GOVERNING SELF: SNSs AS TOOLS FOR SELF-FORMATION

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Self; Self-formation; Michel Foucault; Social Theory; Actor-Network Theory; Digital Sociology; Social Networking Sites; Social Networking; Information and Communication Technology; Arab Spring; Governance; Ethics; Psychologisation.
This thesis investigates how modern individuals relate to themselves and others in the service of shaping their ethical conduct and governing themselves. It considers the use of online social networking sites (SNSs) as one particular practice through which people manage their day-to-day conduct and understandings of self. Current research on the use of SNSs has conceptualised them as tools for communication, information-sharing and self-presentation. This thesis suggests a different way of thinking about these sites as tools for self-formation. A Foucaultian genealogical, historical and problematising approach is applied in order to explore processes of subjectivation and historical backgrounds involved in the use of SNSs. This is complimented with an ANT-based understanding of the role that technologies play in shaping human action.

Drawing new connections between three factors will show how they contribute to the ways in which people become selves today. These factors are, one, the psychologisation and rationalisation of modern life that lead people to confess and talk about themselves in order to improve and perfect themselves, two, the transparency or publicness of modern life that incites people to reveal themselves constantly to a public audience and, three, the techno-social hybrid character of Western societies. This thesis will show how some older practices of self-formation have been translated into the context of modern technologised societies and how the care of self has been reinvigorated and combined with the notion of baring self in public.

This thesis contributes a different way of thinking about self and the internet that does not seek to define what the modern self is and how it is staged online but rather accounts for the multiple, contingent and historically conditioned processes of subjectivation through which individuals relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their daily conduct.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANT</th>
<th>Actor-Network Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUD</td>
<td>Multi-User Dungeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Social Networking Site</td>
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"The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made."

Signature ____________________________

Date ___________ 21/03/2013 ____________
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the thesis

For Western individuals, understanding who we are and what our place is in the world are not just abstract philosophical notions but active parts of the reality of our everyday existence. We have to navigate complex networks in which we are assembled with other human and non-human actants, social norms and discourses and techniques of governing and manage our day-to-day conduct in relation to all of these entities. Being self is not a straightforward matter of living out an already given identity. It is a relational, flexible and ephemeral process that we engage in over and over again. We fold in external experiences, expectations and exchanges, reflect on them and unfold them again in the ways in which we conduct ourselves. Hence, it is not a matter of being self but rather of becoming selves. Our relations to self and others shape our ethical conduct and the ways in which we govern ourselves and are governed by others.

In contemporary rationalised and psychologised Western societies great onus is placed on improvement, perfection and maximisation of productivity in the interest of being a successful and fulfilled individual. People read self-help books and articles, attend self-improvement, career-advancement, relationship-management and financial-development workshops and establish particular eating, sleeping and exercise regimes in a constant quest to better understand and develop themselves. People relate to themselves and others through these day-to-day activities and shape their understandings of themselves and the world they live in. While all of these processes have historical roots, increasingly they are being executed in public and mediated by the use of new technologies in modern techno-social hybrid societies.

Scholars from various disciplines, including, but not limited to, sociology, psychology, anthropology and philosophy, have sought to understand selfhood, identity and the human condition through a variety of approaches. This thesis applies a critical social theoretical line of inquiry to investigate not simply what it means to be self in contemporary societies or to define the characteristics of
this modern self but rather to explore some of the processes involved in shaping and reshaping subjectivities today. This approach is steeped in a Foucaultian conceptualisation of selfhood that rejects the notion of identity as a reality or an inner essence in favour of an understanding of self as a shifting and temporary construct. Investigating a new set of examples that locates modern self-forming activity in the use of online social networking sites (SNSs) will yield new insights into the complexities involved in living in contemporary societies.

As the internet becomes an increasingly embedded part of the everyday lives of more and more people, a growing body of empirical sociological research seeks to understand how the individual is enacted and affected by his/her involvement with new online technologies. Most studies tend to focus on the impact that internet-use has on modern life. They largely account for these new technologies as tools for communication, interaction and information-sharing. Furthermore, they commonly conceptualise the internet as the cause of shifts in our conceptions of privacy, intimacy and community engagement that result in changes to our norms and values. Studies that address the role of identity online analyse how identity is expressed on the internet, how this differs from its representation in the offline world and how individuals, communities and broader social values are affected by the use of new technologies.

These empirical studies aim to generate generalisable results that paint a black and white picture of the benefits and problems of our involvement with online technologies. They make normative assertions about who uses the internet and how and why they do this. They generally do not consider the historical contingencies that have shaped online practices. Those who do acknowledge that new technologies are embedded in historical, cultural and social contexts (e.g. Herring 2008; Westlake 2008) do not make explicit how the connections between older practices and their modern continuations offer conditions and possibilities to their users in terms of becoming selves. Studies that seek to investigate the construction of identity in the online realm also focus more on how identity is managed, communicated, articulated or expressed rather than on how it is shaped and formed in the process of engaging with oneself and
other users online. They conceptualise the internet as a new space within which selfhood can be performed or even discovered.

2.0 Original contribution: SNSs as tools for self-formation

This study seeks to provide future research into self and the internet with a different understanding of the use of SNSs that accounts for the role they play in processes of subjectivation. SNS-use is one of many tools available to individuals today through which they form relations to themselves and others and in this way constitute their subjectivities. Thinking about SNSs in this way avoids making normative assertions about how things are and/or should be done in favour of a more critical approach to engaging with the internet/SNSs that accounts for the historical contingencies that have shaped them. Beyond simply acknowledging that using SNSs has historical backgrounds (see e.g. Herring 2008; Westlake 2008) we need to trace and account for the continuities and discontinuities between older self-forming practices and their modern technological counterparts.

Foucault’s understanding of self sidestepped the problem inherent in the work of many other theorists on selfhood. Foucault did not seek to define the self and its role in society. Rather, he was interested in understanding some of the historical processes and contingencies that have shaped how self relates to self and others according to certain ethical codes and in the service of governing self. Applying this Foucaultian theoretical and methodological approach to new examples will contribute to a post-Foucaultian body of work on processes of subjectivation, headlined by scholars such as Nicholas Rose, Mitchell Dean, Barry Hindess, Peter Miller and Thomas Osborne, among others. This study does not propose a metanarrative of self that defines or characterises the modern self or how it reacts to social or individual change. Rather, it explores some of the tools and techniques available to people today that allow them to make sense of the world they live in, relate to themselves and others and in this way become governable and govern themselves. Understandings that take self as an existing reality for granted will be questioned, historicised and
problematised by exploring some of the ways in which self is formed in society today in relation to dominant discourses, power relations and social processes.

Thinking about SNSs as tools for self-formation is a way of exploring new examples to consider how people relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct in the context of contemporary techno-social hybrid societies. It is relevant to supplement Foucault’s work on techniques of self with a Latourian Actor-Network Theory (ANT) approach in order to account for the role of technology in processes of self-formation without being technologically deterministic. Objects, tools and technologies like the computer, the internet and SNSs are intertwined inextricably in modern day-to-day life. Complex shifting assemblages of human and non-human actants shape and re-shape social interests and actions. Contemporary scholars like Haraway (1991) and Michael (2006) have applied this line of thinking about non-human tools to the realm of technology. SNSs are another example of one non-human technology that people are assembled with and that shape their conduct and relations to self and others. Foucault’s work on processes of subjectivation and ANT’s appreciation of the role of non-human actants in shaping human conduct thus provide ways of analysing some of the techniques of self individuals engage with in the context of modern techno-social hybrid worlds.

3.0 Structure of the thesis

The following chapter will review the literature that has informed this thesis. First, dominant accounts of selfhood in twentieth and twenty-first century theoretical literature in a broadly sociological and philosophical field will be scrutinised. This will reveal that while some scholars like Giddens, Mauss, Elias, Goffman and Butler approach self as a historical, contingent and socially constructed entity, they still fall short of eliminating the concept of self as an existing reality that can be defined and analysed. By applying Foucault’s approach to selfhood to new examples this thesis will reconcile this problem and provide a more nuanced understanding of selves and the processes through which they are formed.
Next, a more recent body of work that explores the use of the internet and SNSs will show the dystopian and supportive views that different scholars have of the effects of internet/SNS-use on modern social life. The way in which this work addresses SNS-use can be divided into four broad categories. The first conceptualises SNSs as environments in which identity can be expressed and cultivated. A second strand of research explores the effects of SNS-use on intimacy. Third, there are scholars who consider how SNS-use is reconfiguring understandings of privacy and finally there are researchers who explore the role of SNSs in shaping social capital, civic engagement and communities. While this work provides some valuable insights and data into how people are using SNSs, little work has been done that considers how people engage with themselves through the use of these sites. Studies that consider identity generally think about self as an existing entity, an inner essence that is staged on SNSs and perhaps affected by this process. This limited way of understanding the role of SNSs in processes of subjectivation can be enhanced by considering not simply what people do on SNSs but rather how they employ them as tools for forming their relations to self and others. This is a novel way of addressing SNSs-use that has not been explored in existing research on SNSs.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the theoretical background and methodological approach of this thesis. As outlined above, these are firmly based in the work of Michel Foucault and supplemented with some of the central messages of ANT. Foucault’s genealogical, historicising and problematising line of inquiry will be applied in order to develop his genealogy of ethics into modern contexts. This acknowledges the historical roots of modern conduct and establishes that the techniques that modern individuals employ in order to relate to themselves and to others are not ready-made and pre-existing, but rather themselves are made up and re-shaped in continual processes (Rose 1998: 25). This theoretical framework provides the basis from which the examples of SNS-use as practices of self-formation will be explored in later parts of this thesis.
Chapters 4 and 5 develop a theoretical approach for understanding modern practices of self, which is based on Foucault’s genealogy of ethics. These chapters will establish that modern individuals shape their selves and their ethical conduct in the context of psychologised and rationalised attitudes that dominate contemporary Western life. While this has been established in an extensive existing body of literature, the study of SNSs as tools for self-formation will show that working on, improving and maximising self today is increasingly executed in publicly transparent ways through the use of new technologies. Hence, a unique combination of the psychologisation and rationalisation of modern life, the incitement to bare oneself in public and the embeddedness of new technological tools in everyday practices, shapes how people relate to, understand and govern themselves and others in contemporary Western societies.

These factors have been considered in social theoretical scholarship however they have not been brought into connection with one another and with the use of SNSs. This thesis will illuminate the links between the three factors in order to establish a sophisticated theoretical framework from which to approach modern processes of self-formation. These factors do not determine certain social behaviour and should therefore not be judged in terms of the causes and effects they have on modern sociality. Rather, we should consider how the interconnections between the psychologisation, publicness and technologisation of modern society is reflected in particular daily practices that can tell us something about the ways in which we come to relate to ourselves and others today.

Chapter 4 will develop and apply Foucault’s genealogy of ethics, particularly his notion of techniques of self, to contemporary society. The first two factors (psychologisation/rationalisation and transparency/publicness) will be addressed in this chapter. Chapter 5 then focuses on the third factor (technologisation) to emphasise how the assemblage of humans with online technologies has problematised, translated and re-shaped the ancient Greek notion of the care of self as a means of shaping ethical conduct. It will show that
the publicly transparent way in which modern self-forming activities are executed has transformed and translated ancient self-forming activities, however can also produce unintended consequences that problematise and re-shape these practices.

In Chapters 6 and 7 the theoretical framework developed in the first part of this thesis will be applied to particular examples of practices of self-formation in modern society. SNSs-use will be investigated as a case study of one of the many mundane practices that people engage in today in order to govern their daily conduct and relations to self and others. Chapter 6 looks at the way in which SNS-users inscribe themselves on their Facebook profile pages and in their status updates. This practice will be historicised and problematised in order to reveal that SNSs-use is a modern translation of self-writing as a technique of self. Chapter 7 explores the ancient Greek practice of *parrhesia* – a form of truth-telling/free speech – in order to show that, like self-writing, *parrhesia* still serves as a way for modern individuals to understand themselves and their relations to others. Different examples of ways in which people have used SNSs to speak out truthfully, such as in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings, will reveal that speaking truth still advances personal and political change and is a way of supporting social causes in modern technologised societies.

4.0 Outcomes

This thesis will not provide a general definition of “the modern self”. It will not make normative assertions about who the contemporary individual is and whether s/he is better or worse equipped to deal with social changes and daily affairs than people were previously. People today are not more or less social, authentic or satisfied than before due to the ways in which they use SNSs. It is vital to draw new connections between some of the themes that existing scholarly literature has engaged with and to explore new examples in order to conceptualise how people form understandings of self and relations to self and others. This will open up a way of thinking about how individuals subject themselves to certain ethical principles in the service of governing themselves and being governed by others. This thesis will alert the reader to some of the
historical contingencies that have conditioned our understandings and formations of subjectivity and ethics.

