow a particular person, you have a chance to see anyone's posts unless their accounts are private.

The first question about others on social media is: do they also observe a person and expect them to behave in a certain way? The answer is yes, but only in part. All others on social media look at an individual account activity. The act of viewing an individual's posts seems inevitable since people are exposed to posts made by someone once they open a social media app such as Twitter or Instagram. Whether they follow a certain person or not, they almost unavoidably have a chance to see their posts. Therefore, regardless of the status of "follower", every social media user observes individuals who make a post, which I call "posters." Also, others on social media do not necessarily have a coherent demand for the posters they view. The demand is an expectation that people have toward someone. When someone is familiar with a person's

post, they probably have an expectation of how they behave. For example, followers of Victoria Beckham might want to and *expect* to see and want her posts only related to fashion. However, when we come across posts made by someone we don't know, we don't have a coherent demand for them. 25

So far, I showed what characteristics Goffman's audience and others on social media have in common. Here, I point out the unique aspects which only others on social media have while addressing the issue of how others appear on social media. The crucial difference between the audience and others on social media, I argue here, is that others on social media appear in two ways: others as merely social media accounts or others with physical bodies. For instance, you can check others' posts only when you use a social media app, thus physically using a smartphone or any other electronic device which has the app. It is obvious but you need your body, especially your eyes and fingers, to use an electronic device and check others' posts. Every social media must acknowledge this fact. However, social media users encounter other users not as those having physical bodies but rather as presented to other selves, such as a profile. More exactly, what we cognitively see others on social media is merely digits of a screen. We do not confront others having bodies. In this sense, in the social media context, we can distinguish whether others have bodies or not.

With this distinction, I highlight the duality of others, which is associated with the second question: are others on social media continuously present to posters? People use smartphones or other electronic devices to view posts and merely *appear* as social media accounts that can be categorized as "followers" or merely as "viewers." I will call others with physical bodies "corporeal others" and others as merely social media accounts

“digital others.” While Goffman’s audience assumes that performers interact with the audience in vis-a-vis settings where both of them can physically recognize each other, others on social media don’t confront individuals physically or at least with their bodies, which means that corporeal others don’t spatially present to posters on social media. Also, corporeal others are not always temporally present to posters, since they don’t constantly check or monitor social media. Therefore, in this sense, corporeal others are not confined to the same spatio-temporal sites as individuals and don’t always observe posters. As Hogan says, “many social media sites do not depend on being bounded in space and time with continued observation occurring between individuals” (Hogan, 2010, p.38).

While corporeal others aren’t always both spatially and temporally present to individuals, digital others aren’t quite the same. Digital others appear as being without bodies, as profiles or accounts. At a visible level, they are just a gathering of dots on a screen. Individuals or their posts are viewed by, or at least through, digital others. For example, suppose you make a post on “your story” on your Instagram account. Then, you’ll see the number of people who viewed your post, along with their usernames and profile pictures. Even if you have never made a post, as long as you have an account and followers, digital others are always present to you. They can appear as “followers,” “viewers,” or even as anonymous others. Therefore, digital others are continuously present to posters. In other words, digital others can “observe” or rather look at posters, which is the gaze of digital others.

Therefore, the difference between the dramaturgical audience members and digital others is the existence of the body and whether they have a certain expectation of

individuals. Then, the third question is: are digital others bound to time and space with individuals since they are continuously present to individuals? In some sense, they are. Digital others appear exactly at the same time when individuals make a post or even open a social media platform. Although social media users, especially those who make a post, do not always intentionally pay attention to or are aware of their existence, they are always on social media. However, to individuals, digital others seem to suddenly show up. For example, when posters make a post, they acknowledge the existence of others or feel they are exposed to others. Therefore, it might be correct to say that digital others are present whenever an individual uses social media since they necessarily share the same time and space. 27

Therefore, by conceiving others on social media as having both aspects, corporeal and digital, a) both the dramaturgical others, who are the audience in Goffman's dramaturgy, and digital others are continuously present to individuals but corporeal others aren't, b) both the dramaturgical others and digital others are in some sense bound to time and space with individuals while corporeal others are not, c) the dramaturgical others, corporeal others, and digital others "observe" individuals, and d) both the dramaturgical others and corporeal others possibly have a coherent demand on individuals but digital others don't. Table 1 shows the characteristics of each kind of other. Before I go into the ontological analysis of the dramaturgical others and others on social media, I'll describe the situation of how corporeal others and digital others interact.

	Dramaturgical others	Digital Others	Corporeal Others
Continuously present to individuals	○	○	×
Bound time and space with individuals	○	○	×
Observe individuals	○	○	○
Have a coherent demand on individuals	○	×	○

Table.1

Even when corporeal others don't open a social media app, digital others are present to and "observe" individuals. However, while corporeal others are using social media, they monitor individuals through their accounts. In this sense, it can be said that both digital and corporeal others observe individuals' activities on social media. However, only digital others *appear to* be presented to and "observe" posters. I don't deny the possibility that individuals are aware of the existence of corporeal others since they can check who viewed their posts when corporeal others react or view them because of the obvious fact that digital others can't voluntarily act per se. Based on this argument, digital others are like eyes which are continuously present to and look at individuals. However, it seems to me that individuals mostly pay attention to the existence of corporeal others as conscious beings although they don't actually or physically view individuals or individuals' posts. They do that only through the medium of digital others.

Another salient difference between dramaturgy and human interaction on social media is the existence of the curator, which refers to social media companies, such as Meta and Twitter. By understanding the presentation of self on social media as self-exhibition, Hogan defines curators as those algorithms which “select which artworks to display, where to place them, what narrative to tell about this selection” (Hogan, 2010, p.381). In Goffman’s dramaturgy, basic human interaction is depicted as a dichotomy between performers and the audience. This seems quite obvious since in face-to-face interactions, no one except for the audience would influence which front performers choose to present themselves. On the other hand, on social media, once you make a post, the post can be viewed by other people who might like it. The curator, or the algorithm embedded in social media applications, for example, selectively chooses a particular post made by a person you don’t follow on Instagram based on the data it collects.

Curators have the following three characteristics: filtering, ordering, and searching. Social media users might want to view a post including a specific topic they are interested in. If a post is public and mentions the topic, “it is included in the set of things to be displayed” (Hogan, 2010, p.382). Although Hogan does not mention it, I think social media can also filter a post by prohibiting certain posts. Posts that contain possible violence, discriminative speech, and pornography are quite often deleted by curators. Ordering means that posts are arranged in a certain configuration. For example, usually, posts are displayed in chronological order from top to bottom. Social media applications have a search function like Google. Users can look for a post by typing a keyword in a search box and can view their favorite posts. In face-to-face human

interaction, you cannot view only favorable aspects of a person and ignore unacceptable ones. Neither can you determine the order in how people present themselves nor is there a search box to see a specific behavior or performance. Therefore, the existence of the curator as a third party is unique to social media. 30

Perhaps, the government, law, or societal norm seems to work like a curator in the sense that it intervenes in human interaction as a third party. However, the curator on social media has more direct or strict influence and control over human interactions. It designates a situation or rather an exhibition which we see on social media. A national law shows the rule which people have to follow and punishes when people violate it. However, it does not prohibit everyone from committing a crime. On the other hand, the curator directly intervenes with every user by selectively displaying posts in a particular order and providing a function which we cannot use in real life. At least, on social media, every user is under the influence of both societal norms and governmental rules and the curator. Therefore, the impact of the curators cannot be ignored and the limitation of the applicability of Goffman's dramaturgy lies here.

Summary of Chapter 1 and implications of further arguments

Throughout this chapter, I introduced Goffman's dramaturgy to understand human interaction in face-to-face settings and applied it to the social media context. His dramaturgy gives plenty of perspectives to analyze and helps grasp human interaction on social media. On the other hand, we could find some social-media-specific characteristics or aspects, such as the distinction between digital and corporeal others and the existence of the curator. I articulated the fundamental structure and aspects of human interaction on

social media, but I did not demonstrate whether it is problematic or not. In chapters 2 and 31
3, I introduce phenomenological aspects by adopting Jean-Paul Sartre's and Guy
Debord's arguments to explore the possible answers to the question, "is using social
media existentially harmful to human beings?" Therefore, this chapter consists of the
foundation of these later existential and phenomenological analyses. Chapter 2 focuses on
human interaction and the presentation of self on social media by delving into the
relationship between them. Chapter 3 deals with the curator aspect of social media by
exploring the relationship between curator companies and social media users.

Chapter 2: Goffman and Sartre on Social Media

The purpose of Chapter 2

Based on the argument in Chapter 1, this chapter deals with the existential issues of using social media from Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective. The primary problems I tackle are 1) how people present themselves and exist on social media, 2) how people interact and deal with other people on social media, 3) the ontological meaning and characteristics of others on social media, and 4) how others on social media influence people. I first present Sartre's ontology and introduce some crucial terms, and then I analyze the presentation of self in Goffman's dramaturgy and on social media from Sartre's perspective while dealing with the issues I showed above. By employing Sartre's framework, I expect to describe the existential influence of social media on human interaction and human beings per se.

Although my focus is placed on social media, I still analyze Goffman's dramaturgy from Sartre's perspective. As is obvious, the major common element underlying both Goffman's and my argument is human interaction. Sartre gives an ontological analysis of human existence including the existence of others. I expect to build the existential analysis of human interaction and existence in face-to-face settings by figuring out whether the presentation of self and the existence of others is existentially harmful or not in reality. Based on the result of this analysis, I apply it to the social media context and attempt to see whether any difference would appear if the place where human interaction happens becomes different: from the face-to-face settings to social media. Since the presentation of self in dramaturgy and on social media seems quite similar in

terms of the existence of others and presenting a particular aspect of self, analysis of Goffman's dramaturgy from Sartre's ontology would delineate the commonalities and the distinctness between face-to-face situations and social media. 33

Sartre gives an ontological description of the existence of the self and others and the gaze of others. He is influenced by Husserl and analyzes human existence in terms of consciousness to develop the argument of what it is to be human. He defines two types of being: being-in-itself(*en-soi*) and being-for-itself(*pour-soi*). The fundamental difference between them is consciousness; being-in-itself is not consciousness but being-for-itself is. Being-for-itself describes human beings since we have consciousness while being-in-itself is often associated with objects. Also, the gaze of others is a pivotal concept in Sartre's ontology. Angelina Vaz says that "for Sartre the 'look' has been of utmost importance in his conception of our relationships with Others" (Vaz, 1995, 33). The gaze is a basic mode of social interaction and has phenomenological power, which is objectification.

Sartre's ontology: being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre makes an ontological distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself—roughly between consciousness, which negates and transcends, and unconsciousness, which is an object. Since Sartre took Husserl's phenomenology, especially intentionality of consciousness, consciousness is always consciousness of something, thus consciousness always requires its objects or targets. In *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology*, Sartre says "This necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself

is what Husserl calls ‘intentionality’” (Sartre, 1970, p.2). Also, we could see the influence 34 of Husserl on Sartre in terms of the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself as follows:

the basic characteristics of consciousness in phenomenology is intentionality – i.e., directed toward an object. The object (noema), which is realized and to which cogitation (noesis) is directed, belongs to consciousness and also to the process of cogitation itself (noesis), according to Husserl’s point of view. (Mentuz, 2018, p.77)

Therefore, we as conscious beings intentionally conceive of objects.

Sartre brings up an example of a waiter in a cafe. The waiter thinks of himself as being a waiter, which Sartre says is impossible since he cannot be a waiter “in the sense that an inkwell is an inkwell” (BN, p.59). He is primarily a person, just one who happens to be functioning as a waiter. Through this instance, Sartre distinguishes being-in-itself and being-for-itself and says “I am a waiter in the mode of being what I am not” (BN, p.60). Working as a cafe waiter is like playing a role and thus the presentation of self in Goffman’s dramaturgy. The key underlying assumption is that being aware of being a cafe waiter means deviation from oneself. The major difference between Sartre’s cafe waiter role-playing and Goffman’s performance or putting a front is that in the former case, people attempt to fit themselves into a societally designated role while in the latter they play a role they designated by themselves.

Being-in-itself is not consciousness, rather it is a pure plenitude of objects and the target of consciousness, which is being-for-itself. The cafe waiter example showed that the waiter attempts to treat himself as an object, not as a conscious being. Through consciousness, he captures himself as an object since consciousness conceives of objects. For Sartre, this phenomenon is a part of bad faith and seems to show that people cannot

be reduced to being-in-themselves since humans are by definition being-for-itself. Bad faith is a deviation from oneself in short. The cafe waiter deviates from himself in terms that he behaves according to the societal standards of being a cafe waiter. Therefore, what Sartre thinks is the necessary element of being a human is consciousness as freedom and human beings are not objects. In this sense, it is not acceptable when human beings are treated as objects not as conscious beings.

