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Three keywords: Voyuerism, Capitalism and Human connection.

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In this essay, through my writing, I plan to come to the conclusion on what my dissertation question will be. In the exploration and research on each keyword, I will find a connection between all three key words, which will form the basis of the question that will determine the outcome of my end of degree dissertation. In my art work this year, I have been inspired by the vastness of the internet, and all the different communities that exists through it and it's visitors using the internet as a conduit for human connection. However, this earnest, human need for connection can be and often is, hijacked by those who want to sell something to you. When I say 'sell', I want to further clarify by mentioning that this can mean selling goods or metaphorically selling a person a theology, political agenda or opinion. I also plan to explore how these keywords are represented or alluded to in art throughout many different art movements and time periods.

Voyeurism

Voyeurism is typically described as a sexual disorder, and it often linked to sexual crimes such as 'up-skirting' and stalking and sexual abuse, however I believe, and hope to prove, that due to the implement of the internet and social media platforms that merge with our daily life, we have all been exposed to the satisfaction voyeurism provides. For example, I believe anyone who receives any type of gratification or satisfaction from viewing social media, is a voyeur, of sorts.

As this seems to be an opinion that is quite original, or less held by most, I have had to research a plethora of different material to prove my point.

In my research, I came across the book *Privacy in the Age of Shakespeare* by Ronald Huebert in which he explored the topic of voyeurism and its representation in art and literature from history. In this, he explains, with reference to *Rudinow* that "the voyeur seeks a spectacle" (Huebert, 2016). Meaning that the voyeur wishes for the subject of their interest to be revealed, or to be

revealing something. Most importantly, the voyeur wishes to watch in complete privacy, demanding anonymity for this act to take place.

I am of the opinion that the creation of the internet and the continuous development of all social media platforms has created a new space in which the act of voyeurism can be executed in a matter of seconds. Further in my research on both voyeurism and its impact on the internet, I have researched into the more sinister side of voyeurism. As stated previously, I am of the opinion that one could be a consumer of social media, and in some way, be considered a voyeur. This is because they receive some sort of gratification (not sexual, in this case) from watching someone while themselves, have a layer of anonymity, hiding themselves from who they are watching. However, one cannot ignore the dark side of voyeurism, and one cannot ignore the people that are made victims at the hands of the voyeur.

In the book *eGirls, eCitizens,* the authors explore and explain the first time revenge porn was covered by Canadian media in 2012. The case involves Hunter Moore, a American man who created the website *isanyoneup.com,* which was a site created for men to upload naked photos of women, along with the woman's name, her age and her location. Moore also encouraged the visitors of the site to post links to the women's social media sites. This proves the demand for voyeurism and its connection to crimes such as revenge porn, as many of these women did not know these images were taken and/or posted, hence they did not consent.

At the end of the trial in 2012, Moore was indicted on felony charges such as conspiracy and identity theft, and since this trial, it was proven that the laws were not sufficient in victim protection, as laws are often proven to not be applicable in cases that involve the internet and social media, due to its digital nature. They also explain how revenge porn must be considered a method of VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) as it holds similar societal behaviour and attitudes as more well known VAWG, such as rape and sexual assault. Some of these including victim blaming and '*viewing men as inevitable perpetrators'* (Steeves and Bailey, 2015).

This research, when presented alongside each other, shows the duality of voyeurism and the duality of the internet. How both these intangible things have real, physical, emotional impact on the people who interact with both. In my next keywords, I plan to take this notion of these intangible properties having life altering effects further, while also being intertwined and connected to each other.

A piece of art I plan to delve deeper into in my dissertation next year, is that of Edward Hopper's *Night Windows* 1928.

(Fig 1)

<u>Capitalism</u>

Life is now, intrinsically intertwined with the internet and social media. It has been normalised to the point in which it is implemented at every aspect of modern life. It is written in *Social Capital Online : Alienation and Accumulation.*

> "*The normalisation of social media is expressed by its ubiquity and apparent necessity. To abstain from social media might be considered by some as proof of abnormality and a cause for suspicion. Hiring firms may pass over a candidate if said person does not use social media."* (Faucher, 2018)

From this, it is evident that once a person creates a social media profile, prospective friends, colleagues and bosses most likely will purposefully view the profile, specifically to gather information and make character assessments based off of posts and pictures. Although, social media can and is used in many different ways, a personal social media profile is undoubtedly a valuable source of information. The question is, valuable to who?

> *"…capitalism itself becomes more normalised and embedded in online social media through the use of paid or sponsored content, and in the curious pursuit of obtaining some profit by the accumulation of incremental values associated with social buttons."* (Faucher, 2018)

YouTube is a great example for what *Faucher* (2018) explains in the above quote. When someone is bringing enough views through the media they create and post on the website and application, they can became a YouTube Creator which from there they can monetise their views, getting a certain amount of money per view. However, as the monetary rate and value for views has dropped, influencers and creators started taking on 'brand deals', in which they would promote a product (or a subscription etc.) and get compensated for it. Throughout the years, YouTube has also imbedded adverts to most videos on the platform to help with monetisation, unless one subscribes to *YouTube Premium.*

(Fig 2)

An art work I plan to discuss that ties into my keyword of capitalism is *Brillo Soap Pads Box* (1964). This piece of installation art by American visual artist Andy Warhol consists of multiple boxes constructed out of plywood to the exact measurements of the product it is trying to imitate. When these pieces were displayed, they were stacked in large amounts in Manhattan's Stable Gallery (1964) and these pieces caused other artists of the time to form the opinion that Warhol was "*capitulating to consumerism". (*Levy and Scott-Clark, 2010*).*

The boxes measure at 43.3 x 43.2 x 36.5 cm and consist of polyvinyl acetate and silkscreen ink on wood (Warhol, 2019). In *(Fig 2),* at first glance, look like cardboard boxes of a cleaning product.