Most existing work on SNS-use and identity focuses on how people express themselves online and how this self-expression may affect their behaviour, both online and offline. It conceptualises SNSs as a place where identity is staged or performed without considering the processes and techniques that govern this activity. SNS-use is commonly seen to activate dormant personality traits or enable people to get in touch with their authentic inner self. This thesis approaches SNSs differently by conceptualising them as tools that individuals use to become selves. SNS-use is considered as one of the ways in which people try to make meaning of their existence in modern psychologised, rationalised, public and technologised society. By drawing attention to the historical contingencies that have formed the practices, tools and technologies we engage with, and how individuals are formed as selves in circulation with these processes, we can gain a more comprehensive, critical and theoretically-based understanding of the use of these sites.

5.0 Conclusion

This thesis proposes an alternative way of conceptualising SNS-use that acknowledges that, beyond being tools for communication, networking and self-presentation/revelation, they provide their users with possibilities for subjectivation. Considering SNS-use as one activity among many others through which individuals form an understanding and relation to themselves and others today is a new and innovative way of approaching SNS-use and self-formation. Foucault’s theoretical work on techniques of self and the genealogy of ethics and his genealogical methodological approach are supplemented with a Latourian understanding of the interrelation between human and non-human actants. This provides a different way of thinking about how individuals shape themselves and their conduct in modern society that can inform and enhance future work on self and the internet.
This study does not claim to provide a comprehensive account of modern processes of self-formation. It looks at some very specific examples of ancient and modern self-forming practices in order to deduce what they can tell us about some of the ways in which selves are formed. Historicising the techniques of self-formation found on SNSs will reveal that they are not completely new ways of engaging with self and others but are steeped in older processes of subjectivation. This provides a historical context that acknowledges the contingencies and unintended consequences that have come to shape these particular technologised processes of self-formation.

This thesis takes a Foucaultian approach to selfhood and develops a genealogy of contemporary ethics. It considers some of the factors that make becoming selves different today without assuming to diagnose the character of our times. Others have addressed the psychologisation and rationalisation of contemporary life, the blurring of boundaries between public and private and the increasing influence technologies have on our lives. This thesis approaches them in a different way that asks not "how do they affect the modern self?" but "what can they tell us about the way in which people come to relate to themselves and others?". It connects the factors in new ways and applies them to novel empirical examples in order to provide an understanding of processes of self-formation.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0 Introduction

This thesis explores particular self-forming practices that govern the conduct of individuals living in modern techno-social hybrid worlds. By focussing on online social networking as one specific technique of self, this thesis engages with a recent field of study within sociology/cultural studies commonly described as internet or (new) media studies, as well as with social theoretical understandings of self and processes of subjectivation. Conceptualising SNS-use as a self-forming practice is an underexplored approach in current scholarship. Insights from this study will enhance research on how people engage with the internet in their daily lives by providing a critical social theoretical conceptualisation of the complex interrelations between humans and technologies that acknowledges the agency of non-human entities in shaping social realities without being technologically deterministic. Focussing on the processes through which modern individuals form understandings of self, govern their relations to others and manage their day-to-day conduct circumvents defining “the modern self”.

This chapter will engage with theoretical approaches to selfhood and subjectivation on one hand and with recent studies of the internet and the use of SNSs on the other. It will address how both of these fields of study can be enhanced by a more critical social theoretical approach and combined to open up new ways of conceptualising how people engage with SNSs in modern techno-social hybridity. The first part of this literature review will briefly summarise dominant classical and contemporary theoretical understandings of subjectivity. Anthony Giddens, Marcel Mauss and Norbert Elias as well as Erving Goffman and Judith Butler provide useful ways of conceptualising selfhood. Yet their approaches have shortcomings that can be reconciled by applying a Foucaultian understanding of self. The main concepts of Foucault's work on self and self-formation will be introduced within this literature review and followed up in more detail in the following chapter, which addresses the theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis.
The second part of this literature review will engage with a quickly growing body of work that explores how people use new technologies like the internet and SNSs. It will define key concepts and summarise general findings and explanations that current work provides about who uses the internet and SNSs and how and why they do so, before focusing on four specific themes that emerge from existing internet studies work on SNSs, namely identity, intimacy, privacy and sociality. This will reveal that SNS-use has not been considered as a technique of self. By seeing SNS-use as one particular example of the many ways in which individuals are constituted and constitute themselves today, this thesis draws new connections and provides new insights into modern processes of self-formation.

2.0 Dominant accounts of subjectivation

Most traditional social theorists and social scientists define “the self” as to a greater or lesser degree constant. Structuralists like Durkheim, Parsons and Merton proposed that social structures define human behaviour. Individuals take on the roles they are ascribed through their integration into society through different institutions and social contexts. In this way, they act out pre-established patterns of behaviour. Actions are predictable and selfhood is an array of roles that individuals appropriate. Freud conceptualised the psyche as a bodily organ that is separated into the id, ego and super-ego. His psychoanalysis was thus aligned with structuralist notions that assumed the self to have inherent traits and instincts that are given at birth and develop under the influence of external conditions. Weber’s more interpretive understanding of social action suggested that collectivities are in fact the result of individual action, accounting for the agency of social actors and the particular historical contexts that shape them. Nevertheless, he understood self as pre-given, even if able to affect the construction of the social world it is embedded in. The interactionist strand of classic sociology, with Simmel at its forefront, accounts for the way in which interaction constructs social action and selfhood. This approach too conceives of the self as a tangible entity. While not an interactionist, Marx also believed that change had to be produced by human
action, even if this was constrained by its economic context. Again, the self pre-exists and is able to cause social change in this account.

More recent theory still is based largely on traditional understandings that presuppose that the self exists as a category that need not be questioned. Elias and Giddens follow Weber’s causal approach in that they account for the effects of structures and institutions on individual action, yet do not see them as the only factors that affect human action. Elias assumed that a rough, unrefined version of the self exists and becomes civilised in the process of modernisation. Giddens believes in an inner, true self that individuals seek to bring out as authentically as possible as part of a modern reflexive project of the self. Habermas, like Simmel, emphasised that communication and interaction shape social action, yet like Weber, suggested that social systems intervene in human life, negatively affecting social relations and hindering individuals in realising themselves. In this way he assumed that an individual has inherent traits that are constrained by social systems. Mead’s symbolic interactionism explains society in terms of the meanings subjects give to their actions, interactions and social processes. It suggests that individuals have the task of becoming aware of themselves in order to be human. This approach also implies that an inherent self pre-exist and that individuals have to discover it and make meaning of it. Ethnomethodology, headed by Garfinkel, steers clear of universal understandings of the self more effectively in that it suggests that the social world has no objective reality and is invented by humans through the ways in which they make meaning of their existence. However, it still leaves unquestioned the assumption that the self is an entity – a person, a body – that is able to order and construct its existence in the world. Chapter 3 outlines further dominant theoretical conceptualisations of the self and their limitations.

A Foucaultian approach to selfhood avoids conceptualisations of “the self” as a pre-existing category in favour of seeing “self” as a fluid process that is assembled and reassembled in complex hybrid networks in which it folds in and unfolds itself in an ongoing manner. Anthony Giddens, Marcel Mauss and Norbert Elias usefully conceptualise selfhood as a changing, historically
contingent and socially constructed category. Giddens acknowledges the circularity of relations between social structures and individual actions in constituting the self. Mauss and Elias take historicising approaches that account for the shaping of subjects and social forces through contingent past processes. Erving Goffman and Judith Butler recognise that social norms and expectations lead people to perform certain prescribed roles. Yet they are still limited in that they focus on, and make generalisations about, the self itself. By thinking about the practices that shape self, rather than about self itself, Foucault provides a more nuanced exploration of self, not as a particular category, but as a process. Adopting Foucault’s approach provides a meaningful way of thinking differently about SNS-use as a tool for self-formation.

2.1 Giddens on the reflexive late-modern self

Giddens conceptualises self-identity as a reflexive project. He suggests that ‘self-identity... is not something that is just given... but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (1991: 52). He proposes that ‘late modern’ individuals have to manage time-space distanciation, mediatisation and detraditionalisation to construct continuous narratives of self, yet be able to adapt to constant changes (1991: 82). They are faced with having to choose a particular lifestyle which can be simultaneously a liberating and troubling process; increasing choices mean near unlimited possibilities yet at the same time represent risks and uncertainty (Giddens 1991: 55).

While Giddens acknowledges the circular relation between social institutions and identity, he focuses on the institutional and global forces that characterise late modernity. He thus disregards individual and social histories involved in processes of self-formation. Giddens does not address how external forces are in fact internalised by individuals in the process of self-formation. For him, identity is shaped from within the individual, even if it is affected by outside factors. For example, Giddens claims that basic organic necessities or bodily needs determine how modern individuals manage their body and understand their identity (Giddens 1991: 62). Unlike Foucault, he does not account for the
external legal and moral codes that individuals internalise in processes of self-
formation and which thus shape how they use their body as a tool for self-
formation itself. Giddens does consider how wider cultural and social
transformations determine selfhood at a particular time. Yet Foucault showed
that people give meaning to their existence in the world by engaging in
particular practices. Their experiences, actions and behaviours themselves are
shaped and formed in historical processes.

Giddens acknowledges that self is a changing project however he implies that
there is a naturalness or inherence that ensures that every human has a self.
Rose suggests that this way of thinking about selfhood asserts that human
beings are ‘equipped with an inner domain, a “psychology”’ (Rose 1996: 129). It
assumes that the self emerges from psychological mechanisms. It defines what
the self is at different points in history but does not acknowledge that practices
of subjection themselves have histories (Rose 1996: 131). A Foucaultian
understanding of selfhood accounts for how people have come to relate to
themselves throughout history to make sense of the world they live in and their
place in it.

2.2 Mauss on the category of the person and the individualised self

Mauss provided a historical conceptualisation of self that acknowledges that self
is a socially constructed category rather than an existing reality. He accounted
for cultural contexts that shape ways of being by looking at specific historical
eamples. For Mauss the self was ‘unstable’ (Mauss 1985: 1), a ‘recent category’
(Mauss 1985: 3) and historically conditioned. In a 1938 lecture on A Category of
the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self (1985), Mauss traced
the emergence of our understanding of selfhood back in history. He showed
how members of ancient societies, such as the Pueblo Indians, defined
personhood according to the roles people played within their families and the
social community. He depicted how wearing masks in ritual ceremonies and
naming patterns that reflected family hierarchies, defined people in these
societies. Modern Western notions of individuality, according to Mauss, assign
agency to the individual and detach his/her understanding of who s/he is from
nature and ancestry. Mauss argued that the Roman ascription of rights to the person (with the exclusion of slaves), the Stoic proposition of moral codes to guide conduct and the Christian metaphysical notion of the soul have resulted in our understanding of the person as ‘a rational substance, indivisible and individual’ (Mauss 1985: 20).

Mauss considered the historical processes involved in shaping understandings of selfhood. He showed how ‘the role’ became ‘the person’, which became the Western ‘category of the self’. Hollis criticised that Mauss’ narrative ‘leads from a start in pure role without self to a finish in pure self without role’ (1985: 220). He suggests that Mauss does not sufficiently explain how self as a concept has become self as a category (Hollis 1985: 223). Mauss acknowledged that his work had limitations. He stated that his thoughts on the categories of person and self were still in their infancy (Mauss 1985: 2) and that his historical method was by no means comprehensive (Mauss 1985: 3). He claimed merely to be pointing out certain moments in history that seemed revelatory of shifts in the ways in which people have understood personality and eventually selfhood. He acknowledged that people have shaped their understandings of self ‘according to their systems of law, religion, customs, social structures and mentality’ (Mauss 1985: 3). Lukes claims that despite using a historical approach, Mauss’ understanding of selfhood was ahistorical; he proposed that a category of the person has always existed and that this fundamental fact does not change (Lukes 1985: 284; see also Collins 1985: 67-8). What changed are the ways in which humans relate to and conceptualise this category.

Mauss sought to produce a teleology of the self. He understood selfhood as an evolutionary process that ends in the emergence of a Western self. He stated that ‘...it is plain...that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical’ (Mauss 1985: 3; emphasis added). Mauss, like Foucault, conceptualised self as a recent and ever-changing category and historicised the shifting conceptualisations of the notion of self. However, Foucault’s ahistorical problematisation of self avoided presuming a universality or fundamental
existence of selfhood. He did not seek to define the self but rather focused on the processes, events, practices, norms, rules and relations that come to shape it. In this way, what is the end result of Mauss' analysis – a definition of “the self” – for Foucault is a contingent concept and the starting point from which to investigate the processes involved in shaping and re-shaping how people come to understand themselves in the context of different truth claims, power relations and moral and ethical guidelines.