The existence and the gaze of others

Sartre also builds an argument on the existence of others in *Being and Nothingness* based on being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Before I go deep into Sartre's argument on the existence of others, I'll briefly introduce the issue itself. Sartre deals with the issue of 1) how I can "know" that others exist, 2) how others appear to me, and 3) if or how the existence of others influences me, which is so-called the gaze of others. I'll explain each of Sartre's arguments and then apply them to analyze Goffman's dramaturgical audience and others on social media, including corporeal and digital others.

As to the first issue, Sartre argues that knowledge is connected to the concept of "object." The issue of whether we can know *others* is associated with the philosophical question of other minds. People have a "privileged status" in regard to their own minds. In some sense, we have our inside information. However, with respect to the knowledge of other minds, we don't have inside information about them. Every day, we encounter others. They appear as bodies, having a certain size and shape. Although they appear as people, conscious beings having their own minds, they do so in a restricted sense. They

appear to us as people but like characters in our films. We can only see others from our own perspective, the viewpoint of our consciousness. We can never get inside of others; therefore, we cannot really know if others have their minds. 36

Katherine Morris interprets Sartre's argument in *Being and Nothingness* and mentions that "what can be known are, by Sartrean definition, *objects*" (Morris, 1998, p.47). The notion of "objects" is a counterpart to that of "subject." I delve into the notion of "subject" or "subjectivity" in Chapter 3 and here I use "subject" as an alternative to human beings or conscious beings. Based on this, Sartre contrasts Other-as-object and Other-as-Subject, which are Other-as-looked-at and Other-as-looking. As knowledge is by definition knowledge of objects, we can "know" Other-as-object and it is *ungrammatical*, in Morris's term, even to pose a question of how we can know the existence of Other-as-subject, which is not an object. Sartre also denies that Other-as-subject is probable. Morris writes as follows:

Probability concerns 'objects which appear in our experience and from which new effects can appear in our experience. There is probability only if validation or invalidation of it is at every moment possible' (Morris, 1998, p.48).

This indicates that Other-as-subject is an assumption or *conjecture* as its existence can never be either validated or invalidated as Sartre says "Other-as-subject can in no way be known nor conceived as such" (BN, p.293). However, this doesn't mean that we cannot know the existence of Other as a subject; we acknowledge the existence of the Other-as-subject only through their gaze. Both admit that people can know the existence of Other-as-subject once they are exposed to the gaze of others, thus experiencing being objectified.

I have to note that Sartre's Other-as-object is not merely an object but a meaningful object. As Morris points out, Sartre says "the conduct is originally released to

perception as understandable; their meaning is part of their being just as the color of paper is part of the being of the paper” (BN, p.347). By this account, Sartre dismisses the prejudice about objects that they are meaningless and what we perceive are meaningless objects. Therefore, Morris argues that “we know that Other-as-object exists because we see their consciousness” (Morris, 1998, p.50) since we can perceive the emotions of others, not by inferring.

Now, based on the argument of Other-as-object, I turn to Other-as-subject, which is ontologically influential in existence and causes existential issues. Perceiving the meaning of Other-as-object is the breaking point to the existence of Other-as-subject. Sartre argues that the existence of the Other-as-subject is as sure as my own since the Other-as-subject “is immediately present to me,” otherwise “all conjecture about him is entirely lacking in meaning.” Morris believes that Sartre thinks we affirm the existence of Other-as-subject with certainty, which is a certainty of our own existence as established cogito. The Other-as-subject is affirmed when I feel shame since shame appears only in the presence of the look of the Other-as-subject. Thus, the Other’s presence to one as one who produces one’s object-state “is experienced as a subject-totality” (BN, p.293).

So far, I have shown how Sartre responds to the existence of others. Now, two issues remain: how others appear to me and if or how the existence of others influences me. Ramm points out “for Sartre, I encounter others directly in my being-for-others” (Ramm, 2021, p.6). Sartre says, based on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “I find that being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*) appears as a necessary condition for my being-for-myself” (BN, p.238) since “self-consciousness is real only in so far as it recognizes its echo (and its reflection) in another” (BN, p.237). This indicates that we exist in relation

to others and the acquisition of self-consciousness is accomplished by acknowledging the 38
existence of others; otherwise, the “I” cannot reflect on itself.

As Morris and Ramm mention, Sartre considers that we experience the existence
of others or encounter them when they look at us. The look has the power of
objectification. Sartre says this about objectification:

By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment
on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this
object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of
another. Such an image in fact, would be imputable wholly to the Other and so
could “not” "touch" me. (BN, p.222)

Therefore, before I am looked at by others, I can objectify others. For example, when I
see a man dancing on a street, I can see him as being a certain distance from the ground.
Therefore, the gaze is reciprocal; we consciously conceive of other people and vice versa.
This argument seems banal since it seems a common view to describe the relationship
between people. However, since consciousness fundamentally recognizes only objects,
our relationship with other people can't be equal but somewhat hierarchical; either we
subjugate others or vice versa. In other words, when I exist as a conscious being, others
exist as objects while when others exist as conscious beings, I exist as an object. Thus,
the hierarchical positions are switchable and people cannot be conscious beings and
objects simultaneously.

The experience of encountering others by way of the gaze or “the look is
primarily experienced as negating and threatening” (Stack and Plant, 1982, p.370). The
act of negating oneself as an object for another indicates that one experiences being
objectified by conscious others. The gaze is threatening since humans are denied that they
are not human beings. When you experience the gaze, you recognize the existence of
Other-as-subject and feel subjugated by others' consciousness. Only when you are under

the gaze of others, do you “encounter other’s subjectivity” (Ramm, 2021, p.6). Although 39
you acknowledge that you are conscious beings, you are consciously aware of being
treated as objects. You fall under an ambivalent situation where you hold two
contradictory entities in yourself. Therefore, the gaze of others is threatening to our
existence because we are treated as non-human beings and subjugated by others.

Next, I will explore the power of the Look and deal with the third question 3) if or
how the existence of others influences us. Besides Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty,
Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and other philosophers argue about the gaze of others.
I’ll continue to focus on Sartre and his argument about the gaze since it can be
understood based on his dichotomy of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. As I mentioned
before, the gaze of others objectifies people. Stack and Plant say that “‘the look’ in
Sartre’s Being and Nothingness is the elucidation of that mode of being that is
characterized as ‘being-for-others’,” and Sartre maintains that “concrete encounters with
particular others are instantiations of this generalized awareness of being for an
anonymous other” (Stack and Plant, 1982, p.368). The anonymous individuals are
somewhat implicitly mentioned in Sartre’s works such as *No exit* and *The Reprieve*. In
No Exit, the anonymity of others is implied as follows:

This bronze. Yes, now’s the moment; I’m looking at this thing on the
mantlepiece, and I understand that I’m in hell. I tell you, everything’s been
thought out beforehand. They knew I’d stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of
bronze, with all those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only two of you?
I thought there were more; many more. So this is hell. I’d never have believed it.
You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and
brimstone, the “burning marl.” Old wives’ tales! There’s no need for red hot
pokers. Hell is – other people! (No Exit & The Flies, 1976, p.61)

Furthermore, Sartre argues that eyes can be represented by anything, and thus eyes are not necessary elements for the gaze of power. Even without eyes, the gaze of others works and objectifies individuals. Sartre says as follows: 40

In a word what is certain is that I am looked at: what is only probable is that the look is bound to this or that intra-mundane presence. Moreover, there is nothing here to surprise us since as we have seen, it is never eyes that look at us; it is the Other-as-subject. (BN, p.277)

In this sense, through the experience of being objectified, people may internalize the existence of Other-as-subject and the reminiscence of the gaze remains in themselves. Since only the sense of being gazed at remains in us, other people's presence is anonymous. The power of the gaze without the presence of others seems intuitive and seems to happen in our everyday lives. For example, when you walk alone on a dark narrow street, you may suddenly turn back since you feel that someone is walking behind you and find nobody there. In such a situation, you don't assume concrete individuals but an anonymous someone.

Analysis of Goffman's dramaturgical presentation of self from Sartre's perspective

Here, I'll analyze the phenomenon of the presentation of self in Goffman by employing Sartre's framework. The act of setting a front in the presence of others is a presentation of self and having multiple fronts means that different selves are presented. The one who recognizes and sees oneself from a different perspective, like a teenage boy controls a character when playing video games, is being-for-itself and the presented self or front is being-in-itself. In other words, I, as being-for-itself or consciousness, control or manipulate myself as being-in-itself. Therefore, my existence as being-in is always in some sense under the control of my being-for, which is consciousness.

has intentions on which impression one wants to give others. For Goffman, the distinction between impression given and given off is important. It indicates that impressions are given both intentionally and unintentionally. In this sense, we might be able to say that we cannot fully control what impressions being-in-itself gives. For instance, suppose a waiter working at a fancy French restaurant intends to present himself as a sophisticated and professional person, which is the front he sets and his appearance. He might wear a tuxedo and black well-polished leather shoes. However, people might assume he is too formal or inflexible, which is the impression that he did not intend to give but that was given off regardless of his intention. Therefore, we could create and present a certain self but couldn't always deliver the impression we intended.

Although we cannot control what impressions being-in gives, being-in-itself seems a medium or an object where an impression is given to the audience or others. Since being-for-itself is consciousness, being-for is not the deliverer of impressions but rather a planner or designer of impression or front. As consciousness is always consciousness of something, being-for-itself per se is like a player of a video game in the sense that they control a character in the video game world. Their intention or desired impression is delivered or comes into effect only when they set a certain "front," and setting or putting a front means objectifying themselves or treating themselves not as being-for-itself but as being-in-itself, or at least not respecting themselves as being-for-itself. Although it is not correct for Sartre to say that setting a certain front or playing a role is the mode of being-in-itself since human is being-for-itself by nature and cannot

simply be an object, it is possible to say that we treat ourselves as if we are objects, which 42 is self-objectification.

In the section on “Reality and Contrivance,” Goffman quotes Sartre’s example of a cafe waiter to show that social status or position is “a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated” (Goffman, 1959, p.75). What Goffman tries to show is that it is not proper to say that A is B, while B is one of the attributes that A has. He brings up the example of a young American middle-class girl who plays dumb for the benefit of her boyfriend. He maintains that we mean to disregard the greater part of the performance if we accept that this performer *is young*. “Young” is necessarily entailed in her performance but is not what she intentionally contrived. It is rather an attribute which inevitably comes along with her and with any of her performances. Goffman argues that “to be a given kind person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one’s social grouping attaches hitherto” (Goffman, 1959, p.75). Here, we can find the strong influence of Sartre on Goffman. By employing the example of a cafe waiter, in terms of bad faith, or more generally authenticity, Sartre points out the situation where we are obliged to become what we are by posing the question: “but what are we then if we have the constant obligation to make ourselves what we are, if our mode of being is having the obligation to be what we are?” (BN, p.59). Goffman seems to answer or at least explicate this question by indicating that a person becomes a performer by endorsing social demands or norms.

However, Sartre doesn’t seem pessimistic about being a performer or playing a certain societal role. Miranda Hu argues that “Sartre focuses on the meaning-making

mechanism of consciousness” (Hu, 2022, p.5). This notion shows us that although Sartrean consciousness allows us to think that playing a social role is a threat and how other people behave with a social structure would intensify such threats, it also can freely decide how important playing a social role is for ourselves. Hu further says “Even though individuals have different social roles and expectations, they nevertheless have the same structures of consciousness, making the meaning-making activity a type of freedom that everyone possesses” (Hu, 2022, p.5). Thus, since we can freely give meaning even when we play social roles, playing social roles and performing are not necessarily existentially harmful.

Analysis of Goffman’s dramaturgical others from Sartre’s perspective

At this point, based on Sartre’s argument, first, I’ll ontologically analyze the dramaturgical audience and others on social media. The dramaturgical others appear as both Other-as-object and Other-as-subject. Performers treat dramaturgical others as a group of beings, and thus a collection of individuals whom we fail to capture their individualities. As I mentioned, the audience is the target to whom performers give an impression by putting on a certain front, observing a set of individuals, and having a coherent demand on them. In terms of performers treating the audience as a group that has a certain common demand, they fail to deal with them as conscious individuals. The audience could appear with a quasi-anonymity as individuals and a group of people labeled based on a common demand. For example, suppose you give a presentation about a new product of your company to your clients. During preparation, which is done in backstage, you anticipate the needs of the audience and make adjustments to your

presentation to fulfill their expectations. You don't or almost can't assume unique individuals' needs. You try to grasp the general or common needs that all individuals have. In this case, the individuality of the audience is ignored or seems lost to you, which indicates that each audience member is not treated as a conscious being, therefore, is treated as the Other-as-object.