But when inspected further, the top of the structures have no opening like a cardboard box does, meaning the structure has nothing in it. This instantly changes the perspective, with an undeniable sense of trickery and artifice.

As shown above, four of the structures lay on the floor, with a smaller, yellow version of the structure sitting directly on top, in the centre, mirroring a pyramid structure.

Warhol may have created the concept and specifications for this piece, but he most likely did not actually construct it himself. This is because Warhol set up *The Factory* in 1963, which was his art

studio that had four different locations until Warhol's death in 1987, in which it was disbanded. (Wikipedia, 2020). Warhol was known to hire artists, technicians and masters of their craft to assist and create the concepts he wanted actualised. Warhol's work tends to comment or simply mirror consumerism and capitalism, which was intentional.

> *"The heart of Warhol's idea — that by playing the role of businessman, an artist could turn himself into the latest, living example of a commodification he believed none of us can avoid — was perhaps as revolutionary in its time as Marcel Duchamp presenting a humble urinal as sculpture had been in 1917. Duchamp's gesture declared that artists alone get to define what is art; five decades later, Warhol took that as permission to treat the spreadsheet, press release and launch party as creative endeavors. This set an example for some of his most notable heirs in our current century."* (Gopnik, 2018)

This quote above, expresses how Warhol made an educated prediction on the implement of capitalism and the growing influx of consumerism.

To me, the inclusion of this installation piece in my dissertation will create metaphorical vehicles in which I can use to travel through the idea that Warhol's art did not just comment and reflect the rise of American capitalism post World War II, but has actually created a pathway in which most forms of media rely on capitalism.

<u>Human Connection</u>

According to *Batsleer and Duggan* (2021), at the beginning of the 2000's, it was assumed that easier access to the internet would create positive connections all around the world, where society, business and knowledge could grow, increasing each others cultural understanding and appreciation, cultivating a more peaceful and educated world. However, throughout news media and social media, the mass opinion is that people are less connected now than they were before, and this book details the negative effects loneliness has on the younger population.

"Thinking of social media as an addiction is interesting because we can see recognisable youth attitudes to their potentially addicted peers' behaviour. Thus we might say there is a pressure to be sociable, gregarious, to drink, take drugs and have sex yet there is a tendency for social conservatism in blaming other young people that become an alcoholic, addicted to drugs or become pregnant." (Batsleer and Duggan, 2021)

This leads me to believe, that even though the internet and social media provides a connection between people through Wifi based messaging, calls and video chats; it also creates a disconnect at the same time, as disconnect breads the use of the internet for some form of human connection.

(Fig 3)

In Marina Abramovic's performance piece *The Artist is Present* (2009), she creates a *happening* (Marta,1999) in which spectators may sit, if they chose, in the chair opposite Abramovic, motionless. In an interview for the MoMA in 2009, Abramovic explains her performance and her personal motives behind it. The performance was performed during her retrospective exhibition in The Museum of Modern Art in 2010 continuously for a total of over 700 hours, (MoMA, 2009) in which visitors, sat down one by one across from her for eight hours a day, for nearly three months. (Dozier, 2022)

> *“If you sit on this chair opposite of me, it's extremely important to actually find a very comfortable position and you don't move. Just sit motionless, and see what happen if we connect with our eyes. And I really think that it’s going to be something quite special to go into this unknown territory.”* (MoMA, 2020)

In this performance, Abramovic is opening herself up to moment of human connection with a stranger, a spectator. No words are allowed to be spoken, the anthesis of internet based connections, and instead eyes may meet if both herself and the spectator choose, and a transference of energy is allowed to take place. This type of human interaction is essential, and this piece speaks to how it may make one feel when they are seen and received.

The research and development I have done throughout this module has aided in my work and understanding of how a question, fit for a end of degree dissertation, is crafted. I have not limited myself on research, viewing and commenting on artworks throughout many different art movements and I have gained knowledge on how the Internet and social media connects vitally to all three key words, and begs the question, where does art fall into this broad category of research? I have decided to focus on the internet’s relation to these three words as these keywords are themes i continually explore in my work as an artists, and the internet and social media is something that the majority of my generation continue to have a ‘love and hate’ relationship to it. I myself, find myself online a lot, trying to satisfy my need to spend, my need to communicate and my need for entertainment. In my dissertation, I want to explore how these keywords are represented in art, and how they are also represented in a digital space, to them understand how art will evolve to relate to a digital generation.

The Question

The working question that is subject to change over the continuing and developing research process for my end of degree dissertation is ‘Is the Internet becoming the new muse for a digital generation of artists?’ I believe that this question is broad enough so that I can use my research of art, social, psychological and political theories to connect my generations use of the internet and social media to the keywords that have inspired my personal work as an artist.

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