2.3 Elias on civilising the self

In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias explored historical examples to understand the processes that have shaped ways in which people today and in the past act according to changing social norms, laws and values. Like Foucault, Elias accounted for the moments when established ways of doing things are problematised and thus transformed, and on the insights these moments can provide into the particular ways in which people are constituted at a certain point in time. However, Elias produced a narrative of progress that connected the shaping of a category of self to wider structural and political processes of state formation. He suggested that society gradually becomes civilized and implied that all humans have certain innate, natural impulses that are managed and eventually suppressed through this civilising process. Foucault also explored how social sanctions come to bear down on bodily urges and desires of individuals, however he did not see these desires to be natural or pre-existing. He suggested that they are themselves the constructs of discourses, power relations and ethical conduct. Foucault's theory of the 'repressive hypothesis' (1990) claimed that the Catholic Church did not establish rules and prohibitions for dealing with sexual relations as a result of the existence of natural human instincts. Rather, the Church actually contributed to inventing these so-called instincts as a means of controlling the conduct of individuals. Rendering them problematic intensified people's concern with these instincts; they became more talked about and fretted over and hence more deeply entrenched as inherent desires. The notion of inherently existing traits is thus itself socially constructed.
Elias did not acknowledge this nuance. He accepted that natural instincts exist and proposed that society gradually puts a cap on them in the process of becoming more and more civilised. He stated that ‘at birth individual people may be very different through their natural constitutions’ (Elias, cited in Goudsbloom and Mennell 1998: 70) but their behaviours are shaped as they become socialised. Foucault would suggest that it is the civilising process itself that establishes certain attitudes and behaviours as instinctual, not that they pre-exist and are managed by becoming civilised. Elias produced causal explanations for social action. He claimed that ‘the actions of individual people...give rise to institutions and formations’ (Elias, cited in Goudsbloom and Mennell 1998: 44). Elias thus believed that certain human behaviours are in place, and that they are changed and managed by the social structures and institutions they are related to. Dean states that Elias ‘is concerned to provide a general theory of the developmental relation between social formation and self-formation, social structure and psychic structure’ (1994: 204). By contrast, Foucault explored examples of relations between specific practices and some of the regimes of truth and power within which individuals experience them. His concern was with ‘problematisation rather than ... theorisation’ (Dean 1994: 204).

Elias rendered processes of subjectivation natural occurrences that addressed existing natural instincts. He stated that various civilising processes ‘take place in and around us not very differently from natural events’ (Elias, cited in Goudsbloom and Mennell 1998: 45). Hence, Elias implied that civilising processes, while shaped by human action, occur outside of the control of individuals. Foucault provided a more subtle way of conceptualising the taken-for-grantedness of social practices. He showed how certain ways of doing things are established as norms that individuals accept, perhaps subconsciously, and live by, and how this relates to the administration of control and power (1977; 1990). He refuted that individuals simply passively submit to rules and let themselves be administered by hierarchical power structures from top down. Foucault explored how people shape ways of relating to and governing themselves, as well as how they are governed by others. While Elias also
grappled with how behaviours become accepted and expected within a society, and how these understandings change over time, he suggested that this is a ‘natural’ process. Hence, he established a general theory of social development (Dean 1994: 207).

2.4 Goffman and Butler on performing self

Goffman followed a symbolic interactionist tradition to argue that identity is constructed in social interaction. He suggested that a person gives off both an intentional impression and an unintentional one in his/her public presentation of self. The way others – the individuals’ audience – perceive and respond to the individual then shapes his/her conduct. The expectations of others, shared understandings and values, and the particular setting of an interaction further shape how an individual presents him/herself. Goffman argues that social actors are convinced to varying degrees of the roles they perform, with some feeling that they are expressing a true, authentic representation of who they are, and others being aware that they may be putting on an act. Thus, while Goffman acknowledges that notions of self can change according to different contexts and norms, he does assume that performances define self. Goffman states:

The self ... as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (1959: 252-3).

Goffman’s focus on managing impressions presumes that understanding oneself necessitates understanding how others see oneself. While Foucault also asserts that relations to others and normative expectations of how to act shape selves, his understanding of relations to self and others goes deeper than Goffman’s. Where Goffman stops at the effects that the actions and reactions of others have on the performance of self, Foucault steps back and explores these expressions of selfhood as practices of forming selves. Foucault connects the relations to others with relations to self as well as with historical and cultural contexts. This provides a more nuanced account of how people form their understandings of themselves as opposed to simply how they perform in social situations.
Butler (1993) draws on Goffman and Foucault to suggest that identity is not a fixed category but a matter of performance. Her work focuses on how gender roles propose scripted actions and are realised and legitimated by the ways in which individuals perform and adhere to these social norms. For Butler, as for Goffman, self is realised through its performance in public, which is mediated by discursive acts that are tied up with power relations and normative conventions. They assume that self is a more or less calculated presentation, a mask people put on or a role they play. While they acknowledge that self is a shifting and changing presentation rather than a static category, they fail to recognise the historical contingencies that shape the understandings people have of how they should act and present themselves. Furthermore, by presuming that selves only come into effect through their public presentation, they disregard the reflexivity involved in processes of self-formation.

2.5 Conclusion

Giddens, Mauss and Elias provide some useful insights into ways in which people form and are formed as selves today. They do not conceptualise selfhood as a static category but rather recognise that self is shaped in contingent social and historical processes and in relation to specific practices, understandings and ways of governing. However, they still seek to define what “the self” is at certain points in history. Goffman and Butler take steps towards acknowledging how relations to others and social norms and expectations influence how people perform certain identities in public. Foucault provided a more nuanced and unique approach that explores processes of self-formation rather than seeking to understand “the self” itself. He accounted for the relations of self to self and to others and the daily practices involved in forming understandings of self, rather than conceptualising them as relations that simply account for, categorise, civilise or perform self. Foucault evaded grand theorisations and instead focused on the problematisations of practices in order to understand how they come to establish acceptable ways of acting and to demarcate what is to be known (Foucault 1991: 75).
Contemporary scholars in a broad range of disciplines have taken up Foucault’s approach to understand the complex interrelation between processes of governing (self and others) and the formation of daily conduct. It lends itself well to the social theoretical analysis of the use of SNSs as processes of self-formation that this thesis engages with. Without seeking to characterise a particular modern self, this thesis will apply Foucault's tools to explore some of the possibilities for becoming selves in modern techno-social hybrid worlds.

3.0 Sociological accounts of the internet and SNSs in society
A Foucaultian approach to self and self-formation has not been applied comprehensively in existing scholarship that engages with the uses and effects of the internet and SNSs by/on human sociality. Since the early beginnings of the global network in the 1970s, scholars have been arguing for and against new media technologies and their potentialities and dangers. The emergence of Web 2.0, and SNSs as part of this new phenomenon, has raised debates about whether the use of SNSs causes a renewal of values and norms regarding personal development, interaction, relationships, engagement and participation in society or whether it contributes to societal decline. Four key themes emerge out of current sociological literature on SNSs. First, SNSs are conceptualised as new virtual spheres where identity can be expressed and cultivated. Second, the effects of SNS-use on intimacy are considered. Third, how SNS-use reconfigures understandings of privacy in modern societies is explored. Fourth, the role of SNSs in terms of social capital, civic engagement and community-formation is examines.

The ways in which the contemporary scholarship has addressed these themes reveals a greatly cause-and-effect-based approach. Applying a Foucaultian awareness of processes of self-formation as well as a Foucaultian methodology (see Chapter 3) provides a more nuanced, non-judgemental and less generalising way of conceptualising the involvement of SNSs in the formation of selves. Other discipline areas have addressed issues such as the effects of SNS-use on brain development (developmental psychology), their use as communication tools between doctors and patients and patients and other
patients in public health (health and medicine), their application as business and marketing tools (marketing, advertising, commerce) and their value as educational devices (education). As research in these areas flourishes, the pervasiveness of SNSs in everyday life becomes ever more evident.

This literature review will identify some of the gaps within specific sociological research on SNSs, identity formation, intimacy, privacy, social capital and civic engagement. It will establish that existing scholarship generally produces ahistorical, causal and universal explanations that construct simplistic conceptualisations of the ways in which SNSs are employed as tools for exploring and shaping selves. This thesis will contribute a more nuanced social theoretical understanding of the complex interrelations between humans and technologies involved in the use of SNSs and the ways in which they shape and re-shape one another. Foucault’s account of selfhood is thus developed to contribute to a general area of research on processes of self-formation as well as to the specific field of sociological research into the use of new technologies in modern society.

3.1 Internet (r)evolution: The internet and its effects on society

From its emergence in the early 1970s to its more general availability in the 1990s and its omnipresence today, the internet has undoubtedly altered daily routines and interactions. It provides certain affordances\(^1\) that have changed and expanded with the development of Web 2.0, a new, upgraded version of the internet and more recently Web 3.0 as a precursor to the semantic web. Existing work on the internet commonly conceptualises it in terms of the either beneficial or damaging effects it has on human action and sociality. As the internet becomes more and more embedded in the every day lives of people in the developed world, considering its effects in terms of the binary opposition of

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\(^1\) J. J. Gibson used the term ‘affordance’ to describe all the possibilities for action that humans perceive an entity to have (1977). In this thesis the term is used to show how the internet provides certain possibilities for people to engage with it. According to Hampton and Wellman ‘Erin Bradner (2000), writing for computer scientists, coined the term “social affordances” to emphasise the social as well as individual possibilities of computer networks’ (2002: 348).
good and bad is insufficient, as it disregards the complexities and interconnections that characterise modern techno-social hybrid societies. Rather, we need to explore how the assemblage of humans with these new technologies is shaping new ways of forming and understanding self.

3.1.1 The internet: Meeting new technology with old suspicion

Like many new technologies, the internet was received with a mix of hype and concern. Castells suggests that in the 1990s people accepted the internet as ‘a technological marvel bringing a new Enlightenment to transform the world’ (2002: 4). Euphoric news stories hailed the way the internet would change and improve everyone’s lives but also warned of the evils lurking in cyberspace (Castells 2002: 4). Nie argues that ‘the Internet today has been greeted with much the same enthusiasm as telephone, radio, and television were following their introductions into American society’ (2001: 421-2). Bugeja maintains that ‘each new medium was a momentous, technological wonder that transformed the most basic aspect of human relationships: how we talk to each other’ (2005: 81; emphasis in original). Herring (2008: 85) shows how the internet has been conceptualised to promote learning, creativity and liberty and to overcome physical displacements between people. On the other hand, Buckingham points out that ‘like television, digital media are seen to be responsible for a whole litany of social ills’, ranging from addiction to obesity to a stunting of the imagination (2008: 13). Even though the internet is a new medium, reactions to its uses and effects are reminiscent of attitudes triggered by previous technologies. Commonly these views are technologically deterministic in their approaches and based on sensationalist discourses around new technologies that often fade out as they become more integrated into everyday life.

3.1.2 Web 2.0, 3.0 and the semantic web

The emergence of Web 2.0 rekindled debates about the virtues and evils of digital media and the internet in particular. Wellman and Haythornthwaite
argued in 2002 that ‘dot.com flames [have] dim[med] down’ (5) as the internet became implanted in everyday life. Similarly, O’Reilly (2005) stated that the hype around the internet died down around 2001 however that ‘far from having “crashed”, the web was more important than ever, with exciting new applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity’ (O’Reilly 2005). As Web 2.0 developed, Beer and Burrows claimed that ‘cultural digitization ... is moving faster than our ability to analyse it’ (2007). Already in 1999, web-inventor Tim Berners-Lee envisioned a future semantic web in which computers become ‘capable of analyzing all the data on the Web – the content, links, and transactions between people and computers’, making machines capable of handling ‘the day-to-day mechanisms of trade, bureaucracy and our daily lives’ (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 1999). Recent developments seem to suggest that we are on the cusp of such a semantic web (see e.g. Khor and Marsh 2006). Some have described the development of a multidimensional virtual sphere that involves artificial intelligence, virtual reality, alternative economies and more personalised and diversified ways of producing and consuming mass media as the new Web 3.0. It is vital to remember that the emergence and development of the internet provides people with new possibilities for action that are steeped in older ways of doing things. Technological developments in the past also contributed to establishing new ways of communicating, sharing, exchanging goods and becoming selves. We have to acknowledge that the ‘internet revolution’ is but a new way of doing old things.

3.1.3 The effects of the internet on daily life

i) The good: Enhancing communication, fostering new communities and engaging citizens

Favourable accounts of the internet suggest that it provides people with new opportunities and enhances daily routines (Chambers 2006; Haythornthwaite and participatory version of the original internet. New applications include blogs, social networking sites, wikis, folksonomies and mashups. These novel functions mark the changed dimensions between creating and consuming content online (Beer and Burrows 2007; Gauntlett 2009; Livingstone 2008; Shah 2008; Watson 2008; Westlake 2008), shifting values of privacy (Beer and Burrows 2007; boyd 2008; Jump 2005; Schrock 2009; Westlake 2008) and less anonymity online (Zhao et al. 2008).
Buckingham claims that the internet affords new ways of communicating, shaping communities and constructing and expressing identities (2008: 13-14). Shah also describes the ‘internet as a new public sphere of communication, interaction and collaboration’ (2008: 213). Similarly, Khor and Marsh suggest that by 2020 the internet will represent a ‘glocal’ for gossip, critical debate, political engagement and entertainment (2006: 7). Herring (2008) commends that the internet is available independent from advertisers and not under centralised control, enabling users to create their own content. She describes the internet as a ‘metamedium’ that allows for two-way communication in contrast to the limited interactivity of television watching (Herring 2008: 84). Others value the internet as a means of enhancing social ties, fostering a sense of community and creating new possibilities for civic engagement (Chambers 2006; Ellison et al. 2007; Hampton 2003; Horrigan 2001; Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Khor and Marsh 2006; Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Watson 2008; Westlake 2008). Valentine (2006) sees the internet to extend intimacy across physical boundaries. Buckingham comments on the innovative ways of learning that online facilities provide, which are said to lead to more complex brain structures and new forms of literacy in younger generations (2008: 13-14). He praises the internet as ‘producing a generation that is more tolerant, more globally oriented, more inclined to exercise social and civic responsibility, and to respect the environment’ (Buckingham 2008: 14). Similarly, Khor and Marsh suggest that Web 3.0 will foster a generation of users that is more socially aware and culturally sensitive (2006: 7-8). For all of these scholars, the internet represents a revival of values and norms regarding interaction, engagement and participation that scholars like Putnam (2000) suggest are deteriorating in today’s society.