However, since the audience observes and has a coherent demand on performers, they also appear as the Other-as-subject. As long as the audience expects performers to behave in a certain way and performers selectively and intentionally "choose" a specific front which would meet their expectations, performers exist as being-for-others. The audience's demand or expectation is specific. For example, suppose you visit a fancy bar and order a dry Martini. You may expect bartenders to wear a clean white shirt with a black vest and the movement of shaking is sophisticated. Bartenders, especially those working at a fancy bar, acknowledge these expectations and behave accordingly. This example indicates the power of the gaze of others, objectification, and the bartender's existence as being-for-others. Coming back to the dramaturgical account, because of the gaze of the audience, performers are objectified, which indicates the audience exists as conscious beings. Therefore, both the performer and the audience objectify each other.

I don't deny the possibility that a specific individual can be assumed by a performer. When I made a presentation about an internship program to college students, I assumed one of my colleagues who participated in the program would be there and adjusted my slide presentation so that he would be satisfied with it. We can also create a persona based on someone we actually know well by abstracting specific aspects of them. However, even in such a case, the other, one of my colleagues, was treated as the Other-

as-object. No doubt I utilized him like an object to make my presentation better. He 45
became an object of my freedom. Here, based on Sartre's understanding of freedom as he
said "'by oneself to determine oneself to wish' (in the broad sense of choosing)" (BN,
p.483), I assume an individual's freedom leads to self-actualization. Once you create a
persona to devise a marketing strategy based on a person you are familiar with, the act of
abstraction indicates you treat them as being-as-object. Although you attempt to deal with
others as conscious beings, you cannot do so because you have already abstracted and
thus objectify them.

Analysis of the presentation of self on social media from Sartre's perspective

So, what can we say about the presentation of self on social media? First, posters
appear as conscious beings, thus not as objects, when they intentionally design or edit a
post. The act of posting necessarily requires posters to think about what to post or how to
make them look good, at least satisfying for the posters themselves. For example, on
Instagram, posters must think first about what or which photos or images they are willing
to use. A high school boy ponders which dance clips he should post by thinking about
which ones he thinks he did well in so that he is not embarrassed by being viewed by
others. By assuming that showing the desired self is one of the usages of social media or
one of the purposes of making posts, posting seems to inevitably include posters'
intentions or plans. Therefore, as long as posters consciously think about how to or what
to make posts, they exist in the mode of being-for-itself. In other words, the situation
where posters are conscious of their own intention or desire indicates that they are
conscious beings, not an object or passive ones.

Therefore, by way of making posts, posters seem to utilize others for their own sake, which means treating others as objects, being-in. If we conceive of the act of posting on social media as a way of self-expression, they might gain satisfaction by doing so. For example, an animal photographer based in British Columbia makes posts about animals in cold regions, such as narwhals and white bears. Her purpose in using social media is to let people know that global warming diminishes the habitat of such animals and the possibility of extinction.¹ She may feel her objective is achieved when the posts reach many people, thus getting lots of reactions. In this sense, she utilizes others for the achievement of her goal. Although those who “liked” her posts may not feel treated as objects or utilized for her own sake or are rather sympathetic toward her ideas, they might be still somewhat exploited by her, setting aside whether being utilized for her is completely problematic or inherently bad. Whatever they feel toward her, she utilizes and gains benefits, which are “likes,” from them. Although they are not obliged to “like,” their actions necessarily contribute to her advantage if they aren’t aware of her purpose of using social media.² Since utilizing others for posters’ own sake means objectifying others, in this sense, posters also exist as conscious beings.

The same thing can be said about making comments. As I mentioned, making comments is a way of presentation of the self since it basically entails expressing one’s opinions or emotions such as sympathy and pleasure. Perhaps, I should note that reacting to posts is a different way of self-presentation from making posts since the former can be done by any social media user while the latter is confined to posters. Therefore, those

¹ In Chapter 3, I specifically deal with the matter of posters having a clear goal to use social media.

² Again, in Chapter 3, I describe whether posters having their own purpose for using social media is existentially important or not.

who have never made any posts still can react to someone's posts, and such people are often called "lurkers" or "browsers." The possible ways how lurkers enjoy social media are to view posts related to their interests and collect information for individual use. For example, a professional photographer might use Instagram to see other photographers' posts for their enjoyment and also to learn new photo-taking and editing skills. In either case, the lurkers seem to consume or utilize posts or posters for their own sake since both viewing posts for one's enjoyment and for gathering information indicates that they are treating posters as objects in the sense that they treat posters as means to achieve their goals. Therefore, reacting to posts by commenting and liking suggests that the lurkers also exist in the mode of being-for-itself.

However, if I conceive of making posts as a way of presenting the desired self, this act seems a sort of self-commodification or at least self-objectification. As conscious beings, thus being-for-itself, posters create a post such as by editing an image and/or putting up a description. If these acts, including editing, can be considered as impression management in terms of Goffman and thus as the behavior of putting a front, posters seem to treat themselves as something that can be modified or controlled. Furthermore, they utilize themselves by treating others as objects to achieve their own goal, giving an intended impression to other people. Leaving the issue of whether treating oneself as an object is inherently unacceptable or not or by definition bad or not, making posts seems to indicate that posters intentionally manipulate themselves. If posters' motivation to post on social media comes from their desire to get as many "likes" and/or favorable comments as possible, they objectify themselves for others' sake on social media. In this sense, posters become being-for-others, which means that their own actions are primarily

done for others, not genuinely for themselves³. Therefore, if posters edit their posts to get 48 a lot of positive reactions, they objectify or commodify themselves to meet others' demands or entertain others. This shows that, although posters exist as conscious beings, they objectify themselves, and thus treat themselves as objects or being-in by making posts. Moreover, since consciousness basically conceives of objects, the presented self as a post must be an object. Posters in the mode of being-for-itself recognize or at least treat their posts as objects rather than themselves as being-for-itself.

Also, as I described in Chapter 1, if we can assume posts on social media are presentations of the self, they have an object-like aspect since they can be edited and modified before being posted and deleted after being posted. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, the presented self as posts can be edited or modified by posters for them to achieve their own goals, such as getting many “likes” from others. Presented self as posts can be deleted by posters even after being posted when posters find something unapproved for themselves. They may find a typographical error or an area for further modification on an image. This is a crucial difference from how we present ourselves to other people in everyday life as Goffman assumed. Once you put on a front and confront others in your presence, basically, although not always, the impression has been delivered to others. People, or performers, can try to modify or update the impression other people or the dramaturgical others received by putting on another front. On the other hand, on social media, posters can delete their posts even before other people notice they had made them. Therefore, a time gap could occur between the moment the impression is created or posts are made and other people receive the impression or see the posts. Face-to-face

³ I'll further discuss this issue in chapter 3.

interaction is instantaneous or momentarily in terms that the impression is received by others soon after it was made. This means it is almost impossible that other people don't receive the impression. Therefore, the occurrence-reception gap of the impression is unique to the social media context and allows posters to have additional opportunities to treat themselves as object-like beings by deleting posts. This is because of the recording function of social media as Hogan points out. 49

The possibility that posters treat themselves as objects can specifically be interpreted that the presented self on social media can be objectified or rather is a product of one's own objectification. The presented self as a post on social media appears in the mode of being-in-itself. I consider any kind of post to be a presentation of the self even when they don't include any posters' personal information such as the face. For example, an animal photographer makes posts of animal photos, not herself. Although her photos don't include herself, as long as she has the intention or the impression to be given to her followers, I think they are presented selves. The impression matters here since the act of presenting the self necessarily entails giving impressions. As Goffman points out, the purpose of presenting oneself is impression management. Therefore, even if she posts only a photo without any descriptions, which might rarely happen on Instagram, it delivers a certain impression to others on social media, setting aside whether others can properly understand the intended impression or not. Thus, since posts necessarily deliver a certain impression to others, even if posts don't include posters' information, we can understand posts on social media as forms of self-presentation.

The fact that posts can be edited before being posted and deleted after being posted indicates that posts often include preservability, and thus can be recorded as

Hogan points out. Posts can be recorded semi-permanently, which means that posts are 50 permanently preserved except for a few cases, such as when posters intentionally delete their post. This is a unique case on social media in comparison to face-to-face interaction, in which the impression is instantly delivered to others and disappears and is preserved only in the receivers' memory. Thus, once posts are made, the impression also tends to be preserved permanently. Also, the preservability of the impression or posts on social media shows that the exact same impression can be delivered to the same individuals repeatedly and a lot of people have a chance to view the posts or receive the impression compared to face-to-face interaction. When you see someone's social media account, you can see the same posts again and again as long as they are not deleted. In addition to that, if you make a public post, and thus non-followers can view it, the number of viewers will continuously increase until it is deleted. Therefore, the preservability of posts as forms of self-presentation seems an object-like characteristic because they can be edited and deleted. This shows making a post is a way of self-objectification.

In terms of the preservability of posts, posts as forms of self-presentation seem to behave independently of the posters' will. In other words, the presented self on social media has automatism. They deliver the impression to others on social media. According to Goffman, an impression is both given and given off, which means the impression is intended by a person while people can receive it differently. When posts are made, thus preserved on a certain social media platform as a part of account information, the impression can be simultaneously preserved. Since people can interpret the impression in a different way than the posters intended, the impression may not be properly or correctly conserved as the posters intended. However, the impression is still given and given off to

others. When a post, which was made about 2 years ago and forgotten by the poster, is viewed by others now, although posters now even do not mind how others interpret the impression, still, the impression is delivered. In this sense, posts as forms of self-presentation seem to walk alone independent of posters. 51

Then, if the presented self behaves somewhat independently of posters in terms of delivering the impression, can we say that the presented self appears as being-for or conscious being? I think we can't. Posts as forms of the presentation of self are objects since they are products of posters or the medium through which posters deliver an intended message. Besides, others on social media treat posts as forms of self-presentation as objects such as by viewing them for their enjoyment. Thus, although posts as forms of the presentation of self deliver a certain impression to others independently of posters, they do not appear as a being-for or conscious being, which indicates that having the power of delivering an impression is not a necessary property to be a conscious being. Furthermore, since the posts as forms of the presentation of self are objects, they cannot have the gaze, and thus cannot objectify others and others do not feel objectified by the posts.

Analysis of others on social media from Sartre's perspective

Now, I'll analyze the others on social media in terms of Sartre's framework. As I mentioned before, others on social media don't confront individuals with physical bodies. Corporeal others are not spatially and temporally present to individuals while digital others are always present to individuals even when corporeal others are not using smartphones. As for others on social media, we can see anonymity as we did in the case

of the dramaturgical others. Others on social media appear as a quasi-totality, which means their individuality is lost. Social media usage presupposes that people's posts are being watched by more than a single person, which means people make a post so that a certain number of others would see it regardless of the fact that they selectively choose their followers.

Also, what is especially unique to those who use multiple accounts on a single social media platform is that they present different selves and manage their followers depending on the account they use. This follower management is mentioned as "audience segregation" in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman says:

"by audience segregation, the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting" (Goffman, 1959, p.49).

Therefore, the audience is distinguished as a group for individuals to maintain their fostered impression which a presented self gives off. Thus, those who use multiple social media accounts abstract others and lump them together by labeling. For example, suppose you have two accounts; one is a private account to post pictures of playing with friends and the other is a public one to show hobby photos of drawing. By making audience segregation in this way, you simultaneously label each group of followers; the former as "friends" and the latter as "someone who likes art" or simply "the anonymous." By making a private account, you selectively choose people who can follow your account, which is audience segregation. By way of showing your specific aspect to limited individuals, you objectify others.

I'll delve into the analysis of others on social media by focusing on digital others and further dividing them into followers and non-followers. As for Instagram and Twitter, unless people make their accounts private, basically anyone can view the posts.

On Instagram, once you tap a magnifying glass icon, the “Explore Page,” you can view 53 posts that people you do not follow posted. Therefore, if you post on Instagram with your public account, others simply appear anonymous since you never know who will view your post. Even followers, although they might be one’s real friends, appear as somewhat anonymous beings. Again, others as a group can be categorized or labeled depending on a common demand or qualities which one finds out. The label does not make others completely anonymous. Pulling up the example of labeling followers of one’s private account, one recognizes that all followers of one’s private account are “friends” and assume that they have common attributes. In this sense, followers appear as more concrete beings than non-followers. However, followers and non-followers appear as Others-as-object since both lack individuality and are utilized for one’s freedom, in other words, for the sake of one’s self-actualization, which I think is one of the motivations for people to use social media. Therefore, others on social media appear or exist as others-as-object.

However, others on social media don’t only appear in the mode of Other-as-object but as Other-as-subject in terms of the gaze. Again, the gaze or the look is the crucial term for Sartre since people recognize Other-as-subject through the gaze of others. Also, because of the gaze of others, people feel shame. As Sartre says “I am ashamed of what I am” (BN, p.221), I feel shame in the mode of being-for-itself, which presupposes that I encountered an Other-as-subject and was objectified. Based on these notions, Others on social media appear in the mode of Other-as-subject because they observe individuals. For instance, others on social media, especially as corporeal others, treat individuals as objects by viewing their posts. Others consume the posts on social media for the sake of

enjoyment. In other words, by choosing to view individuals' posts on social media, probably for others' personal purposes, they utilize and subjugate individuals as those who make a post. Rather, if we assume that social media posts are a kind of presentation of self, others might consume the posts by viewing them. So we may be able to say that we expropriate individuals in the mode of being-as-object.

I will see whether digital and corporeal others have different functions in terms of the gaze. Corporeal others observe individuals on social media through their own accounts, and thus they gaze at posters or posts through their accounts. The gaze of corporeal others seems intuitive since their gaze is basically made by their eyes. However, since corporeal others are not spatially and temporally present to posters, their gaze, which includes their bodies, seems not a huge factor. I should mention that for Sartre the body of the other is not the main factor of the gaze, and eyes can be represented by anything and thus the gaze can be anything. Therefore, although digital others are bodiless beings, since the gaze of others can work without physical eyes, they are spatially and temporally present to individuals, objectification of individuals is basically due to digital others. For example, the gaze can be represented by a smartphone or a laptop. In this sense, digital others can appear as Other-as-subject irrespective of the gaze of corporeal others. Digital others are similar to the dramaturgical audience in terms that they are continuously present to and observe individuals.

Furthermore, posters might be more likely to internalize the gaze of others than those who don't use social media. The replaceability of the gaze by something other than the eyes entails the internalization of the gaze. By internalization, I mean that people assume the existence of others in their minds although they don't cognitively perceive

others in reality. The chance of posters having already internalized the gaze of others is quite high since they encounter and interact with other people in everyday life in the real world. This already internalized existence of others may have the power of the gaze and makes posters feel objectified. However, assuming that social media is another world existing separately from the real world, the gaze which posters experience in the real world might not function on social media since they don't encounter corporeal others there. Unfortunately, as long as digital others are present on social media and posters recognize their existence and feel their gaze, posters or even every social media user have a chance of internalizing the gaze. What is worse, since digital others are continuously present to posters, they could feel their gaze at any time when they use social media. Therefore, for posters, there is no exit to escape from the gaze either in the real world or on social media. Once they internalize the gaze of both corporeal and digital others, they might have a high chance of feeling objectified.

Even lurkers, those who merely view posts and don't make a post, could have a sense of objectification because of the existence of curators on social media. I will explicate the power of social media companies as curators in Chapter 3 but here I argue that such companies monitor users' activities and would objectify every user through their gaze. Social media users may be aware of the fact that social media companies track their activities on social media and embedded AI selectively presents posts made by those who they don't follow and advertisements. Once people use social media, they are necessarily under the gaze of such companies. Therefore, no social media user can avoid the gaze of social media companies and is possibly objectified although they don't make a post.

Conclusion for Chapter 2

So far, I analyzed the presentation of self and the existence of others on social media by comparing them to Erving Goffman's dramaturgy and by employing Sartre's phenomenological approach. As for the presentation of self on social media, I primarily showed that making a post is self-objectification and thus the presented self as a post is an object. From Sartre's phenomenological perspective, making a post on social media as a presentation of self is existentially problematic since humans treat themselves as objects; humans exist as being-for-itself and cannot be reduced to objects. I will explicate why objectification per se is ontologically threatening in Chapter 3 by delving into the notion of subjectivity and freedom, but for now, treating humans like non-human beings intuitively seems problematic since it implies that humans are denied as humans. Especially, as Sartre shows in the cafe waiter case, if posters are not in the mode of being themselves when they feel obliged to present a certain self, they might be in an existentially problematic situation. For example, those who make posts merely to gain many positive reactions from others may be in an existentially bad situation where they feel obliged to make posts which please other people although they self-acknowledge that their posts are representations of their fake selves.

In terms of the existence of others, the crucial point to distinguish between the dramaturgical others and others on social media is the spatial and temporal constraint. By splitting others on social media into digital others and corporeal others, while the dramaturgical others and digital others are placed in the same spatio-temporal locus with a performer or posters, corporeal others are not since they don't constantly check or

monitor social media. Therefore, others on social media, as corporeal others, are not always presented to posters. This difference in functions of others, which is revealed by the duality of others on social media, results in the peculiarity of the gaze of others compared to Goffman's dramaturgical others. For example, when you walk the Shibuya Scramble Crossing, the world's busiest pedestrian crossing, you might feel being watched by hundreds of other people although they are just walking facing forward. Based on Sartre's argument that the gaze can be replaced by anything, even when you walk alone in the dark after a party, you might feel that someone is watching you behind the corner you passed. To think a little deeper about the replaceability of the gaze, we can assume that we are already surrounded by things which would "have" the gaze since we acknowledge the existence of Others-as-subject by feeling shame or noticing being treated like an object.

Therefore, although we are exposed to the gaze of others in everyday life, by using social media, people seem to voluntarily place themselves in a situation where they experience the power of the gaze of others. In other words, using social media, especially for those who make a post, indicates that posters have more chances to be objectified, and thus become being-for-others than those who don't make a post. However, I have to mention that posters may also have more opportunities to treat others as objects to utilize for their own sake. As I said earlier, posters do not often assume a concrete individual although they can imagine concrete individuals. Others lack individuality as they appear quasi-totality. In this sense, making a post on social media is like a trade-off act since posters gain chances to utilize others for their freedom, for their self-actualization, while exposing themselves to the gaze of others more often, and thus have more chances of

being objectified. The replaceability of the gaze additionally increases the opportunities 58
for further objectification since any electronic device which includes social media may
work as the gaze before posters make posts.

However, we have to reconsider whether the gaze of others always negatively
influences people, especially in the social media context. As for Sartre, he seems to
assume that the gaze is by definition harmful to every human being since it is associated
with being treated as objects, not human beings as subjects. However, the gaze per se, if
not confined to Sartre's perspective, might have some benefit to humans and conversely,
the absence of the gaze may cause another problem. For example, an influencer, or
strictly a social influencer, refers to a person who has built a reputation for their
knowledge and expertise on a specific topic, and being an influencer is now considered to
be an occupation. They always have a huge number of followers and thus their remarks
and posts affect their followers' actions. So-called "Instagrammers" and "YouTubers" are
sorts of influencers. They acknowledge that their posts are viewed by many others, thus
being exposed to the gaze of others and being treated like objects. Regardless of being
objectified, they seem to gain happiness or pleasure by feeling that many others view
their posts. Although such happiness and pleasure are capitalistic or somewhat
materialistic since they come from earning money which is the result of posting, making
posts would both mentally enrich and support influencers' own lives. In this sense, the
gaze of others on social media would not necessarily be a negative factor.

So-called influencers seem to emphasize the point that other people exist as
being-with rather than as confrontational beings to us. Influencers appear to exist as
leading models who show at least part of their aspects in their lives, which enables people

to easily look into the lives of other people. Before the advent of social media, you might rarely have the means to see how other people live when you don't spend your time with them unless visiting their houses. However, nowadays people can easily show their part of their lives either willingly or unwillingly. For instance, a famous streamer, who has more than ninety thousand followers on his Twitch channel, used to keep a web camera on even when he doesn't play and stream a game. His viewers can see how he spends his time in the room and thus can even monitor his behavior. They could even see his sleeping face. Although he stopped turning on a web camera 24 hours because of the radical increase in electric bills, the streamer seemed not to feel the gaze as a threat and rather enjoy the gaze while doing what he likes to do. He lives his life well together with his viewers. In this sense, by showing our aspects to others, we might be able to live in coordination with them. Thus, the gaze might not be such threatening as before and rather would be existentially beneficial for some individuals.

Also, in *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, Byung-Chul Han argues that "the absence of the gaze is partly responsible for the loss of empathy in the digital age" (Han, 2022, p.21). If we deviate from the Sartrean understanding of the gaze, we could think that the gaze enables us to recognize the existence of others as conscious beings and thus we become able to empathize with others by recognizing them as the same conscious beings. Thus, if we understand the gaze in a positive way and the existence of others as those who inevitably live with us, the loss of empathy would cause a problem in terms of building a relationship. Although Han considers that the gaze of others disappears on social media and thus the absence of the gaze is problematic, still his argument gives us another perspective to ponder the positive aspect of the gaze, which contradicts Sartre. If

the gaze is not so problematic, at least compared to Sartre's assumption, making posts on 60
social media is not by definition harmful to posters. Therefore, while making posts seems
to be associated with self-objectification, whether making posts is necessarily negative is
controversial, which is the limitation of the analysis from Sartre's phenomenology.

The purpose of Chapter 3

The aim of this chapter is to additionally explore the problem of objectification in the social media context from a different angle while delving into the notion of subjectivity. To develop Sartre's argument in the social media context, I'll bring in another phenomenological argument, Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, to illustrate what happens in the world besides what happens to oneself and others. Debord, who was a founding member of the Situationist International, criticizes the degradation of human life because of the progress of capitalism. The attempt of the Situationist International and Debord is to "renew the Marxian adventure under historically specific conditions" and "trace the further development of capitalist society and culture and the new forms of alienation and oppression" (Best and Kellner, 1999, p.131). He presents the notion of "spectacle," which means "a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 2009, Thesis 4). By introducing the term "spectacle," Debord claims that "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (Debord, 2009, Thesis 1), indicating the alteration of human interaction. The notion of "images" is interchangeable with "media." Undoubtedly, nowadays, we are almost all the time exposed to and use any kind of media, including mass and social media. Therefore, his argument of the spectacle, based on the rapid advancement and proliferation of the media, seems applicable to the analysis of human interaction on social media, especially in terms of the problem of subjectivity.

The media or "images" influence our lives and beliefs every day as we are exposed to advertisements, such as on TV and the Internet, which causes us to aspire and

desire something new. For example, once you open Instagram to check your friends' posts and scroll down the smartphone screen, you'll unavoidably and unintentionally encounter so-called promotion posts besides your friends' entertaining posts. Everyone often obtains news from mass media, including newspapers and TV shows, as well as social media, such as Facebook and TikTok. Such information we receive is the interpretation or reduction of the media. They translate the incidents that happened in the world into a simple narrative, probably for readers or viewers to understand easily. In this sense, the media or images is the medium between the world and people and the interpreter of the world. This is part of the reason why Debord argues that everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. As technology develops and as long as we use any kind of media, we are more likely to engage in the world where we live in an indirect way. In other words, as human interaction takes place in a digital world rather than the real, we live in a *pseudoworld* and indirectly engage in the real world. By "pseudoworld," Debord says the world "that can only be looked at" (Debord, 2009, Thesis 2) and thus exists as an alternative to the real world.

Along with the notion of the spectacle coined by Debord, "The spectator" is also a crucial term to understand his criticism of the spectacle's society. The spectator is "the passive viewer and consumer of a social system predicated on submission and conformity" (Best and Kellner, 1999, p.142). He explains this concept as analogous to Marx's alienated worker, who is separated from a product, describing this situation as follows:

the general separation of worker and product tends to eliminate any direct personal communication between the producers and any comprehensive sense of what they are producing" (Debord, 2009, Thesis 26).

Therefore, in the society of the spectacle, the spectator is the one who indirectly lives in 63 and is separated from the world. He is an abstract being, in the sense of his individuality being lost, and engages in unconscious activities because “the spectacle keeps people in a state of unconsciousness” (Debord, 2009, Thesis 25). As the spectacle is autonomous in terms that it keeps moving independently, people are spectators, like alienated workers, since they merely view the autonomous movement or development of the society of the spectacle and only indirectly engage in the world, which makes them passive beings.