3 Buckingham also reviews negative impacts of the internet. See the following section: 3.1.3 ii) The bad: Alienation, inequality and the erosion of privacy.

4 The term combines the words ‘global’ and ‘local’ and was popularised by sociologist Roland Robertson in 1992. It refers to the interplay of local and global factors in modern hyperconnected, technologised societies (Scott and Marshall 2009). In the context of the internet it has been applied to suggest the possibilities for locally positioned communication on a global scale.
3.1.3

**ii) The bad: Alienation, inequality and the erosion of privacy**

Critics of the internet argue that it contributes to societal decline and leads to ‘further alienation, anomie and antisocial behaviour in postmodern society’ (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 52, referring to Boat 1995; see also Heim 1993; Kroker and Weinstein 1994; Nie 2001; Tucker 2007). Buckingham (2008) mentions the undemocratic attitude of some online communities and suggests that children can be at risk of being commercially exploited. He conceptualises much online activity as monotonous or banal and based around mundane day-to-day activities as opposed to being a creative or productive endeavour (Buckingham 2008: 14). Nie (2001) argues that digital communication isolates people and does not provide the satisfaction and gains reached from emotional cues, physical expressions of sentiments and subtleties of face-to-face engagement. For example, he suggests that the workplace as ‘one of the last remaining arenas for daily face-to-face contact outside the home’ (2001: 430) is being eroded as digitalisation makes it possible for people to bring their office home.

Critics of the internet commonly claim that it changes understandings of privacy. Beer and Burrows (2007) suggest that peoples’ willingness to make personal information publicly accessible via the internet indicates such a shift in values of privacy. boyd\(^5\) highlights that there are no physical limitations to the size and composition of the public audience that can monitor the conduct of an internet user, completely revolutionising the ‘scale of the public’ (2008: 125). Schrock (2009) perceives a ‘privacy paradox’ in how people treasure the freedom of expression that the internet affords, however may not always consider the consequences of their public exposure. Livingstone points out that popular and media discourses commonly portray online users to have ‘no sense of privacy or shame’ (2008: 395). Van Mannen states that SNSs scrutinise the innermost secrets of their users, which trivialises and makes public their private concerns. He claims that this results in the ‘exposure and erosion of the

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\(^5\) danah boyd prefers her name to be spelled without capitalisation of the first letters (see boyd 2012).
intimate and the private’ (2010: 4). To these authors, the internet provides a further step towards a surveillance society. Others propose that even though boundaries between public and private may be shifting, people still possess a sense of privacy (Raynes-Goldie 2010; Westlake 2008). Herring contends that where some adults perceive an erosion of privacy, the generation that has grown up with the internet manages privacy matters with less concern (2008: 86).

Critics have alluded to the development of a digital divide between different internet-users based on factors such as age, economic or physical abilities and lifestyle. Scholars generally agree that younger and older generations access and use the internet in different ways (boyd 2008; Mossberger et al. 2008; Richardson 2009; Westlake 2008). Herring (2008) asserts that the generation that has grown up with the internet has been labelled the ‘Internet generation’, ‘Digital Generation’ or ‘Generation I’ (2008: 71). Buckingham distinguishes between ‘digital natives’ (those who have grown up with the internet) and ‘digital immigrants’ (those who have encountered new online technologies later in life) (2008: 13).

Moyo (2009) notes that some scholars (referring to Haywood 1998; Holderness 1998; Meredyth et al. 2003; Norris 2001; Servon 2002) simplify a digital divide to exist only between those who have access to digital media and those who do not. Nie (2001), Dalsgaard (2008) and Hewitt and Forte (2006) assert that online hierarchies exist just as they do in the physical world, and that these hierarchies affect who accesses which kinds of services and how they behave online. Wilson and Peterson (2002: 460) suggest that online inequality not only depends on a person’s access, but also their ability, experience, computer literacy and conformity to dominant technological ideologies. For boyd it is not so much access that creates a divide but rather choice regarding participation (2008: 121). While this is an important observation, boyd simplifies factors involved in non-participation. She tends to blur the lines between those who cannot (e.g. due to parental restrictions) and those who choose not to (e.g. as resistance to normative lifestyles) participate in internet-use. Khor and Marsh
anticipate that a ‘Luddite-type’ middle-class group will turn its back on the use of technologies by choice in the near future (2006: 9). However, they acknowledge that there will continue to be a large demographic in developing parts of the world who are simply unable to connect to and use online technologies (Khor and Marsh 2006: 9).

Chambers (2006) notes that the internet has the ability to connect people from different backgrounds, races and localities but it does not eliminate these differences. Similarly, Hargittai (2007) refutes claims that the internet can act as an equalising tool that frees people of negative physical predispositions and empowers them to be whoever they want to be online (Shah 2008; Zhao et al. 2008). She states that ‘the idea that people would be on an equal footing online assumes that offline characteristics are not mirrored in people’s online pursuits’ (Hargittai 2007). Yet, ‘people bring constraints and opportunities from their offline lives with them to their online interactions and activities’ (Hargittai 2007). She thus perceives “real-world” inequalities to be mirrored and reproduced online, contributing to a digital divide (see also Papacharissi and Gibson 2011).

3.1.4 Avoiding technological determinism

Debates around digital media and their effects on society can be inclined to exaggerate the agency and power of technologies. Papacharissi and Gibson (2011), for example, claim that

Facebook actively stretch[es] our comfort zones until our social norms catch up with technological progress (Thompson, 2008). As a result, technological architectures cultivate a newer paradigm for sociality, one that equates disclosure with being social (Zhang et al., 2010).

They thus imply that media technologies determine how users adapt to the structural demands of sites. Similarly, Turkle (2011) insists that technologies control our lives and alter what it means to be human. Buckingham (2008) refers to Robins and Webster to argue that this type of technological determinism desocialises technologies and undervalues that social actors can shape and reinvent how technologies get used. Similarly, McKenna and Seidman
argue that ‘people are not passively affected by technology but, rather, actively shape its use and influence (Fischer, 1992; Hughes & Hans, 2001)’ (2006: 291). Herring contends that ‘the evolution of any technology takes place in a specific historical, cultural, and economic context’ (2008: 84) (see also Baym 2010; Walther et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, technologies do possess ‘inherent potentialities’ that make them more suited to some uses than others (Baym 2010; Buckingham 2008: 12). Mavridis (2011) discusses the recent introduction and proliferation of artificial intelligence agents on SNSs. He effectively accounts for the circulatory relations between human and non-human actors in shaping action and technology. Khor and Marsh note that we need to understand these technologies not as entirely new ways for doing things but rather as additions and alternatives to older tools for communicating, exchanging and shaping identities (2006: 19; see also Baym 2010).

The internet is becoming embedded in the daily lives of more and more people (Chambers 2006; Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002; Wilson and Peterson 2002). Wellman and Hogan point out that ‘the stand-alone capital-I “Internet” [has become] the more widespread and complex small-I “internet”’ (2004: 1), to indicate that the internet has become a taken-for-granted part of people's daily routines in the developed world. Herring (2008) believes that the more embedded these new technologies become in everyday life, the more normalised their use will be. Baym refers to this as the ‘domestication’ of digital technologies (2010: 45). Dystopian visions of what new digital technologies might do to society are increasingly being dismissed (Hampton 2003; Westlake 2008) in favour of views of the internet as an additional means of interacting and socially engaging (Baym 2010; Coyle and Vaughn 2008; Haythornthwaite 2005; Horrigan 2001; Khor and Marsh 2006; Westlake 2008). Perceived dichotomies between real-life and virtual realms are being deconstructed (Baym 2010; Chambers 2006; Livingstone 2008; Wilson and Peterson 2002) to build a coordinated approach between online and offline actions (Kitchin 1998; Zhao et al. 2008).
3.1.5 Conclusion

Herring suggests that the effects of new technologies should not be over-emphasised, stating that ‘the human race will not become smarter, kinder, or more just overall as a result of digital media, nor will it become dumber, more violent, or less moral’ (2008: 88; see also Baym 2010). The more the internet is used, the more possibilities and risks arise. Current work on the use of online technologies however has not sufficiently considered them as possibilities for subjectivation. This gap in the literature is also evident in ways in which SNSs as one particular Web 2.0 development have been conceptualised in current literature. Work on SNSs commonly suggests that SNSs-use changes how we interact and present ourselves in contemporary society. However, creating a simplified divide between online and offline action and disregarding the practices and tools that have come to shape the use of SNSs undermine the effectiveness of much of this work. This thesis will address this gap in the literature particular to SNS-use and provide a more nuanced way of conceptualising the complex assemblages between humans and technologies that shape selves, social actions and environments.

3.2 Introducing social networking sites

3.2.1 What are SNSs and who uses them?

A brief overview of what SNSs are, who does and does not use them, to do what and why will provide an introduction into these Web 2.0 tools. SNSs like Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and Twitter have gained increasing popularity since their emergence in the early 2000s. To briefly summarise: Six Degrees.com was the first SNS launched in 1997. It held up until 2000 but could not sustain itself as a business. SixDegrees founder Weinreich believed that his SNS was ahead of its time (2007, cited in boyd and Ellison 2008: 214). Between 1997 and 2001 several online community services began to feature profiles and public expressions of connections between people. The SNS Friendster was launched in 2002 as the first site to provide a service dedicated to allowing people who had a connection offline to tend to it online as well. From 2003 onwards a surge of different SNSs emerged, including MySpace and Tribe.net in 2003 and Bebo in 2005. In 2004, Facebook reached niche communities by starting as a network to support a university community (boyd...
research project, a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that an average of about 30 percent of all online users over the age of 12 actively used an online social networking tool (Jones and Fox 2009). Further Pew Internet and American Life Project studies showed that by 2011, 65 percent of adults over the age of 18 (Madden and Zickuhr 2011) and 80 percent of teens aged 12-17 were using SNSs (Madden 2011). This reveals that SNS-use is being integrated into the daily lives of more and more people, making it even more pertinent to seek an understanding of the role it plays in shaping relations of self to self and to others.

boyd demonstrates that most SNSs have functions like ‘profiles, friends and comments’ (2008: 123). Users create a profile that provides basic information about themselves, commonly paired with a profile picture. Other users of the same SNS, sometimes only after being approved as a known contact or “friend” by the user, can access this information. Connections between people are displayed publicly on profiles. People who have connected on SNSs can communicate via both publicly visible comments on profiles, posts, photos and group sites, and through more private channels, such as instant messaging or internal email (boyd 2008: 123; boyd and Ellison 2008; Buffardi and Campbell 2008: 1303). While many SNSs were initially geared towards teenagers, more and more adults are using them now. Lenhart (2009) discovered that the number of adult internet-users with profiles on SNSs increased from 8 percent in 2005 to 35 percent in 2009. Madden and Zickuhr (2011) show that this figure has risen to 65 percent in 2011.

Beer and Burrows declared that SNSs are ‘perhaps the most socially significant of the Web 2.0 applications’ (2007: 2.20) due to their ability to combine online and offline, as well as geographically distant and physically close, connections. SNSs generally serve to maintain and enhance existing connections between

and Ellison 2008: 214-218). At the outset of this research project in 2009 Wikipedia (2009) listed 148 different SNS in existence today. By 2011 the list had expanded to 201 sites (Wikipedia 2011). Wikipedia emphasises that its list is not exhaustive and only covers the most used and well-known sites. This suggests that more SNS are available online today.
people (boyd 2008; boyd and Ellison 2008; Buckingham 2008; Coyle and Vaughn 2008; Ellison et al. 2007; Ellison et al. 2011; Mendelson and Papacharissi 2011; Richardson and Hessey 2009). Richardson and Hessey (2009) highlight that, on Facebook, existing offline connections are a prerequisite for associating online. Facebook’s log-in page states that the service ‘helps you connect and share with the people in your life’ (Facebook 2009a), indicating that using the site is meant to support already existing social networks. SNSs also promote a truthful and genuine representation of self. Facebook bans the creation of fake or made-up profiles (Westlake 2008: 29).

Ellison et al. (2007) contend that SNSs have changed the ‘directionality’ of connection of online communication. They point out that older online communication tools such as chatrooms, dating sites or gaming forums intended for people to meet online and then possibly follow this up with a real-life meeting. Zhao et al. (2008) refer to Facebook as a ‘nonymous’ online environment, contrasting it with the anonymous nature of chatrooms, Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs)7 and internet dating sites. They acknowledge that online relations are often anchored in the real world through associations with institutions, locations or mutual social circles (Zhao et al. 2008: 1818). Whereas Peter Steiner’s well-known cartoon in The New Yorker (1993) portrays one dog telling another that ‘on the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog’, scholars have argued that SNSs have changed this anonymity.