Then, what is the difference between an indirect and direct way of living or engaging in the world? Reading newspapers and browsing the Internet would be typical examples of engaging in the world indirectly. Before the invention of media, people could know what is happening in the world primarily from their perceptions or experiences. Now, we can buy things online by merely looking at their images. As a result, we may sometimes get something unexpected or something that turns out not to satisfy our needs. Regardless of whether Debord considers that such a direct way of living is supreme and we all have to trace back to a period before the invention of the media or not, he surely criticizes the society of the spectacle as fostering an indirect way of living and people there as being passive and becoming less humane.

Let me explore the notion of the spectator a little more for later reference. As for the passivity of the spectator, Debord argues that:

The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. (Debord, 2009, Thesis 30)

In everyday life, advertising tempts us to buy certain products. Especially, for instance, when a celebrity or a well-known person says that pastel colors are trending in this spring

fashion, those who watch advertisements are seduced to buy such goods. This phenomenon seems quite common and we think it is a normal or natural way of buying things and desire generation. However, such a desire is not authentic or genuine according to Debord. This kind of desire does not spring from one's conscious thinking but from one's unconscious passive attitude. Even more radically, Debord seems to argue that the spectator cannot consciously contemplate since the spectacle is everywhere, in other words, for instance, since we inevitably encounter advertisements every day, we cannot really understand our own authentic desire under the constant influence of advertising. Therefore, in the society of the spectacle, spectators are unavoidably passive and their agency or subjectivity is impaired or even lost.

Based on these arguments, I'll articulate the characteristics of the spectacle and give a possible explanation of how the spectacle is now before delving into the social media context. After Debord showed that the spectacle turned everything into a representation, he said humans were degraded from "*being into having*" and after that a shift from "*having to appearing*." This transition indicates that what humans possess comes to matter in capitalism; having money or private properties becomes the main concern among people. Then, in the society of the spectacle, appearance starts to matter since it contributes to having; if the appearance of an item is great, people want to have it. In this way, Debord shows that human beings no longer live directly. If you are concerned with how you appear, more exactly how others react to you, you may feel like living your life for the sake of other people while feeling a sense of deviation from your own life. In this sense, you might question yourself: "Am I living my own life" or even "Am I really living?" We may not have to pay attention to how we appear and how others

perceive us; we can behave as we want unless we do not violate any laws or rules. In 65
other words, as long as we are concerned about how we *appear*, we do not *live* our lives;
we deviate from our original or authentic way of living. How we *appear* is a
representation of ourselves. Although Erving Goffman employed dramaturgy as a
metaphor to describe human interaction, if Debord is correct, now dramaturgy ceases to
be a metaphor but becomes the structure of human interaction itself.

Applying Debord's argument to social media

I will introduce some scholarly works which applied Debord's argument to social media. We have to acknowledge that social media is the spectacle as the mass media is so. In the book *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, which is a collection of scholarly essays, several authors applied and developed Debord's argument on the spectacle to adjust to a contemporary situation. For example, Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano coined the term *Spectacle 2.0*, which is the current version of the spectacle reflected upon information technological advancement. Raffaele Sciortino and Steve Wright show the applicability of Debord's work by focusing on Facebook and the connection between paying advertisement fees to social media companies and posting as unpaid work. They point out that Debord's argument is useful to see what is new within the continuous capital accumulation while his weakness lies in a devaluation of the self-activation of subjects. I'll specifically mention and utilize these two arguments to support my analysis of human interaction from Debord's perspective and add further support for my application of Debord's argument to the social media context.

For now, I will attempt to apply Debord's argument to social media. First of all, social media per se seems like a modern type of spectacle. Since the spectacle is "not a collection of images" but "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 2009, Thesis4), it well describes social media. Sciortino and Wright depict the phenomenon of the spectacle in contemporary society as follows:

the tendency to reduce experience to digitised images, within which it falls to networked computers to provide the 'social' dimension of life – a world seen rather than lived, in the sense of not being produced by subjects. This is a reality swallowed up by appearance, one wherein appearance becomes the only reality. (Sciortino and Wright, 2017, p.85)

Social media is a platform full of digital images which are once directly experienced in the real world by social media users. In other words, on social media, users share their personal experiences which happened in the real world, and social media per se becomes a place of social life filled with images in a way that they interact with each other in many ways, such as direct messaging or commenting. However, social media is not the real world, rather it is a new form of pseudoworld as an alternative to the real one, and thus they cannot actually live there.

Social media is not a pseudoworld as Debord thought since it is not a world which can only be seen and people can interact with each other on social media. They can interact with social media themselves in a predetermined way. Social media is a stage of a collection of images ready to be seen and users can change or interact with it by making posts. However, they cannot actually change the fundamental structure of social media. Posting, viewing, and reacting are determined behaviors on social media. Especially, how we react and interact is more strictly determined on social media than in real life since people can react and interact basically through commenting, liking, and sending a direct

message. You basically cannot do anything other than embedded functions in social media. In contrast, in real life, the way you interact with other people and the world is not much restricted compared to social media, as you can use eye contact and gesture while talking with someone. Therefore, social media is not a pseudoworld in Debord's sense but is a neo-pseudoworld in terms that people can interact with social media itself only in a pre-determined way. It is almost a pre-contract between social media and its users that they only act in a pre-determined way such as by making or viewing posts.

Also, social media may be a caricature of reality resulting from people's obsession with appearance. In reality, because of the influence of capitalism, appearance matters in every corner of the world. The appearance of a certain commodity would be associated with an increase in profit and people pay attention to their appearance by wearing trendy clothes and making up themselves. For example, at a supermarket, you will find items with fancy packages; Lay's has a printed photo of chips in its package, which might tempt people to buy. Celebrities wear extremely extravagant dresses or jackets to make themselves look good or "celebrity." They might feel that they are obliged to behave to fit into the expectations of "celebrity-ness" or being a celebrity. On the other hand, on social media, people, typically influencers, pay attention to their appearance by maintaining their images by editing a photo or text before posting. The number of views or likes is profit for posters. Therefore, social media itself is a spectacle in terms of being full of images and appearance is people's major concern.

In addition to that, posters manage the appearance of each post for the sake of the appearance of their accounts. The appearance of posts is what people perceive firsthand. That is why posters make an effort to make their posts as good as possible by editing

them. However, managing the appearance of a post leads to managing the appearance of 68 the posters themselves. For example, in the case of a dancer boy, he makes posts about anything related to dance. By making dance-related posts, he is concerned about his own appearance on social media so that other people would think of him as a skillful dancer. Therefore, caring about the appearance of posts is a means to maintain the appearance of posters themselves on social media. In Goffman's dramaturgy, putting on a front is actually a kind of taking care of one's appearance. It is basically the same as a poster's caring about their own appearance since both modify a thing, either a post or a front, associated with the presentation of the self. As a way to present a certain self, people take care of their appearance by adjusting a post or a front.

Because of the advent of social media, individuals, especially those who are posters, now behave themselves as private media. As a poster, people can function as if they were the mass media. The act of making posts on social media is often a way of expressing or exhibiting the poster's opinion and/or personal experiences to other people. Regardless of whether the post is merely a photo or with texts and hashtags, as long as it is made out of posters' conscious activities, it is surely a representation of the real world and exists in a neo-pseudoworld. As I mentioned, by neo-pseudoworld, I mean a new type of pseudoworld in which people can interact with the world itself but cannot change its fundamental structure. This neo-pseudoworld takes over characteristics of the spectacle since it is filled with posts which are often representations of the real world. If an individual poster has a function as mass media, it is the spectacle. In other words, posters' individual accounts are the spectacles. In this sense, social media as a neo-pseudoworld entails many spectacles as individual accounts; the spectacle now includes

other spectacles. I call a poster's individual account *sub-spectacle* since it is part of a larger spectacle: social media itself. The sub-spectacles contribute to the maintenance of social media by producing new images.

Not only posters are private media who interpret the world and tell it to the public and their accounts are sub-spectacles, but also on social media, every user is a spectator. When people use social media⁴, they are forced to live in a neo-pseudoworld, an alternative to the physical world, and thus inevitably live indirectly. Additionally, as long as social media users view others' posts for entertainment or whatever, they behave and exit as passive beings. Posts are free products made by the free labor of posters, and social media users utilize them for their own purpose, such as relieving boredom or looking for the best restaurant for dinner with a partner. The act of viewing is often a passive behavior. By claiming viewing that is a passive behavior, I specifically emphasize a human's stimulus-response aspect of viewing as we sometimes purposelessly scroll down a smartphone's screen while using social media. Users often spectate what is happening on social media or in the neo-pseudoworld by viewing others' posts. Furthermore, since social media users unavoidably encounter advertisements while using social media, they might not understand their lives and desires because they cannot escape from the influence of images, such as advertisements.

However, social media users do not seem the spectators as Debord harbored. Does the act of posting show that social media user is passive? Although they live in the world indirectly and all their actions are not authentic, their act of making a post seems a voluntary conscious behavior at least on social media. Briziarelli and Armano argue in

⁴ Here, I exclude those who merely download a social media application.

Mediations:

While in the original conceptualization the spectator represented the passive actor, recipient of Spectacle agency, passively consuming cultural products, thus being more and more object, the spectator of the Spectacle 2.0 is the interactive subject who socializes through language tools and flexible digital technology, characterized much more ambiguously by initiative, creativity, exploitation and precariousness. (Briziarelli and Armano, 2017, p.34)

No doubt social media is a place for human interaction through accounts or digital selves.

On social media, people can voluntarily follow a particular person and can communicate with him or her. For instance, on Instagram, you can reply to a certain post and even send a direct message to a certain person regardless of whether he or she is your follower or vice versa. Moreover, the act of making a post often requires the posters' creativity.

Setting aside that they may pay attention to how others react to their posts, they edit a photo or text to express their uniqueness. Therefore, the act of posting seems a voluntary conscious behavior to a certain extent. While social media users are by definition images or representations on social media, this fact does not necessarily indicate that they are totally passive actors or consumers.

So far, I have mainly focused on relationships between social media users but now I focus on the relationship between a user and a curator company. Social media companies, such as Twitter and Meta, are curators as they have some control over activities on social media. Sciortino and Wright apply Debord's theory to social media by taking up Facebook. They argue as follows:

the specificity of social media, within the broader context of today's 'network capitalism,' lies in its ability to combine – economically, technologically, anthropologically – a new form of value appropriation through the free gift of users' activity, enacted (above all, if not exclusively) within the sphere of their own social reproduction. (Sciortino and Wright, 2017, p.83)

A curator of social media applications, such as Meta, tracks a user's activities and collects user information. Based on the information the curator acquired, by utilizing an algorithm embedded in the application, it provides its stakeholders with useful data so that they would pay an advertising fee, which is the main source of revenue for a social media company. Such data would include a decision-making process of a target group of people to whom a company wants to sell its product. In addition to this, social media is often designed to attract users "to free services that facilitate the formation of online social communities" (Sciortino and Wright, 2017, p.88). Such a situation is convenient for companies paying ad fees in terms of marketing and the curator companies since they can profit by increasing advertisement revenue. Therefore, it is an expropriation of users' free gifts since the curator company gains profit while users never get paid for their actions and personal information. This is the current example of the spectacle of the social media age.

I'll explore the notion of "free labor" a little more since this way of understanding human acts or usage of social media would lead us to the advanced comprehension of human interaction on social media as a phenomenon. Sciortino and Wright argue that using social media is inextricably linked with social production, including online sociality and human activities tied with social production which "have for a long time been subordinated to processes of 'labourfication'" (Sciortino and Wright, 2017, p.88). "Labourfication" means the industrialization of human activities, which eliminates people's "artisanal forms" of creative activity. Surely, for posters, they do not think they engage in this free labor, but they are structurally expropriated. Therefore, as industrialization accelerated the division of labor and craftsmanship became less valued,

in the digital age, the individuality of social media users' posts is depreciated, primarily 72
by the curator company. Expanding the connection among users in number is a curator
company's concern, which contributes to their capital gain. What is more, in this sense,
individual social media users are "isolated together," which indicates that "the
omnipresent receivers of spectacular messages fill his isolation with the ruling images –
images which derive their power precisely from this isolation" (Debord, 2009, Thesis
172). As in the division of labor, social media users are isolated from each other both
spatially and temporarily and they seem connected on social media. However, their
connection is conventionally made by the curator company by attracting individuals to
make posts, which fills their isolation. It is mediated by images. With this regard, social
media users are contrived to engage in free labor and belong to a pseudo-community,
whose relationship is filled with images.