Hargittai (2007) notes that differences in background, age, race, gender and experience in using the internet cause people to seek out different SNSs. Her study of over one thousand students at the University of Illinois found that ‘social network site usage in the aggregate attracts a diverse set of students across services, but … certain groups are more represented on some sites than others’ (Hargittai 2007). Schrock (2009) similarly suggests that choice of SNS is not arbitrary but is influenced by psychological, affective and behavioural

7 Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) are online sites that allow users to participate in role-play games and interact with one another by typing certain written commands that construct the online environment.
factors, such as extroversion, self-disclosure, computer anxiety and self-efficacy. Hargittai (2007) also found that students chose services according to the ones their friends used, indicating that ‘students from similar backgrounds might migrate toward the same services’. Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) similarly point out that group norms affect people’s choice to use a SNS. Demographic traits, personal circumstances and the history of a relationship influence the way people encounter one another on SNSs.

Most current studies found that people use SNSs foremost to maintain contact with existing friends and family (Cheung, Chiu and Lee 2011; Smith, A. 2011). Arnett (2004, cited in Bumgarner 2007) claims that young adults today are confronted with a gap in their lives between leaving their original families and creating their own. Friends come to take on the role of surrogate family and young adults use online technologies to build and maintain their friendship networks. Coyle and Vaughn (2008) found that students who lived at home were less likely to use Facebook which may suggest that there is less need for these students to seek out social contact through online services, as they are integrated into a social network through their home and family. Existing scholarship also notes that people use SNSs for entertainment (Cheung, Chiu and Lee 2011), as a social activity and to facilitate gossip (Bumgarner 2007). Some allude to the concept of social capital to suggest that SNSs are a useful tool for establishing shallow interaction however are not a meaningful way of making new connections (Coyle and Vaughn 2008, Ellison et al. 2007; 2011). SNSs (Facebook in particular) have also been conceptualised as ‘dormant archive[s] of relationships’ (Richardson and Hessey 2009) or directories (Bumgarner 2007) that constantly update themselves and can be accessed at any given time (Richardson 2009: 18).

3.2.2 Online social networking: For better or worse?

i) Civic engagement and political activism

Critics of the internet have bemoaned that digital technologies infiltrate all situations of everyday life, leading to a demise of social interaction and physical contact (Nie 2001; Nie et al. 2002; Tucker 2007). Nie (2001) asserts that online
interaction omits vital emotional cues, physical expressions of sentiments and subtleties of face-to-face interactions, making it inferior to communication in the physical world. Others identify the internet, particularly SNSs, as new spaces for interaction, communication and expression (Howard et al. 2002; Richardson and Hessey 2009). Horrigan refers to Wellman’s definition of ‘glocalization’ as ‘the capacity of the Internet to expand users’ social worlds to faraway people and simultaneously to bind them more deeply to the place where they live’ (2001: 2), to illustrate how online social networking can enhance connections between people.

Research by Hampton (2003) and Howard et al. (2002) revealed that using internet technologies can further community engagement and civil action (see also Chambers 2006; Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Watson 2008). Some SNSs enable people to publicly support a good cause online, such as Facebook’s ‘Causes’ application (Watson 2008). In this way, SNS-use can further social activism. The way in which online technologies were used in the ‘Arab Spring’\(^8\) revolutions (see Attia et al. 2011; Cottle 2011; Giglio 2011a; 2011b; Madrigal 2011; Shirky 2011) and the ‘London riots’\(^9\) (Baker 2011; Ranger 2011) has led commentators to conceptualise SNSs as tools for achieving political change. SNSs also increasingly are being employed in political campaigns to mobilise supporters (Cook 2010) and enable citizens to become involved in political processes (Coleman and Moss 2008; Levy 2008). These studies reveal that online technologies are integrated into modern processes of relating to self and others and effecting social and political change.

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\(^8\) A term used in the media to label the civil uprisings that swept across North African countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and several others, largely in 2010-2011. Some countries were still in unrest at the time of writing.

\(^9\) A term that refers to a civil upheaval in the UK that started in London in August 2011 and spread to other cities in the country. The riots involved looting, arson and vigilantism.
3.2.2

ii) Exploring and expressing self and forming friendships

SNSs are seen to offer new opportunities for exploring and expressing different aspects of one’s personality (Bargh et al. 2002; Zhao et al. 2008). Creating a profile on a SNS commonly is conceptualised as a way of managing and communicating one’s identity. Richardson (2009) asserts that SNSs are changing both how and what people communicate. Livingstone (2008: 395-396) nuances that this does not mean that face-to-face communication is being displaced. Indeed, while social networking is displacing other forms of online communication to some degree (email, chatrooms, website creation), it incorporates others (instant messaging, blogging, music downloading) and remediates yet more (most notably, face-to-face and telephone communication; Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Jenkins, 2006).

Critics and supporters of online interaction debate about the quality of relationships forged and maintained through SNSs. Haythornthwaite comments that ‘[online] connectivity can be both disengaging and engaging, disruptive of relationships yet also integrative across populations’ (2005: 126). Some argue that there is no distinction between relationship-types on SNSs (Richardson 2009; Taylor 2008). Others acknowledge that the strength of the tie between two communicators can both influence and be influenced by interaction on SNSs, allowing for the existence of different intensities in connections (Ellison et al. 2007; Haythornthwaite 2005; Schrock 2009). Some scholars claim that the public display of friendships on SNSs is connected to a concern with narcissistic self-presentation, leading users to befriend people they would not usually interact with offline in order to bolster the number of connections they can display on their sites. Buffardi and Campbell suggest that SNSs promote narcissistic behaviour and express an ‘overall agentic (rather than communal) self-presentation’ (2008: 1305). Tucker (2007) argues that online communication furthers what Rosen has termed ‘egocasting’ (cited in Tucker 2007: 13) – the narrow engagement with own interests, not expanding on tastes and opinions. These critics deny that making these new connections online (for
whatever reasons they are made) could lead to new friendships and experiences.

3.2.2

iii) Privacy

Privacy concerns around the internet are echoed in studies of SNS-use. Facebook’s privacy policy (2009b) states that the site collects information that users share with friends such as the groups they belong to, events they set up and applications they add. When users change or update information, Facebook keeps a backup of the previous version of the profile for a vaguely specified ‘reasonable period of time’ (Facebook 2009b). Furthermore, the site retains the right to

collect information about [users] from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service (e.g., photo tags) in order to provide [users] with more useful information and a more personalized experience (Facebook 2009b).

Facebook-users have no choice with regards to these policies however they can limit who sees what information about them in certain ways. Some suggest that SNSs may be the answer to privacy concerns on the internet because they provide the possibility to manage how private or public one wants to make oneself and to whom (Pincus, cited in Gross and Acquisti 2005: 73). However, studies have found that many young SNS-users are unsure about whether and how to change default privacy settings (Gross and Acquisti 2005; Livingstone 2008; van Mannen 2010).

3.2.2

iv) Norms, rules and hierarchies

While some allude to discrepancies between online interaction and face-to-face communication, others suggest that offline norms, rules and hierarchies are mirrored in online communication processes, as well as new ones established. Shah claims that ‘the social order of … technologised communities’ – something she also refers to as ‘technosociality’ – produces a new ‘technologised social
order’ (2008: 214). Bargh et al. claim that the anonymity of the internet affords the opportunity to act without consequences, both because one is free of the expectations and constraints placed on us by those who know us, and because the costs and risks of social sanctions for what we say or do are greatly reduced (2002: 35).

Holmes (2011) however asserts that the proliferation of advice in the media on appropriate online conduct indicates that people are uncertain about how to manage their emotions in contemporary technologised society. boyd (2008) points out that adolescence is a time when adhering to norms is socially particularly important. She argues that ‘even though teens theoretically have the ability to behave differently online, the social hierarchies that regulate “coolness” offline are also present online’ (boyd 2008: 129). Holmes asserts that online rules of etiquette are based on norms that exist in the offline world and that the embeddedness of SNS-use in everyday life has brought about new norms and manners – a new ‘netiquette’ (2011). Similarly, Zhao et al. (2008) contend that the ‘nonymous’ environment of SNSs causes people to conform to established social norms. Buckingham argues that the absence of visual and tonal signals from online communication necessitates the development of new skills and norms – an online etiquette (2008: 6).

Both Buckingham (2008) and Westlake (2008) apply Goffman’s observations on processes of interaction in the physical world to online communication. Westlake argues that internet-users consciously adapt the rules and norms of face-to-face engagement to their online interactions. She states that while certain elements that Goffman defines as part of the “front stage” performance are absent in computer-mediated interaction (visual cues such as clothing and facial expression and aural cues such as tone), they are replaced in chat and on web-sites by more “staged” elements such as font, photographs, music, and graphics (2008: 27).

Wilson and Peterson (2002) argue that long-established social practices influence how we use the internet yet that internet-use can also change existing norms. They state that ‘offline social roles and existing cultural ideologies are played out, and sometimes exaggerated, in online communication’ (2002: 457).
Hierarchies and comparative relationships also translate from the physical into the online world. Dalsgaard (2008) claims that the ‘Top 8’ feature on MySpace, which requires users to select eight friends who are awarded the status of top friend, illustrates that hierarchies exist in online communities (2008: 12). boyd (2008) shows that the ‘Top 8’ feature can result in drama and social dilemmas. One participant in boyd’s study equates the process of appointing eight top friends to bribing people to invite them to birthday parties in pre-SNS times. She states that ‘Top 8’ is ‘the new dangling carrot for gaining superficial acceptance’ (Nadine, cited in boyd 2008: 131). boyd (2008) also illustrates that offline social pressures and hierarchical relations cause people to accept friends to their MySpace list merely to avoid awkward social situations in the physical world (see also Holmes 2011). Hewitt and Forte (2006) and Skågeby (2009) conversely suggest that offline social boundaries and hierarchies cause people not to accept others as friends. Hewitt and Forte (2006) refer to the relationship between students and academic staff. Skågeby (2009) asserts that conflicts of interest and social pressures can arise when work colleagues or superiors approach one another on Facebook.

Marsden (2008, cited in Holmes 2011) sums up the complexities involved in managing offline hierarchies in the use of SNSs by suggesting that online networks consist of ‘an unholy collection of people who, in everyday life, you’d probably go to great lengths to keep apart’. Hence, offline relations both shape online connections and can become problematised by their transfer into the digital. Westlake aptly summarises the way in which offline social hierarchies, rules and norms are mirrored and developed in online interaction by stating that ‘the internet continues to be a palimpsest of the older ways of

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10 see also boyd on the challenges of expressing oneself adequately in online environments that collapse contexts (2011: 50), and Holmes (2011), who refers to Goffman’s concept of ‘role conflict’ to describe what happens when the segregation between different audiences in the performance of identities break down. Mendelson and Papacharissi suggest that some users create several separate profiles on SNSs to manage these difficulties and to accommodate different audiences (2011: 252).
communicating, even as it is also a way of signifying through new technologies’ (2008: 38).

3.2.3 Conclusion

Existing literature on SNSs highlights that different people use different sites for different reasons. While some view online interaction as detrimental to social contact others have conceptualised SNSs as new tools for communicating across boundaries and expressing identity. Existing scholarly literature on SNSs mainly addresses the use of the sites for social and political engagement, the quality of online friendships, the changing boundaries of what is private and public and the existence of online norms, values and hierarchies. Some claim that the anonymity of the internet affords a more authentic expression of self, whereas others assert that offline power relations are mirrored in online conduct. Most of the cited studies create a binary opposition between online and offline that discounts the fluidity of interconnections between human and non-human actants in modern techno-social hybrid worlds.

For the purposes of this study it is relevant to take a closer look at existing scholarship on four specific themes that relate to the way SNS-use is conceptualised in later parts of this thesis. This first is the notion of SNSs as environments in which identity can be expressed and cultivated. The second relates to, and extends from, literature on online friendships and concerns the perceived effects SNS-use has on intimacy. Third, it is relevant to address how SNSs are seen to contribute to the reconfiguration of privacy. Finally, the role of SNSs in terms of social capital, civic engagement and community-formation will be addressed.

3.3 Exploring SNSs further

3.3.1 I-dentity: Self-expression on SNSs

The literature on SNS-use and identity is split between those who conceptualise SNSs as new arenas for developing and expressing identity, or even multiple identities, and those who see them as narcissistic tools that promote self-obsession. The debate centres on whether the creation of a profile on SNSs is a
self-reflexive process or whether it cannot be an accurate and contemplative representation of self. Some studies acknowledge that relations with others and the structural design of SNSs influence the way identities are expressed on and through these sites, however they do not conceptualise SNSs themselves as self-forming tools.

3.3.1

i) New avenues for self-expression and reflexivity

SNS have been rendered forums for creating online identities that mirror, enhance and even aid the discovery of unexpressed personality traits. Turkle asserts that

when people adopt an online persona they cross a boundary into highly-charged territory. Some feel an uncomfortable sense of fragmentation, some a sense of relief. Some sense the possibilities for self-discovery, even self-transformation (1995: 260).

Turkle highlights the different effects that exploring identity online can have. Bargh et al. applaud ‘the Internet’s ability to facilitate self-expression’ (2002: 35) and to Livingstone ‘it seems that for many, creating and networking online content is becoming an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and social relations’ (2008: 394). Similarly, boyd states that ‘how youth engage through social network sites today provides long-lasting insights into identity formation, status negotiation, and peer-to-peer sociality’ (2008: 142). Wilson and Peterson (2002) refer to Peter Steiner’s (1993) previously mentioned cartoon to argue that identity can be reshaped and newly constructed online. While these scholars acknowledge that the internet and SNSs play a role in the ways in which individuals understand and present themselves, they fall short of acknowledging them as tools that provide certain possibilities for subjectivation that individuals can take up. They characterise SNSs as spaces where dormant personality traits can be explored and revealed. This presumes that a particular self pre-exists and is expressed in certain ways online. It overlooks that understandings of self are actually shaped in the process of users circulating with SNSs in the context of a variety of relations, norms and truth claims.

11 Turkle changes her position on this in later work (Turkle 2010). See further details below.
Mendelson and Papacharissi point out that SNS-users choose to portray ‘highly selective versions’ of identities on these sites (2011: 252). They suggest that Facebook-users strategically select the photos they post on their profiles to create certain representations of themselves and the social groups and events they are involved in (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2011). Others highlight that the perceived anonymity of the internet and the variety of venues it offers allows users to explore and experiment with different presentations of self (Bargh et al. 2002; Hargittai 2007; McKenna and Seidmann 2008; Shah 2008; Skågeby 2009; Turkle 1995; Wilson and Peterson 2002). Turkle describes the internet as a virtual laboratory (1995: 12) for ‘experimenting with multiplicity’ (1995: 260). McKenna and Seidmann (2008) state that online anonymity provides the freedom to express oneself without feeling constricted by expectations and social sanctions. Zhao et al. (2008) suggest that identity construction on the internet is detached from physical gating characteristics such as stuttering, an unconventional appearance or shyness, which makes the internet an empowering setting where different identities can be explored and real-world barriers overcome. While these scholars raise relevant issues, they all proceed from an idea of a fixed identity that may be experimented with, enhanced or represented in particular ways. They disregard the idea that selves are actually formed in the process of engaging with SNSs.

By distinguishing between online and offline identities, contemporary literature on the use of SNSs overlooks that historical practices and complex networks are involved in processes of subjectivation. Even scholars who acknowledge that representations of self on the internet originate from real people in the physical world and can have consequences for their “real lives” (Wilson and Peterson 2002; Zhao et al. 2008) construct categories of the online vs. the offline self. They assume that the identities SNS-users portray on their profile pages either reflect or misrepresent their selfhood. While SNS-users do approach their engagement with the sites with an idea about how they want to portray themselves that is linked to their position in a social group and to other relations, discourses and norms, it is also important to acknowledge that users
form and re-form their selfhood in the process of engaging with online technologies. The affordances that these technologies themselves provide to a certain extent prescribe and shape some possibilities for being self on SNSs. SNS-use is one way for individuals to form an understanding of themselves, not a means of staging pre-formed identities. This nuance is not acknowledged in existing literature\(^{12}\).

Scholars who consider the internet to be a forum for people to shape and express an identity either portray this as a liberating and empowering act or as a grounding means of finding oneself. This suggests that SNSs prompt people to engage with themselves. Brake (2008) describes creating a profile on a SNS as an inherently self-reflexive process. However, he claims that people do not make use of this potential because self-examination and self-reflection in front of others can be challenging and embarrassing, as it may be considered egocentric (Brake 2008). Participants in a study by Bargh et al. however noted that interacting online enabled them to access qualities they would not usually express socially – their ‘true-self concept’ (2002: 33-34). Ellison et al. (2011) suggest that self-disclosure and self-reflection on SNSs allow users to gain a better sense of themselves. All of these studies suggest that representing self on SNSs allows users to tap into and express a part of themselves that they may not have ‘found’ otherwise.

In 1995, Turkle agreed that portraying oneself online might provide a way of prompting a deeper understanding of one’s identity. She argued that ‘having

\(^{12}\) Notable exceptions include Siles’ (2012) analysis of early blogging and online diary-writing practices that conceptualises them as techniques of self. Baym also acknowledges that ‘mediated communication is not a space, it is an additional tool people use to connect, one which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life’ (2010: 152). However, neither of these scholars look at SNSs specifically. A more centrist approach that acknowledges the circular relation between technology and society needs to be applied to understandings of SNS-use in order to produce more nuanced understandings that avoid ascribing to notions of selfhood as pre-existing and dichotomise between online and offline realms. This thesis aims to generate such critical, social theoretical analysis of SNS-use and self-formation.
literally written our online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life’ (Turkle 1995: 263). Turkle (2011) has since revised her position and asserts now that online technologies come to dominate and determine human relations to self and others. Her highly technologically deterministic views suggest that people are loosing some of their humanity the more they engage with technology. Both conceptualisations, as well as most of the studies referred to above, assume that selfhood is a pre-existing category that can be explored and expressed or controlled and suppressed by becoming involved with online technologies. This a priori understanding of self is contested in this thesis in favour of thinking about SNSs as practices and tools involved in processes of self-formation that do not produce fixed identities but rather constantly shape and re-shape ways of being selves.

Some scholars have considered how SNSs encourage users constantly to revise and update their profile pages. They provide a slightly more flexible understanding of identity. Shah argues that updating one’s profile ‘giv[es] the sense of a fluid and changing persona, rather than a static description’ (2008: 215; see also Livingstone 2008). Hills notes that the frequently updated profile pictures on Facebook ‘become a short hand for changing, up-to-the minute performances of self’ (2009: 118). Noting that SNSs encourage users to keep their profiles up to date opens up to the understanding that identity is not a fixed category. Nevertheless, this constructivist approach still conceptualises self as a real entity that reacts relatively predictably to external changes. In thinking about the use of SNSs as tools for forming, understanding and expressing identity we need to focus less on what the self is and more on how selves are formed.

3.3.1

ii) Fostering insecurities and narcissism
Some scholars have suggested that SNSs create more unstable relationships, superficiality and disengagement, promote narcissistic behaviour and increase levels of uncertainty and insecurity in today’s society. Dalsgaard (2008) and
Marshall (2006, cited in Hills 2009: 119) state that the proliferation of SNS-use has shifted boundaries between public and private presentations of self. They suggest that this increases voyeurism and exhibitionism within our society. Accordingly, people narcissistically put themselves on display as well as scrutinise the performances of others (Dalsgaard 2008; Hills 2009). Rosen (2007) also believes that one of the main objectives of SNS-use is self-exposure. She states that

> the creation and conspicuous consumption of intimate details and images of one’s own and others’ lives is the main activity in the online social networking world. There is no room for reticence; there is only revelation (2007: 24).

SNSs are seen to put the individual at the centre of attention (Dalsgaard 2008), with profiles acting as self-promotion (Brake 2008). Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) state that posting pictures on Facebook is a narcissistic act, as users select only photos that make them look good and place them in the spotlight. Buffardi and Campbell see the way that ‘these Web sites offer a gateway for self-promotion via self-descriptions, vanity via photos, and large numbers of shallow relationships’ (2008: 1303) as disconcerting. Rosen similarly questions whether

> this technology, with its constant demands to collect (friends and status), and perform (by marketing ourselves), in some ways undermine[s] our ability to attain what it promises – a surer sense of who we are and where we belong? (2007: 16; see also Turkle 2011).

Buffardi and Campbell (2008) found that the expression of narcissism on SNSs mirrors narcissistic behaviour offline. Thus, they suggest that even though it may seem like SNS-use fosters egocentric and narcissistic personalities, in fact they simply provide a forum within which pre-existing narcissistic traits can be exhibited and amplified. Once again, this approach suggests that there is a division between online and offline identity and conceptualises self as a pre-existing, definable category. It assumes that inherent character traits become expressed, enhanced or corrupted when individuals use SNSs.
3.3.1

iii) Expressing self in relation to others

Current SNS-scholarship suggests that publicly displaying friendships on SNSs, and comparing oneself to others, affects how people express their identities. Dalsgaard (2008) claims that Facebook-users exist relationally; a profile without connections is non-sensical. As such, identities are embedded in a social circle (Watson 2008). This view softens claims that SNS-profiles are egocentric exhibitions of self. Brake (2008) maintains that profiles are used to position the self in a social group rather than to express an individual identity. boyd (2008) also claims that self is represented through social ties on SNS MySpace. She argues that ‘because Friends are displayed on an individual’s profile, they provide meaningful information about that person; in other words, “You are who you know”’ (2008: 130). Livingstone (2008) found that teenagers see themselves as embedded in a social group on SNSs since they use the sites to put on display their social interactions with others. She argues that the self is represented through friends rather than through individual desires on SNSs (Livingstone 2008). Similarly, Zhao et al. (2008) found that a majority of Facebook-users express group-oriented identities through their profile pictures, which depict them together with other people rather than by themselves. These authors conceptualise the construction of identity on SNSs as rooted in a network of friends and expressed through these social ties. They allude to the link between relations of self to self and self to others in processes of subjectivation however do not make this explicit. This thesis seeks to provide a way of thinking about SNSs that might allow current scholars to make the connections between self-formation and relations of self to self and to others.

Some scholars have considered how the structure of SNSs prescribes certain ways of expressing oneself. Brake states that

it is arguable that part of the appeal of services like MySpace is that users do not have to concern themselves overmuch with determining which aspects of themselves best reflect who they are. The questions deemed relevant – who their peers are, what bands they like and so on – have already been decided and are presented to the potential profile maker by the service (2008: 297).
Brake suggests that a generic way of constructing an identity exists on SNSs. boyd maintains that ‘profiles are constructed by filling out forms on the site’ (2008: 123). She accepts that the design of the site promotes a certain generic demonstration of personality (through demographic and preference questions), yet claims that ‘there is plenty of room for [teenagers] to manipulate profiles to express themselves’ (boyd 2008: 127-8).

Zhao et al. (2008) found that the identities expressed through profiles on Facebook were generally group-oriented, heterosexual and consumption-related and occasionally represented hedonistic or superficial demonstrations of personality. Hills also suggests that ‘consumer taste is … heavily foregrounded [on Facebook] … Self-identity is explicitly made a matter of one’s assorted enthusiasms and fandoms’ (2009: 118). In this way, filling in sections on one’s favourite books, music and movies becomes a way of expressing a consumer/taste-oriented identity (Zhao et al. 2008). Furthermore, Zhao et al. found that the structural set up of profile pages encourages users to portray themselves as active, well-rounded, popular and thoughtful. They imply that the technology leads users to assume a certain type of selfhood.

We can infer that these findings acknowledge that SNSs on one hand suggest or prescribe ways of expressing self and on the other are tools through which people can present their identity. None of the above studies however explicitly acknowledge that humans and technologies are mutually involved in shaping (rather than simply expressing) one another in ongoing social processes. A more critical social theoretical approach that digs deeper to understand what these findings mean and how they can be interpreted on a theoretical level is necessary. Foucault’s work on techniques of self and a balanced ANT-based approach to the reflexive relations between human and non-human actants can provide this theoretical framework. Such an approach will be applied in this thesis in order to contribute a different way of thinking about SNS-use as a technological way of governing the conduct of individuals in contemporary society.
3.3.1

iv) Being ‘present’ through the profile

Some argue that creating an online profile of one’s identity is neither a reflexive act nor an accurate means of expressing identity. Whereas Livingstone (2008) and Shah (2008) maintain that SNS-users devote time and effort to creating, checking and updating their profiles to ensure their standing in the network, Brake argues that ‘MySpace and sites like it provide a means for individuals to have a “presence” online under their control without having to invest a significant amount of time in creating or maintaining it’ (2008: 297). Brake (2008) believes that creating a profile on a SNS can be a reflexive exercise, however that users do not make use of this potential. The SNS-users he interviewed explicitly claimed that their profiles on MySpace did not provide a sufficient reflection of what they are like (Brake 2008). Charlie states that ‘it’s hard to sum yourself up in one page. It tells you the bare facts but then there’s nothing to link them together’ (cited in Brake 2008: 290). Similarly, participants in Bumgarner’s study (2007) rarely responded “yes” when asked whether ‘Facebook lets [them] craft [their] identity’.

Neither Bumgarner (2007) nor Brake (2008) analyse the responses of their interviewees. They take their statements at face value to mean that SNSs do not represent meaningful tools for modern individuals to express, never mind shape understandings of self. Once again, the need for more critical, social theoretical interpretations of empirical findings surfaces. While SNS-users may not report that they employ these sites to express their identities, this is not necessarily a conscious choice. SNSs are involved in the social practices through which individuals form understandings of themselves and others and in this way shape their conduct. Whether or not creating a profile on a SNS is a way of articulating an identity is in fact the wrong question to pose. SNS-use is not an expression of selfhood but a tool in the formation of selves.