Therefore, the connection with others on social media seems genuine or real but,
in fact, is artificially made by the curator company. Thus, although one major
contribution of social media is the creation of communities regardless of geographical
constraints, in which people come to more easily build a connection with others who
possibly have similar or the same interests, these communities are pseudo-communities in
the Debordian sense. Belonging to a pseudo-community rather emphasizes humans'
isolation and separation both from the real world and other people. Using social media
would increase the chances of feeling isolated or lonely while providing a sense of
belonging to a pseudo-community. Spending the whole time on social media seems
almost impossible. Social media users have to confront reality when they temporarily
stop using social media. In other words, their false connection with others and the digital

world disappears and the isolation of individuals becomes obvious. Therefore, from Debord's perspective, in the society of the spectacle in the digital age, in terms of social media, users exist as spectators, who are passive and isolated beings, unconsciously forced to engage in free labor, and live indirectly in the real world.

Hogan's argument on the curator's characteristics, which I presented in Chapter 1, would supplement what Sciortino and Wright presented above. Since Hogan assumes the presentation of self on social as an exhibition, he shows that social media companies work as curators and have the characteristics of filtering, ordering, and searching. These three functions surely are aspects of social media as a neo-pseudoworld and help create pseudo-communities. Through filtering, curator companies and individuals can exclude sensitive or harmful posts and maintain a healthy atmosphere of a pseudo-community. Ordering and searching are associated with pre-determined behavior in terms that ordering determines the way people can view posts on social media and searching is one of the pre-determined behaviors. Although these three functions contribute to the creation of social media as a neo-pseudoworld and a pseudo-community, they don't directly influence our existence compared to the free labor aspect. Therefore, while I acknowledge these three functions as components of social media, I don't put an emphasis on them.

The problem of objectification as an impairment of one's subjectivity

Before I integrate Debord with Sartre, let me give another perspective to conceive of the problem of alienation and explore its relation with subjectivity. I'll briefly describe the notion of alienation here. Alienation is basically the issue of separation. For Debord,

it is separation from the real world, and for Sartre, separation from the true or authentic self. The separation is problematic because, for Debord, people cannot directly engage in the real world and their lives become merely fake or not genuine. On the other hand, for Sartre, it is because “I” am separated from myself by the look of others, which means objectification alternates my (pre-reflective) self-awareness, represented by the example of a keyhole, which is that people feel that someone is looking at them through a keyhole without their awareness. 74

Both cases indicate the presupposition of the genuine or authentic being. Or at least, alienation becomes problematic only if the altered beings or situations are worse compared to the other possibilities. Regardless of whether the “authentic self” or “authentic situation” actually exists, intuitively alienation per se seems to cause troubles to human beings. For example, psychologically, loss of identity is a typical youthhood issue. Young adolescents question their own existence because they fail to recognize their own desire. One may quite often adjust to others and not behave for oneself but rather to meet others’ expectations. In a more practical case, one may become skeptical about the meaning of their life as one blindly works to make oneself alive in a capitalist society, which may cause enervation.

I do not intend to search for the existence of the authentic self or world but rather focus on what the problem of alienation tells us, which I think of human existence as subjects. Although there is no “authentic self” or “authentic situation,” alienation has a negative influence on human existence. Impairment of autonomy seems common among possible negative results of alienation. Taking up the case of loss of self, people may be unable to make autonomous decisions or actions since they cannot notice their inner

desire or purpose. They may not notice what they really want to do when they ask themselves. High school students who plan to apply to a college might not come up with any ideas to express themselves in a college essay. In Debord's case, because of the pervasive advertisement, people tend to buy trendy items while disregarding their own desire, which is a kind of self-betrayal. On social media, influencers introduce items that companies ask for a promotion and pay for them. An enthusiastic fan of a particular influencer would buy anything which the influencer promoted regardless. Once the influencer deleted her social media account, this fan may feel at a loss and not be able to self-understand what he wants without depending on the influencer.

The inability to make a voluntary conscious decision and loss of self are typical problems of alienation. In a broader sense, alienation seems to be associated with the impairment of subjectivity. I think the lack of autonomy does not fully grasp the problems of alienation. Autonomy emphasizes the self-government aspect and independence of one's existence and thus is associated with freedom of choice. Therefore, the notion of autonomy basically has to do with a way of life. However, alienation not only includes the way of living aspect but also the fundamental ontological aspect, thus existence itself. For example, the gaze of others is a sort of alienation and reveals the problem of being treated as objects although humans are by definition separated from objects in terms of the possession of consciousness. The gaze is an existential issue, which is thus broader than autonomy. Therefore, I understand the problem of alienation as the impairment of subjectivity which deals with the issues of both a way of living and existence itself.

Then, I'll explore the notion of subjectivity primarily from Sartre's perspective. Subjectivity seems to entail both way of living and existence itself aspects and I describe these two. I start with the notion of freedom and then further explain the dichotomy of subject and object by recapitulating the existence of others as I mainly described in Chapter 2.

First, I'll present the relationship between subjectivity and freedom and why exploring the notion of freedom is worthwhile for understanding the impairment of subjectivity. As I mentioned earlier, Sartre's idea of freedom is "by oneself to determine oneself to wish" rather than to acquire what one wished for. It is necessarily combined with consciousness since "consciousness's pre-reflective fundamental project is the freely chosen general project that shapes its reflective self-understanding and its everyday values, norms, meanings, and choices" (Rae, 2009, p.54). Pre-reflective consciousness or cogito refers to a state being reflected upon by people; in other words, pre-reflective consciousness is the target of consciousness and exists before their contemplation. For example, if I ask you to give me a description of the pain you feel, suppose you bumped your pinky toe on the dresser, you will reflect on it and thereby take up a certain perspective that was one order removed from the pain. Therefore, pre-reflective consciousness is a direct experience and first-order cognition before you interpret through reflective consciousness, for-itself. Therefore, pre-reflective consciousness is the state before we feel pain; through our consciousness, we are aware of our pain.

For Sartre, "(reflective) consciousness is a free subjectivity that lives an objective situation" and "it either privileges its subjective freedom over its objective situation or

privileges its objective situation over its subjective freedom” (Rae, 2009, p.54). Sartrean 77
freedom seems by definition subjective as it is associated with pre-reflective
consciousness. This subjective freedom not only relates to pre-reflective consciousness
but reflective consciousness. Consciousness, for-itself, “values freedom as the highest
ethical end” and “alters its reflective self-understanding so that it recognises that it is a
subjective freedom that lives an objective body in an objective situation” (Rae, 2009,
p.55). Through consciousness, we recognize that our existence is distinguished from
objective reality, including our own bodies, and notice freedom of choice. In this sense,
freedom is connected with both pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. In other
words, to conceive of our individual freedom, pre-reflective consciousness literally
should exist a priori to reflective consciousness so that reflective consciousness can
understand experiences themselves and have a sense of freedom based on such pure
experiences.

So far, I argued that freedom is by definition subjective and associated with pre-
reflective and reflective consciousness. This reveals that both consciousnesses entail
subjectivity and that human beings are subjects by nature because of the possession of
consciousness. Therefore, the problem of subjectivity can be interpreted as the problem
of freedom and consciousness. I adequately described the problem of consciousness in
terms of the objectification of the gaze of others in Chapter 2 so I will not go deeper into
this topic. However, instead, I will delve into what freedom entails.

Autonomy seems an indispensable aspect of freedom since the act of choosing
should be conscious and voluntary behavior. Poellner articulates the relationship between
autonomy and freedom as follows:

(Freedom) The for-itself is free whenever **(F1)** it makes conscious decisions to act **(F2)** in the reasons-sensitive pursuit of ends, which **(F3)** are not given to its consciousness at the time of decision from outside it, but are rather determined by that consciousness. In choosing its ends in this way, consciousness at the time of choice, and thus the for-itself, determines itself, and is therefore autonomous. (Poellner, 2015, p.225)

In order to decide anything, humans have to realize what they need to do to achieve their ends. Therefore, first, humans must realize their ends with their consciousness, next understand what they have to do to achieve them, and finally can decide something. We need to acknowledge that Sartre's choice seems to exclude unintentional or passive decision-making. Suppose your friend suggests going to Lake Superior. If you choose to accept her offer without reflecting on your ends, you actually do not choose it. Therefore, freedom requires an "understanding of means-end relations" (Poellner, 2015, p.225). In addition to that, people are fully autonomous even under physical or mental constraints as long as these "are compatible with reason-acknowledging mental agency" (Poellner, 2015, p.225). Therefore, humans are subjects as conscious beings and thus entail pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. As conscious beings, we can be autonomous so that we can voluntarily make-decision, which is Sartrean subjective freedom.

That ends should be determined by consciousness, not by objects or the objective world. In other words, "free action is action for the sake of intrinsic (i.e. non-instrumental) ends that are nevertheless fully determined by the for-itself" (Poellner, 2015, p.226). Free action should be authentic in terms that it should solely be determined by reflective consciousness and never by others which are basically objects. Poellner argues as follows:

Sartre does indeed assert that no object can causally determine consciousness, that 'nothing' justifies me in adopting this or that value, that freedom is the ungrounded ground of values, and that human reality does not receive its values from outside. (Poellner, 2015, p.226-227).

The point is that, regardless of the situation where people are placed, since consciousness 79 is fully separated from the objective world, objects cannot motivate consciousness (for-itself) to adopt a certain intrinsic end. Therefore, pure consciousness conducts decision-making and determines an intrinsic end. Thus, subjective freedom and action require pure consciousness without the influence of external objects and can be maintained even under some constraints.

The complete separation of consciousness from objects is the dichotomy of subject and object. Let me delve into this dichotomy to adequately grasp this situation and introduce the problem of the impairment of subjectivity. As I mentioned, others are objectifying and objectified beings since they look at us and are being looked at by us. When I look at the other person, I am a subject and the other person is an object, and vice versa. It is a problem for Sartre that, although humans are by definition subjective beings in terms of having consciousness, they are also treated as objects. This is an impairment of subjectivity. The underlying assumption is no doubt the dichotomy of consciousness and objects. However, that humans are both objects and subjects seems an axiomatic truth since as subjects we have consciousness and as objects we have physical bodies. But, this intuition is off the point for Sartre since through reflective consciousness we already notice that we have physical bodies as objects.

However, still, the complete separation of consciousness from objects seems contradictory since consciousness, being-for-itself, first appears when we notice the gaze of others and experience objectification. This appearance of consciousness which determines an intrinsic end for our subjective freedom seems dependent on objects. Only pure consciousness, not external objects, determines an intrinsic end, but it should be

objectified by other subjects beforehand. In this sense, consciousness is not absolutely pure. This incomplete totality of consciousness, as I touched on in Chapter 2, is that consciousness is always the consciousness of something. Consciousness cannot exist by itself. It is always combined with pre-reflective consciousness and could happen to exist only after people encounter other subjects and are objectified. The essence of consciousness, conceiving of objects or being-in-itself, is acquired a posteriori through the experience of objectification by the gaze of others. Its essence should be acquired through others for its existence. Therefore, being-for-itself lacks predetermined essence.

Individuals as subjects have both pre-reflective and reflective consciousness, the latter being obtained through the experience of objectification. They have freedom of choice, which is by nature subjective, and reflective consciousness determines an intrinsic end for freedom. An intrinsic end should not be instrumental and is what consciousness conceives of. Such an end is intrinsic in terms of not existing in objective reality or objects. It belongs to subjective entities but is not built-in consciousness. In this sense, although Poellner used the term “intrinsic end”, subjective end or pure end would be more precise. Therefore, from here, I will use “subjective ends” instead of “intrinsic ends.”

For the achievement of freedom, humans subjugate other people’s consciousness or at least utilize them by treating them as objects. They seem to look for acceptance from those who are at the same level, which is an inner motivation for their actions. For example, a top professional football player may feel lonely if he could not gain a sense of acceptance even if other professional players who are less skillful or talented admit he is the best player in the world. He is so skillful and talented that no one except for those at

the same or higher-level grants him a sense of acceptance. He might gain a sense of acceptance by admiring other people, but it is false or he cannot be satisfied since he thinks they are not equal to him in terms of skills.