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13 Reflected in how many people look at a users’ profile, who contacts a user, who adds them, etc.
3.3.1

v) Conclusion

Current scholarship on SNS-use and identity suggests that SNS-users express their identities through their social relations, through narcissistic behaviour and by adhering to structural prescriptions inherent to the sites. Whereas some maintain that SNSs are used reflexively to express and explore self, others deny that online profiles can accurately represent the complexity of a user’s personality. Much of the scholarship that explores identity construction on SNSs is framed by the commonly held understanding of selfhood as universal and pre-existing and often seeks to establish a general theory about “the self”. Most empirical studies fail to question and interpret their findings from a critical theoretical standpoint that can provide insight into the more subtle ways in which humans and technologies are interconnected in day-to-day life that shape social processes. Such an approach needs to focus not on the self itself but on the practices that form selfhood in order to allow for an understanding of subjectivity as transient and involved in constant processes that shape and re-shape it.

3.3.2 Out of sight, out of mind?

i) Online intimacy

SNSs have been explored with regards to their ability to maintain, stabilise, generate or harm intimate relationships. Katz and Rice argue that ‘rich, fertile, diverse, and expanded interactions are possible through the Internet’ (2002: 225). They state that online connectivity can provide support, including emotional support (Katz and Rice 2002). They cite ethnographic studies that reveal that internet-users view communicating with friends and family as one of the most important aspects of their online activity (Katz and Rice 2002: 225). Valentine (2006) conceptualises the internet as a way of extending intimacy beyond physical boundaries. She shows how members of long-distance families use the internet to maintain social contact and share daily occurrences. Tapscott demonstrates that the internet also serves to reconnect family members in households that are not physically separated 'by moving many family activities
(such as working, learning, shopping...) dispersed by industrial society back into the home’ (1997: 252, cited in Katz and Rice 2002: 214).

Hiltz and Turoff (1978, cited in Reid 1999) suggest that online relationships can be just as strong, dependable and authentic, if not more so, as offline connections. They elucidate that some users of online interaction tools ‘come to feel that their very best and closest friends are members of their electronic group, whom they seldom or never see’ (1978: 101, cited in Reid 1999: 113). Similarly, Haythornthwaite’s study (2009) of distance education students revealed that their online study community becomes the ‘real’ network for these students and face-to-face interaction becomes a supplementary rather than primary form of interaction.

3.3.2

ii) Intimacy on SNSs

The above-mentioned studies refer mainly to the use of ICTs more generally, including MUDs, chatrooms and email. Very little work on the formation of intimacy on SNSs specifically has been conducted. Toyama (2007) performed one study on the influence of SNS-use on community-building in Japan. He found that ‘a reliable and “real” relationship with others could be formed and maintained with social networking services’ (2007: 2). Toyama refers to Yamasaki (2007) to render the exchange of comments on SNSs as ‘positive strokes’ (Toyama 2007: 2) that provide pleasure. In this way, Toyama suggests that interpersonal interaction on SNSs can be intimate and can connect people. Van Mannen (2010) also maintains that SNS-use strengthens relations between individuals and understandings of self. He argues that while the physical separation that characterises online interaction seems to decrease the possibility for intimate social contact, the mediated form of communicating in fact can make users more open and vulnerable, leading them to reveal more of themselves than they would in face-to-face engagement (2010: 6). He also suggests that digital media open up ‘a reflexive sphere of intimacy’ with the self (van Mannen 2010: 6).
3.3.2

iii) Conclusion

Most current studies on internet communication and intimacy suggest that interaction in virtual environments may serve to maintain, strengthen and/or build intimate offline relationships. How SNS-use specifically relates to intimacy has not been explored in any depth. Scholars tend to construct a divide between online and offline intimacy and compare and judge the quality of the two against one another. They commonly focus on how online conduct affects offline relations. Rather than making value judgements about whether relations are stronger and better or weaker and less intimate online we should focus on how people form and understand their relations to self and others in the context of modern techno-social hybrid worlds. In order to do so we need to historicise the online practices to show that they have emerged from older ways of forming self that have been translated and reconfigured to fit new contexts. This will release the dichotomous conceptualisation of offline vs. online intimacy and provide a more historical and contingent understanding of practices of self-formation and relations of self to self and self to others. Using SNSs as specific case studies contributes to the growth of the currently limited body of literature on SNSs and intimacy and enhances it with critical theoretical analysis.

3.3.3 Profiles as identity cards: The public display of private information on SNSs

The blurring of boundaries between public and private in our modern hyperconnected, technologised ‘celebrity society’ (van Krieken 2012) has become a prevalent topic of discussion in popular media and academic debate. Some perceive making private information public on SNSs as dangerous, whereas others claim that SNS-use alleviates online privacy concerns. Young people in particular are seen to assess risk and privacy issues differently to their parents. This suggests that there are generational differences in the ways in which people expose themselves on SNSs. Some scholars argue that taking risks is a standard part of growing-up that occurs both online and in real-life situations. They propose that the dangers of SNS-use for children and adolescents should not be over-dramatised. While our understandings of
privacy may be shifting we, once again, should not assign SNSs the agency to produce these changes, nor conceptualise them as the mere symptoms of a grander trend that defines modern society. Rather than making general value judgements we should explore how people expose themselves online in order to think about the role this plays in their self-formation. In doing so we need to acknowledge the interrelation between humans and technologies in modern self-forming processes and their historical roots.

3.3.3

i) Revealing self in new mediated publics

Current literature on internet-use proposes that Web 2.0 has fostered an environment more open to the revelation of private information in the public domain. It suggests that ordinary people willingly expose themselves to public scrutiny through their use of new online technologies. boyd refers to online networks like those created on SNSs as new realms of publicity or ‘networked publics’ (2008: 125; see also boyd 2011). She alludes to the role of technology in mediating communication within these new public domains, claiming that ‘the network mediates the interaction between members of the public’ (boyd 2008: 125). In a more recent publication on networked publics boyd (2011) appends that this does not imply that networked publics dictate how people act but rather shapes their engagement.

boyd identifies five defining factors of mediated publics: persistence, searchability, replicability, invisible audiences (boyd 2008: 126; boyd 2011: 46) and scaleability (boyd 2011)\textsuperscript{14}. She suggests that ‘a mediated public could consist of all people across all space and all time’ (2008: 126). Papacharissi and

\textsuperscript{14} Persistence refers to the permanent records of interactions between people that are generated through the use of online neworks. Searchability is defined by the ability to find another person’s ‘digital body’ (boyd 2008: 126) through mediated search tools. Replicability describes how data can be copied and pasted from any given medium to another. The invisibility of audiences refers to how people can access information about one another and interact regardless of temporal and spatial distanciation (boyd 2008: 126). Scaleability suggests that information is distributed on greater scales, increasing visibility in mediated publics (boyd 2011: 47-48).
Gibson (2011) supplement boyd’s characterisation with a sixth element, shareability, to account for the sharing of content and information in networked digital spaces. These scholars argue that mediated publics are never static or asocial as they depend on users to provide a flow of information (Papacharissi and Gibson 2011: 76). Papacharissi and Gibson suggest that ‘the challenge for individuals is to manage the persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability of their performances fluently in environments that prompt (and in some instances reward) sharing’ (2011: 76). Similarly, Walther et al. allude to the ‘convergence of mass, peer and interpersonal communication’ (2011: 25) that characterises online interaction. They use the Facebook wall post as an example of ‘a hybrid of mass and interpersonal messaging’ (2011: 32) that requires users to manage the public visibility of their private interpersonal communication.

The notion that people are voluntarily giving up more and more of their personal lives and submitting it to audiences of unknown scale, suggests that a shift in values of privacy is occurring (Beer and Burrows 2007). Gross and Acquisti (2005) claim that new forms of intimacy and trust are developing as people become more open about sharing personal information online. Raynes-Goldie suggests that ‘Facebook’s very purpose challenges conventional notions of privacy’ (2010). She argues that SNS-users voluntarily submit themselves to self-disclosure and self-surveillance (Raynes-Goldie 2010). Charlie Rosenbury, a student at the University of Missouri in the United States, created a program in 2005 that automatically sent out 250,000 friend requests across America through Facebook to see how many people would add him. 75,000 (30 percent) accepted his request (Jump 2005). This suggests that people willingly permit strangers to view private information about themselves on Facebook. However, we need to understand that complex shifting dynamics between the demands, risks, disadvantages and benefits involved in surrendering privacy require networked individuals to manage their privacy in new ways (boyd 2011).

Taddicken and Jers (2011) suggest that users are faced with weighing up a loss of privacy with the gratifications of public online communication. Westlak
claims that making private information public on SNSs is ‘surveillance driven by desire’ (2008: 38). Papacharissi and Gibson remind us that

sociality has always required some (voluntary) abandonment of privacy. In order to become social, we must give up some of our private time and space so as to share it with others (2011: 78).

They note that the issue becomes more prevalent in the context of networked publics because the persistence, searchability, replicability, shareability and invisibility of audiences mean that information that is made publicly accessible can be recorded, archived and traced back (Papacharissi and Gibson 2011: 78). Surrendering privacy on SNSs means an increase in possibilities for surveillance and reveals that modern individuals feel a demand and desire to be visible in the public realm.

3.3.3

ii) Privacy: Eroded or managed in new ways?

Scholars disagree about whether SNS-use endangers privacy or represents a structured means of managing online identity within the dangerous domain of the internet. Some acknowledge that this is not a simple black and white issue. Gross and Acquisti identify dangers such as identity theft, access to social security numbers by third parties, online and offline stalking, embarrassment, discrimination and blackmailing as possible outcomes of surrendering private information on the internet (2005: 73). Van Mannen adds paedophilia, sexual harassment and cyber bullying to the list of risks SNS-users put themselves at when revealing themselves on these sites (2010: 4). Gross and Acquisti (2005) propose that privacy implications are dependent on who information is made available to (the hosting site, other users, third parties) and how this information is used. Mark Pincus15 (cited in Gross and Acquisti 2005) suggests that SNSs represent a means of managing privacy in the public domain of the internet and protecting oneself from some of the dangers outlined by Gross and Acquisti (2005) and others.

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15 CEO of SNS Tribe.net
Gross and Acquisti claim that the early version of Facebook, which required users to be part of a university network in order to join the site, made users feel more secure and intimate because they knew they shared the physical university campus with those they encountered online (2005: 74). Facebook is now more widely accessible, yet users are still expected to provide private details about themselves, including their full name, email address, sex and date of birth, to authenticate their identity before being able to join the community. In 2009 Facebook’s Principles stated that the site ‘requires all users to provide their real date of birth to encourage authenticity and provide only age-appropriate access to content’ (Facebook 2009b).

The introduction of the News Feed feature on Facebook in 2009 resulted in a controversial debate about privacy issues. The News Feed became the homepage of each individual user’s Facebook site and presented the user with an aggregation of the most recent actions and information shared by his/her contacts (see boyd and Hargittai 2010; Papacharissi and Gibson 2011; Westlake 2008). Facebook-users initially disapproved of this change as they felt their rights to privacy were being violated (boyd and Hargittai 2010; Papacharissi and Gibson 2011). However, users quickly accepted the new feature (Papacharissi and Gibson 2011). Resistance to technological change often shifts into acceptance and normalisation the more familiar tools become. Facebook has continuously adapted its privacy settings, gradually opening up policies further and further. In 2009, Facebook changed its privacy settings so that profiles became publicly accessible by default and users had to opt out of this default setting, rather than having the ability to choose who is allowed access to their information from the outset (boyd and Hargittai 2010). Despite concerns about how Facebook handles the privacy of its users, more and more people use the site every day. Users seem willing to accept and adapt to the changing boundaries between what is public and private. boyd suggests that ‘privacy is

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16 The exact phrasing of these terms has since changed however Facebook still insists that users provide private details to ensure they portray themselves authentically.
simply in a state of transition as people try to make sense of how to negotiate the structural transformations resulting from networked media’ (2011: 52).

3.3.3

iii) Generational differences in perceptions of risk

A generational difference in attitudes towards internet use becomes particularly apparent in connection to privacy issues. Scholars report that members of generations that did not grow up with the internet feel that young people are being careless with their privacy, leaving them vulnerable to crime and danger (boyd 2008; Herring 2008; Livingstone 2008). Herring asserts that the future generation may think and behave in ways different from present generations – for example as regards privacy which many adults perceive as eroding dangerously, but which youth appear to manage with less concern (2008: 86).

Livingstone (2008) similarly suggests that while older people often assume that teenagers give up private information too readily on SNSs, young SNS-users know how to regulate who has access to information about them. Others claim that young SNS-users are in fact ignorant or careless about changing default privacy settings (see below and Gross and Acquisti 2005; van Mannen 2010). Livingstone states: ‘the complex relation between opportunity and risk is not distinctive to the internet, rather it is a feature of adolescence’ (2008: 397). She argues that risk-taking is a means for adolescents to learn to make the right decisions and that what may seem risky to adults represents an opportunity to teenagers. Fogel and Nehmad also claim that taking risks is part of experimenting and learning and hence growing up (2008: 154). Older and younger generations often perceive dangers differently, whether in relation to SNS-use or other aspects of day-to-day life.