Therefore, when I mention “subject,” I refer to this extended interpretation of Sartre’s notion of subjectivity. Sartre seems to think a desire connects consciousness to objects or even consciousness seems a desire in some sense. However, he does not mention that humans are fundamentally everyone against everyone nor do subjective beings look for acceptance by other people on the same level. He might even criticize humans as having a desire for acceptance since humans exist in the mode of being-for-others, which is not an authentic way of living. This would indicate being subjugated to others’ freedom and might be a self-alienation in terms of admitting one’s own objectification. Or fundamentally, humans might not have subjective freedom whose subjective end is directed toward others.

However, this desire for acceptance seems crucial as a part of consciousness as young people seem to feel secure when their desire for recognition is satisfied, such as by their posts getting many positive reactions. I think we could have subjective freedom while our subjective end is directed toward others or we seek acceptance from others. Through our consciousness, based on our experiences, humans as subjects could autonomously make decisions for the achievement of subjective ends while contributing to the subjective ends of others. Thus, I think being-for-others is problematic only if people passively accept their own objectification without referring to their own subjective ends. Moreover, we unknowingly have a desire for acceptance. A psychological study says that “the desire to belong is a deeply rooted human motivation that, underpinned by

our ancestral origins, permeates our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” (Allen et al., 2022, 82 p.1134). We may have an innate desire for acceptance and thus we cannot choose our desire to be accepted by others. Our subjectivity may lie upon such desire. Therefore, although Sartre does not necessarily assume the desire for acceptance, it is worth noting as a part of subjectivity.

As I see it, there are three different ways in which subjectivity can be impaired: (1) impairment of freedom: (a) one fails to notice own subjective ends and (b) one fails to make autonomous decisions; (2) objectification by others; subjugated by others consciousness and engulfed in others’ freedom. As long as others could exist as subjects and thus appear as having (reflective) consciousness, (2) is likely to happen almost in any situation since the gaze of others works without the physical presence of others. In other words, we are inevitably in hell and we as subjects confront others as subjects, which is a conflict among subjects. However, as I said, it would be problematic when people are passively subject to others’ freedom without reflecting upon their subjective ends. The problem of (1a) is that people are dehumanized in the sense that they behave like animals since this indicates the malfunction of reflective consciousness. Because of for-itself, we can notice our biological desire, which is a desire for an object, and another consciousness. Since for-itself is a unique characteristic of humans, if we lose that, we would behave without restraint. (1b) seems the effect of typical alienation. One would passively follow other people’s decisions or social rules. Therefore, when I mention the impairment of subjectivity, it satisfies at least one of these cases.

So far, I showed Debord's argument about the spectacle. Next, I'll integrate it with Sartre and attempt to point out the problem of objectification and impairment of subjectivity in the social media context. With the integration of Sartre and Debord, I expect to specifically analyze the existence of humans on social media from a phenomenological perspective and further develop the argument of human interaction on social media based on Goffman and Sartre by deeply and critically explicating the problem of the impairment of subjectivity in the digital age. Specifically, I expect to see the whole mechanism of how the impairment of subjectivity happens on social media since Debord focuses on the curator or a macro aspect while Sartre on individuals or a micro perspective. Actually, Debord has an affinity with Sartre as Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point out:

Drawing on Sartre and his concept that human existence is always lived within a particular context or situation and that individuals can create their own situations, as well as by Lefebvre's concept of everyday life and demand to radically transform it, Debord and his comrades began devising strategies to construct new "situations" (Best and Kellner, 1999, p.131).

As Sartre's freedom is the freedom of one's own choice in one's life and the accumulation of the result of choices shapes one's existence, we may be able to say that people create their own world or situation in the Debordian sense. As Sartre considered alienation to be the separation from the authentic self or a situation where people can behave authentically, Debord's argument on the spectacle deals with the issue of alienation as separation from the real world, which would result in the indirect way of living. Therefore, although Debord pays attention to the societal aspect resulting from capitalism, both Debord and Sartre fundamentally seem to look in the same direction.

Despite commonalities between Debord and Sartre, we have to acknowledge the difference in their focus: consciousness or society. No doubt both of them have a Marxist-influenced worldview and thus take a critical attitude toward capitalism. However, while Debord attempted to articulate the process and the current situation of the evolving capitalistic society at his time, Sartre's project seems to concentrate on individual aspects rather than societal ones as he developed his argument from Husserl's phenomenology. This difference seems trivial but is not to be ignored. For instance, in terms of alienation and presented choices, Debord may suggest that since spectacle is everywhere and people cannot live in the world directly, a choice people make does not come from conscious decision-making since they are inevitably alienated in the society of the spectacle. On the other hand, although people are alienated as *being* a worker and the choices presented to them are constrained by society, Sartre would not take an extremely pessimistic attitude towards those who voluntarily choose and behave as an agent since it is a subjective/conscious behavior thus as being-for-itself.

On account of the problem of subjectivity, Best and Kellner say:

The stage of the spectacle described by Debord, congruent with Sartre's analysis of the fate of subjectivity in the present age, was that of the consumption of spectacles in which individual subjects were positioned to be compliant spectators and consumers of commodities and mass media. (Best and Kellner, 1999, p.144)

Sartre's argument of the gaze of others and the effect of objectification, which leads to impairment of one's subjectivity, can be understood that people become spectators in Debord's sense. As people are concerned about how others look at them or thus their own appearance, they could become passive beings in the sense that their subjectivity or more exactly subjective judgment could be reliant on others' judgment. Therefore, in the society of the spectacle as pseudoworld, people, who are spectators, merely see the

change or movement of the society, and their authentic or original desire is defiled by images or media. In this sense, the passiveness and indirect way of living of spectators correspond to the gaze of others. In the society of the spectacle, people are highly aware of the gaze, as if they are always watched by somebody through a keyhole, and may fall into a negative spiral where they remain passive as they care about the gaze and their appearance even if they wish to behave according to their will.

In connection with objectification, then I focus on appearance. In terms of *appearing*, I as being-for-itself am conscious of my appearance. Appearance is associated with conscious and intentional behavior since I must be conscious of or at least assume how other people perceive and react to me. Therefore, to me, *appearance* is a target of my consciousness. Since consciousness fundamentally can conceive of objects, caring about appearance seems a self-objectification. People are being-for-others when they pay attention to their appearance since they assume their appearance is appreciated by other people. Caring about appearance is similar to that of a person who works at a cafe is conscious of himself as a cafe waiter. In the case of a cafe waiter, one has to play the role of a cafe waiter and pay attention to the appearance of a cafe waiter so that customers surely recognize him as a cafe waiter. On the other hand, on social media, posters care about their appearance as posts or accounts. Both a cafe waiter and posters keep an eye on the appearance they create by themselves and how other people recognize it. However, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, posters maintain their appearance by caring about the appearance of their posts while a cafe waiter cares about his appearance directly.

However, I do not think these two cases are the same because they deal with different kinds of appearance. A cafe waiter attempts to manage his appearance as a cafe waiter so that his appearance matches a common image of a cafe waiter. The common image itself is not created by that waiter. On the other hand, posters maintain their own appearance and thus do not necessarily have to fit with a common image created by others. This is also different from Goffman's dramaturgy since the performers' act of putting on a front entails answering the expectation of the audience to deliver an impression which the audience demands. In other words, in the case of posters, if they care about their appearance by trying to match an image of themselves created by others or paying attention to how others perceive, it might be far more problematic when compared to the cafe waiter case. On the other hand, as long as they do that by pursuing their subjective ends, such as achieving the beauty they think, caring about appearance might not be as much problematic.

Sartre might not assume the latter case because he didn't live in a society where social media had been developed or even invented. Sartre may have lived during the time of the maturation of mass media, and encountered widespread advertisements everywhere. In such a society, as I said above, Sartre might have a similar view to Debord in terms of people becoming passive beings. Thus, for Sartre, caring about one's appearance might indicate the impairment of subjectivity by any means and is being-for-others. Since being-for-others indicate that one is conceived of by other people as subjects, it is in a state of subjectivity impairment. However, because of the advent of social media, people seem to be able to remain subjective while being concerned about

their own appearance. Therefore, I explore the possibility of being subjects while caring 87
about appearance while integrating Sartre with Debord.

The impairment of subjectivity in the context of social media

From Sartre's perspective, posters are being-for-others when they care about their appearance by paying attention to how others react. In this case, they are passively engulfed by others' subjective freedom since they assume that they are being recognized by the objectifying gaze. Thus, this case seems to satisfy all three types of the impairment of subjectivity; they (1a) fail to recognize their own subjective end, (1b) fail to make autonomous decisions, and (2) are objectified by others. In a realistic case, such a poster may feel peer pressure. They may have downloaded a social media application because their friends used and recommended it. They make a post about a day of hanging out with friends and edit it so that everyone on a photo of the post looks fun and pretty. They are afraid that they will not gain positive reactions or as many likes as they anticipate. Therefore, their subjectivity is severely impaired by using social media since their existence is completely being-for-other.

In the case of posters caring about their appearance while aiming at their subjective ends, the impairment of subjectivity is relatively mild. They are merely objectified by others, thus (2) type impairment of subjectivity. Although they are concerned about the appearance of their posts and themselves, their behavior is autonomous and they surely notice their subjective ends. Suppose that an artist explores "beauty" and makes posts about her artwork to spread her idea of beauty on Instagram. Although she is objectified by making posts on Instagram, her action of posting photos of

her artwork is surely autonomous and her decision to do that is autonomous, too. As a way to achieve her goal, she freely chooses to use social media. She understands the means-end relation which Sartrean freedom requires. Therefore, her subjectivity is impaired by the gaze but it is not much more severe compared to a peer pressure case.

However, from Debord's perspective, in either case, being concerned about appearance is alienation and subjectivity is equally impaired. As long as people use social media, they are forced to live in the spectacle. Since social media is a spectacle and a neo-pseudoworld, people as spectators cannot really interact with it or at least only can behave in a pre-determined way because of the pre-contract between the social media company and users. Posters are obliged to be concerned about their own appearance because social media functions as a place for posting and interacting with other people. Structurally posters are forced to pay attention to appearance. Debord would not admit any autonomy of humans on social media since such autonomy is structurally designed or contrived by the curator company. Thus, he might not think that even an artist who shares her artwork on social media behaves subjectively or voluntarily. She is not different from a person who feels peer pressure in terms of behaving in a pre-determined way. Therefore, in either case, both people's subjectivity is equally impaired on social media. They are merely spectators.

Based on previous arguments on appearance, I think that analysis from Sartre's perspective combined with the modification I discussed is compatible with Debord to some extent. By combining these two, we could find more detailed existential descriptions of posters on social media. Debord shows a structural alienation in which a poster's subjectivity is inevitably impaired and there is no degree of the impairment of

subjectivity. Posters are structurally designed to be concerned about their appearance. 89

Thus, Debord might argue that, although posters may feel they behave as they will, their autonomy is not authentic or genuine since social media fundamentally determines and restricts their behavior. From Debord's perspective, his argument seems incompatible with the advanced Sartrean view of subjectivity, but the other way seems compatible.

While every poster's subjectivity is equally impaired by making a post, depending on whether they notice their subjective ends and make autonomous decisions, the severity of subjectivity impairment is different. Since people can be fully autonomous under physical and mental constraints, they can voluntarily make decisions. Furthermore, as I showed in the case of an artist, people can use social media as a means to achieve their subjective ends which goes beyond the social media context. An artist consciously agrees with the pre-contract and understands the restrictions of social media while setting her end as spreading her idea of beauty. Actually, she is structurally obliged to care about appearance, she consciously acknowledges that, or rather she might have previously subjectively decided to pay attention to appearance so that she can properly spread her idea. Therefore, she may experience alienation twice and thus her subjectivity is impaired twice. However, I have to note that she surely recognizes her subjective ends and uses social media properly as a means.

Switching to the viewer's aspect on social media, spectators seem to coincide with being-for-others. As I said, every user is a spectator, but a poster is not quite so since they can behave voluntarily by posting although they cannot change the fundamental structure of social media. On the other hand, viewers can be complete spectators since they not only cannot fundamentally change social media but see how the contents of social media

shift. In this sense, the passivity of viewers seems more severe than that of posters. The 90
existence of viewers is being-for-others since their existence relies on others. Therefore,
being spectators on social media means being-for-others.

However, viewers can be subjective although not as a complete being-as-subject. As is the case of an artist as a poster, people can view posts as a means to achieve their subjective ends. For example, a mother who has a 2 year old daughter may use social media to collect information about parenting tips besides reading books. In this sense, she subjectively chooses to use social media to achieve her goal: gathering useful information for parenting. She surely exists as a spectator and her impairment of subjectivity belongs to (2) as is the case of an artist. Since posters objectify and utilize viewers as a way to achieve their ends, viewers are inevitably objectified, thus impairment of subjectivity (2). On the other hand, if people merely view posts, for example, to kill time, their subjectivity might be more seriously impaired, which may satisfy all three categories of the impairment of subjectivity, unless they clearly set an objective to kill time by browsing social media.

We should also take the curator aspect into account in considering the structural aspect of subjectivity impairment. Curator companies such as Meta and Twitter gain profit by receiving advertisement revenue from other companies. Curators provide account-related information to other companies as a way to increase conversion rates. Since they are satisfied as long as they obtain account-related information, such as a history of viewing or contents of posts, they ignore the artisanal aspect of posts. The subjectivity of posters is absolutely impaired because curators deny the autonomy of posters and disregard posters' subjective ends. Posters are merely free labor who

contribute to capital increment. Posters are like machines which produce various kinds of 91 products: posts. In other words, curator companies objectify every user through social media. Users are denied as subjects and their products are expropriated.

Furthermore, curator companies seem to utilize humans' desire for acceptance, which might be a fundamental aspect of human beings. Sartre might not assume the desire for acceptance as underlying subjectivity. However, if it is true, curator companies extremely impair humans' subjectivity. Social media is designed as a place for human interaction through making and viewing posts. This implies that curator companies set up a place for people to satisfy their desire for acceptance by giving people an opportunity to easily interact with others through representations or images. Such a designation seems quite plausible and reasonable since people may look for a place to see others firsthand if they have an innate desire for acceptance. However, to put it another way, curator companies manipulate and utilize human desire for acceptance for their further capital gain. Since the increase in the number of users would contribute to a rise in the profit of curator companies, creating a social media application is an effective method for advertisement business. Therefore, curator companies utilize human desire for acceptance and disregard users' subjectivity for their capital gain.

However, since social media is a spectacle and a neo-pseudoworld, every user cannot actually satisfy their desire for acceptance. According to Debord, people are isolated together in the society of the spectacle. Each human is isolated from the other and their relationship is mediated by images. The same is true for social media users since they are temporally and spatially isolated and their existence is represented as accounts. No social media user can appear as a totality partly because they exist without

bodies, as digital others, and show a specific aspect of themselves, such as being an artist 92 or a dancer. They cannot exist as a totality and thus be recognized as fully subjective total beings. I think that people can feel partly recognized or accepted by others. For example, a dancer boy would be satisfied when he got a positive reaction from a professional dancer who he admires the most. However, even the dancer could only see a specific aspect of the boy, being a dancer. A dancer boy cannot be accepted as a totally subjective human being. In this sense, the desire for acceptance might not be completely satisfied on social media. Curator companies merely prepare a place where such a desire is temporally or falsely satisfied. In this sense, humans' subjectivity is extremely severely impaired by them.

Also, as curator companies plan to increase the number of users, they secondarily invite people to constant exposure to the gaze of others. The false sense of acceptance is conducted by the gaze or the existence of others per se. While they objectify social media users by ignoring their subjectivity for their profit gain, they create a situation where people objectify each other. Thus, they set a two-factor alienation for users: alienation from the real world and from an authentic self. If there were no social media, people would have opportunities to be less objectified.

Again, the advanced Sartrean perspective on subjectivity can be maintained even in a situation where curator companies make people alienated. People can be autonomous and subjective even under constraints. In the social media context, constraints are that people can behave only in a pre-determined way, such as making and viewing posts. Even in such a situation, as the artist's case shows, people can notice their subjective ends and make autonomous decisions based on their ends. However, to be subjective on social

media, people have to make an autonomous decision on whether they use social media or not and whether using social media is a good means to achieve their ends. Or people can make subjective decisions not to use social media anymore if they recognize their ends. However, since using social media inevitably entails being exposed to the gaze of others, users' subjectivity is impaired because of objectification (2).

Let me note that objectification through the gaze by posting might not be existentially harmful if we take a desire for acceptance into consideration. Humans may have a desire for acceptance by others who are at an equal or higher level but cannot notice it through their own consciousness. If that is the case, making posts as a way of gaining attention from others is not so problematic although being objectified. Seeking attention seems a subjective behavior if humans have such a desire for acceptance. If humans are existentially stable when they belong to something like a community or a group, making a post is a subjective behavior to connect oneself with others. By existentially stable, I mean people are not annoyed by or at least are able to deal with their existential anxiety. For example, not paying too much attention to how other people recognize them is an indication of being existentially stable if people are not easily swayed by others and focus on their own subjective ends. In this sense, making a post is not a form of self-alienation, and seeking others' gaze is not very existentially problematic. However, if I extend the notion of others to include curator companies, thus from Debord's viewpoint, social media users are by any means objectified. The gaze of others as curator companies is not avoidable. Therefore, curators' expropriation of social media users is definitely objectification and also a kind of gaze in a Sartrean sense. Thus, the subjectivity of social media users is inevitably impaired at least partially.

Conclusion for Chapter 3

So far, I argued that people can be subjective to some extent although they are inevitably objectified and thus alienated both structurally and mutually among people. Although using social media would inevitably entail objectification, social media users themselves can feel that they behave autonomously by making a voluntary conscious decision. Social media can be used effectively if people subjectively think of and reflect on their own ends and using social media would be a proper means to achieve their ends. Objectification is ontologically harmful, but social media users can feel that they behave autonomously. However, even if they subjectively use social media by reflecting on their subjective ends, they are by no means structurally objectified and alienated by curator companies. Therefore, people can be skeptical about their consciousness or subjectivity because they would cast doubt on whether their consciousness or subjectivity is structurally designed and thus not pure consciousness. In this sense, the spectacle aspect of social media is more striking than the Sartrean gaze by others.

The fact that every social media user is unavoidably forced to engage in free labor seems to emphasize that making a post on social media is a kind of self-commodification. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that making a post is self-commodification since it is self-objectification and posts are consumed by other people for the sake of their freedom. Regardless of the existence of other people, because of the power of the curator companies, posters inevitably self-commodify. Furthermore, since the activities of any social media user are by the curator, every social media user must unavoidably engage in free labor and commodify themselves. Taking this function of the curator companies as

the gaze, it seems more powerful than the gaze of other social media users. Furthermore, 95
we could say that the curator designated a situation where people are exposed to the
constant gaze of others. Structurally, a poster is inevitably exposed to the gaze of other
social media users, which is a fundamental part of social media. In this sense, the curators
seem to be the root of existential issues on social media.

However, people can be aware of these possible existential harms with the use of
social media. We can easily recognize the gaze aspect of social media although we may
not pay attention to how the gaze would cause existential problems. We can start using
social media by understanding our own subjective ends, treating social media as a means
to achieve our goals, and recognizing the gaze included in social media. Doing these
three things would require conscious efforts and people often may not do such things
before starting to use social media, especially school-age teenagers. However, if we could
do these, social media would be a powerful tool to achieve our subjective goals although
our subjectivity is inevitably impaired by the curator. As never before in history, we
could express ourselves and involve other people in helping us achieve our goals.
Politicians use social media to gain their supporters in order to win upcoming elections
and young entrepreneurs announce that they are doing crowdfunding to raise the
resources for producing a brand-new item. Therefore, social media would bring us
existential benefits in terms it helps achieve our subjective ends.

Furthermore, although Debord worries about alienation from the real world, for
some people, for example, streamers who broadcast themselves online on social media
such as Twitch and YouTube, social media might be their “real world.” In other words,
people might be able to have satisfying life experiences without much interaction with

the real world. Since streamers could earn enough money to live by streaming a game they play and buy necessary items through online shopping sites such as Amazon and Doordash, their primary places for living are on the Internet rather than in the physical world. They would spend most of their time in front of a screen or at least in their room, which enables them not to go outside except for some special circumstances. Although social media is a neo-pseudo world where people can behave only in a predetermined way, for streamers, social media might be their main field for interaction and living. In this sense, they might feel alienated when their behavior or will are constrained by reality. As we live in the age of highly developed social media, although social media seems to be an existentially harmful application from Debord's perspective, we may need to update his arguments by taking societal development into consideration.

Although existentialism is not as vigorously discussed recently compared with the mid-20th century, exploring the meaning of life and our existence might still be fruitful even though our way of living and society have drastically changed. Sartre and Debord surely provided useful phenomenological frameworks for existentially understanding human interaction on social media. Sartre's arguments regarding the ontological character of what it is to be a human being and the gaze of others are still persuasive and seem to grasp why we sometimes become anxious about our own existence. Debord also seems to capture the influence of society as the spectacle, and current society itself and social media are like the spectacles. However, as I showed the limitations of Sartre and developed Debord's argument to match the social media context, we may need to advance their arguments and reexamine the definition of terms coined by them. The existence of others and the gaze may not be much existentially problematic as Sartre

assumed. Although we might live in pseudoworld or neo-pseudoworld, we have to think 97
about which world is real; the physical world might not be “real” or at least the main
place for activities for some people.

Based on this possible room for further exploration, as for future study, delving
into the notion of being-with would be fruitful to consider the relationship with other
people as togetherness and a positive take on the existence of others. In addition to this,
philosophically analyzing the possibility of humans having an innate desire for
acceptance would be a new perspective to consider whether acting for gaining attention
from other people would be existentially beneficial. Actually, in *The Phenomenology of
Spirit*, G.W.E. Hegel famously shows the master-slave dialectic which would give an
account of such a desire from the human nature of masters. Also, as Allen et al. show
from the standpoint of psychology that “belonging is not only good but that the desire to
belong is a deeply rooted human motivation” (Allen et al., 2021, p.1134), humans seem
to have a psychological necessity to belong to someone. Therefore, at least, desiring
acceptance from other people might not be self-alienation and rather necessary for our
well-being. Although Sartre denies humans have human nature, the desire for acceptance
might be human nature.

Throughout this paper, by employing arguments from Erving Goffman, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Guy Debord and applying them to the social media context, I analyzed whether the usage of social media is existentially harmful. Goffman aims to metaphorically use a dramaturgical method to explain human interaction as the presentation of self in face-to-face settings but now the dramaturgical presentation is the fundamental way of human interaction on social media. Although our subjectivity must be inevitably impaired by the curator companies, humans can consciously understand and decide their own subjective ends while properly using social media as a means. Making a post is a kind of self-commodification and necessarily entails exposure to the gaze of others, which is existentially problematic since humans are treated as objects. Furthermore, surely the use of social media would increase the opportunities of being exposed to the gaze of others, thus more chances of being objectified.

Although Sartre thinks that the existence of other people is ontologically harmful, in reality, we could have satisfying lives by exposing ourselves to and gaining attention from them. Likewise, Debord's argument seems to capture well the current society. However, on the other hand, people are not as passive as he imagined although we are surely in a society of the spectacle. We might face a challenging situation where we could have great tools to achieve our own goals but we easily feel existential anxiety in our everyday life. As we are exposed to the gaze of others by using social media, even if you try to keep having your subjective ends, you may need to check your current situation to see if you passively behave and merely try to meet the expectations of the other. We

would be better off calling into question our *raison d'etre* as being-for-itself and rethinking our individual way of living.

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Being conscious of everything that you are concerned with is almost impossible as you can't pay attention to every single detail of your daily life or don't act to follow your goal. For example, when you talk with friends, you sometimes do not recognize your goals and use talking with friends as a means to achieve them. You won't say that "I go to this Italian restaurant because by going there and having Italian food, I could achieve my goal of filling my stomach." Rather, you go there simply because they feel like it. On the other hand, for example, you surely conceive of your goals when you decide on something related to your career. In the case of a photographer, she might have decided to study oceanography in college in order to become a photographer with solid knowledge of sea animals in cold regions.

However, in our everyday life, we speak or behave without recognizing our subjective ends. In other words, most of us might not always have goal-oriented thoughts in every situation. If someone fails to have clearly-defined subjective ends and act in a way to achieve them, they might not be very human. However, having subjective ends and setting a proper means to achieve them seem necessary for humans to lead a satisfying and existentially stable life; otherwise, we have to accept being treated as objects on many occasions. People can judge a certain means as being proper for them by examining the pros and cons of using the means. For example, if you use social media as a means, you have to acknowledge that you can easily express yourself to many others while the curator company forces you to engage in free labor. This argument seems banal but examining whether the means are appropriate would be necessary for living as

conscious human beings. If social media is an appropriate tool for you to achieve your subjective goals, you can use it as a means, but you may need to reflect on your goals and check your current situation constantly. 100

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