3.3.3

iv) Navigating the technology

Work on SNSs and privacy suggests that the structural set up of SNSs encourages users to share information. Most SNSs conflate contacts that get separated out into different categories in daily life into one and the same group (friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances). Sharing information publicly thus
means sharing it with all contacts. Livingstone (2008) suggests that the binary opposition of friend and non-friend that SNSs generally offer is not representative of real-life sociality. She claims that many teenage SNS-users wish they had more options for categorising who has access to what information on their profiles (see also Brake 2008; Skågeby 2009). Van Mannen (2010) suggests that most SNS-users are unaware of how to change default privacy settings or neglect to do so. Gross and Acquisti (2005) found that only 1.2 percent of users in their study changed default privacy settings and a minority of 0.06 percent (3 users) did not allow access to their profile to people outside of the university network they belonged to. Conversely, boyd and Hargittai (2010) declare that Facebook-users in their study reported a high confidence level in changing privacy settings (an average of 4.3 out of a top level of 5). boyd and Hargittai acknowledge that this self-reported score does not reveal whether users in fact manage their privacy effectively. The technological affordances of SNSs can facilitate or complicate how users manage who has access to information they provide. Scholarly literature suggests that SNS-users are becoming more confident and capable of navigating the sites they use the more these sites are embedded into their daily lives.

3.3.3

v) A privacy paradox

The idea that young people are voluntarily and uninhibitedly giving up all their privacy has been contested. Schrock (2009) suggests that some young people perceive a paradox in terms of managing their privacy online. On one hand, they appreciate, and want to take advantage of, the freedom to express and represent themselves that SNSs offer. On the other, they do not always consider the consequences this public revelation of self can have. boyd (2008) also found that teenage MySpace-users experienced difficulties in managing differing audiences and maintaining a consistent representation of self. They face the problem of ‘how [to] be simultaneously cool to their peers and acceptable to their parents’ (boyd 2008: 133). While SNS-users seem willing to reveal themselves publicly they continue to value their privacy, even if boundaries are
shifting (boyd 2011; boyd and Hargittai 2010; Raynes-Goldie 2011). Raynes-Goldie asserts that

younger [SNS-]users do indeed care about protecting and controlling their personal information. However, their concerns revolve around ... social privacy, rather than the more conventional institutional privacy (2010, emphasis in original).

She thus suggests that young SNS-users are conscious of managing what information those they know have access to, but less aware of how strangers, commercial or governmental bodies may use what they make public about themselves to target, monitor or take advantage of them.

Westlake claims that young people have thresholds in terms of privacy that can be crossed, as demonstrated by the initial resistance that the introduction of the Facebook News Feed was met with (2008: 36-37). Livingstone states that ‘the point is that teenagers must and do disclose personal information in order to sustain intimacy, but they wish to be in control of how they manage this disclosure’ (2008: 405). Similarly, Westlake asserts that

the internet is indeed a stage for performing the self, with Generation Y inviting, albeit cautiously, a certain level of surveillance. But it is surveillance driven by desire, and in that way maybe it is resistant in ways older generations cannot begin to imagine (2008: 38).

These studies suggest that even though young SNS-users expose themselves to unknown or only vaguely defined audiences, they do so consciously and with care (boyd and Hargittai 2010; Raynes-Goldie 2011). While their sense of privacy may be different to that of members of older generations, they are not necessarily being careless with it.

3.3.3

vi) Conclusion

Current scholarship on the effects of internet/SNS-use on notions of privacy suggests that definitions of public and private are shifting and being re-evaluated. Younger generations are portrayed as more ready to reveal private information about themselves in public, yet also capable of managing who has access to this information. The literature reveals that SNSs provide both risks
and affordances in terms of making oneself visible in the public realm. Some suggest that the structural design of SNSs can lead users to reveal information they would rather not share, either because they are unaware that they are sharing it, or unaware of the fact that they have the option not to share it. Mostly, studies found that a sense of privacy prevails within the mediated environment of SNSs and that users find ways to manage public presentation of self online.

The dangers and affordances of SNS-use cannot be neatly categorised as binary opposites. While studies show that people today seem more willing to share more and more information about themselves in the public domain, we should not make value judgements about the state of modern society based on these findings. Some studies acknowledge the complexity involved in weighing up the risks and opportunities of publicly disclosing private information (boyd 2011; Taddicken and Jers 2011; Westlake 2008) and that giving up privacy in return for sociality is not just relevant online but also offline (Livingstone 2008; Papacharissi and Gibson 2011). This thesis provides a way of addressing the shifting boundaries of public and private that accounts for their historical backgrounds in order to assert that the shifts are not indicative of the demise of modern society. Exploring how people have managed their privacy in the past enables us to consider SNSs not as cause or effect of a certain modern attitude but rather as one element involved in its formation. Critically analysing SNS as self-forming practices provides insights into how people relate to themselves and others and understand the ways in which they can conduct themselves, both in public and in private.

3.3.4 The effects of SNS-use on sociality
SNS-use has been considered to have effects on social capital, civic engagement and the building and maintenance of communities. Current research indicates that SNSs provide supplementary means for people to engage with one another that weaken, maintain or strengthen social capital. Offer refers to SNSs as ‘economies of regard’ (1997, cited in Skågeby 2009: 62) where social capital is formed in terms of attention, repute and reciprocity. The strength of ties is seen
to affect different types of users and connections. Research on the effects of SNS-use on civic engagement generally suggests that SNS-use is involving people more in communal action and increasing the impact of social movements. With regards to the effects of SNS-use on the strength of communities, the scholarship is divided. Some suggest that the use of online technologies fosters isolation and alienation and that online communities are less valuable than real-life communities as they are based on weak and hollow relationships. Others propose that SNS-use can facilitate processes of building new communities and enhance existing communities by enabling them to spread globally. This thesis will show that the online practices that are conceptualised as new, revolutionary ways of engaging and communicating are in fact steeped in age-old ways of relating to self and others. This avoids ascribing to a cause-and-effect narrative in favour of establishing a way of thinking about SNS-use and engagement as historically contingent.

3.3.4

i) Social capital

The concept of social capital alludes to the things that people gain from their interpersonal connections in social networks (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000)\(^\text{17}\). As one of the main purposes of SNSs is to facilitate interaction and support existing connections, scholars have considered them in terms of social capital theory. Ellison et al. (2011) suggest that SNSs expose people to a multiplicity of ideas, content and subjectivities, provide resources to be used in daily conduct and strengthen existing social capital. Skågeby argues that on SNSs ‘comments, tags, affiliations, links, etc. are attached to media objects to illustrate, maintain, invoke, create or end interpersonal relationships’ (2009: 61). He suggests that using SNSs involves managing relationships (Skågeby 2009). Offer frames SNSs as ‘economies of regard’ (1997, cited in Skågeby 2009: 62) to suggest that on SNSs, just as in the physical world, people seek ‘acknowledgement, acceptance, respect, reputation, status, power, intimacy, love, friendship, kinship, and sociability, to name but a few’ (1997, cited in

\(^\text{17}\) see Ellison et al. (2011) for a useful outline of social capital and the way in which it has been applied to the study of SNSs.)
Skågeby 2009: 71). Skågeby suggests that this pursuit of regard, a ‘communicated grant of attention’ (2009: 62), is the reason why people cultivate social capital. These studies frame SNS-use as a beneficial way of developing social capital, as they represent ways of expressing and developing connections with others.

Critics render online interaction inferior to offline communication due to the absence of physical cues and the omnipresence of technology in everyday life (Nie 2001; Nie et al. 2002; Tucker 2007). Schrock (2009) refers to Putnam to suggest that social technologies foster ‘weak and convenient “drive-by” relationships’. Haythornthwaite (2005) acknowledges concerns that online communication may pose threats to real life connectivity however she suggests that digital technologies have enhanced daily communication. Chambers also claims that technologised interaction resocialises private lives, enhances social ties and increases social capital (2006: 11-12). Similarly, Quan-Haase et al. ‘suspect that people not only have more relationships than in pre-Internet times, [but] they are [also] in more frequent contact with their relationships’ (2002: 319). Ellison et al. (2007) suggest that SNS-use strengthens social capital and enhances sociality. They show that using Facebook can enable people to stay in touch with, and feel included in, a network that they have to leave behind physically. They refer to this type of connectivity as ‘maintained social capital’ (Ellison et al. 2007). These scholars perceive positive effects of online communication on social capital. They frequently suggest that while SNSs may not provide a structured way for people to express their social networks, they can be used to establish and sustain relations (Ellison et al. 2007).

3.3.4

ii) The strength of ties

Granovetter (1973) first introduced the notion of the strength of ties. He showed how the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy and mutuality or reciprocity involved in a connection between two people defines the strength of their tie. Scholars have applied Granovetter’s theory to SNSs (for a broad overview see Ellison et al. 2011). Skågeby argues that a strong-tie-type SNS-
user would define his/her online relationships as socially meaningful and synonymous with offline relations, whereas a weak-tie-type user would class them as trivial and frivolous (2009: 61). This suggests that people conceptualise their SNS-use and its effects on their social capital in different ways. Further studies have revealed that strong-tie-type internet-users value friendships for their quality whereas weak-tie-type users value the quantity of their connections (Schrock 2009; Skågeby 2009; Taylor 2008). Richardson (2009: 16) found that older SNS-users commonly take the quality approach, allowing only their closest friends to access their profile page, whereas younger users are less pensive about whom they add, striving to increase the number of connections they can display on their profiles. These studies suggest that the effect of SNS-use on social capital differs according to who uses, and how they use the sites (Ellison et al. 2011).

Most scholars seem to agree that online interaction consists mainly of weak ties but can act as a means of sustaining strong ones (Chambers 2006: 113-114). Haythornthwaite suggests that SNS-use increases the amount of weak ties users have because they provide the possibility of turning latent ties – those that are ‘technically possible but not activated socially’ (2005: 137, cited in Ellison et al. 2007) – into weak ties. Ellison et al. (2007) maintain that simply using the internet does not necessarily increase weak ties however they see Facebook as a tool for activating social connections that might otherwise remain inoperative. This suggests that SNS-use helps to resocialise people. Haythornthwaite (2005) observes that weak ties on SNSs are generally not connected through other means and will therefore be affected negatively if a SNS-connection is interrupted. Strong ties, on the other hand, will have other ways of communicating outside of SNSs18 and will seek these out if contact on the SNS breaks down. Weak connections can be newly established through SNS-use yet will remain precarious. Stronger ties can be maintained through the use of SNSs by providing an additional means for people to stay connected.

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18 Haythornthwaite (2005) terms this ‘media multiplexity’.
3.3.4

(iii) Civic engagement

ICT-use has been shown to foster new means for social engagement and to enhance social capital by facilitating communication and information-sharing. Studies render the internet a public discussion forum with the potential to mobilise communal action (Chambers 2006; Hampton 2003; Hampton and Wellman 2003; Horrigan 2001). They reveal that ICT-use makes it more likely for people to become involved in communal issues and more engaged in processes of collective action (see also Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Watson 2008).

SNSs-use in particular has only been considered more recently as an avenue for civic engagement. Brodock et al. (2009) explored the use of different online media in digital activism and their role in effecting social and political change. They found that SNSs were the most common platform used for digital activism (Brodock et al. 2009). boyd (2008) renders MySpace ‘the civil society of teenage cultures’ (2008: 121), suggesting it allows communities to collect and effect civic action. Horrigan (2001) also observes that young people are becoming more involved in community activity through the internet. Watson uses the example of the Facebook Causes application19 to suggest ‘that a broad social network could support online social activism’ (2008: 29).

SNS-use has been involved in recent social and political action. For example, SNSs were (arguably) employed as tools for demanding civil rights and achieving social change in the political uprisings in North Africa in 2010-2011 and the riots in London and other UK cities in August 2011. Whether or not online social networking has been significant in advancing political change in these cases is still a highly contested issue. Opinions are split between those who claim that SNSs furthered political movements by enabling people to come together, communicate and organise action (Attia et al. 2011; Madrigal 2011; Shirky 2011), those who believe that their contribution is negligible, suggesting

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19 The Causes application on Facebook is an online platform for activism, which enables users to create and support a good cause that is represented by a specific non-profit organisation.
that revolutions occur in the same way without SNSs (Allnutt 2011; Gladwell 2010) and those sceptical of the positive effects of SNSs, who consider them to be more beneficial to the governments the uprisings are challenging than to the revolutionaries themselves (Morozov 2011a; 2011b).

Scholarly research and conclusive findings around the issue are yet to emerge. Cottle (2011) outlines ten ways in which online media and communication affected the uprisings in North Africa. He suggests that across these moments of political struggle and change, media and communications have played an inextricable part in extending their scope and sending visible shock waves like a political tsunami through the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to different national, regional and global shores (Cottle 2011: 649).

Baker (2011) suggests that the digitalisation of social space has fostered new ‘mediated crowds’ and public spaces for performing political protest and collective action. She believes that the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter in the 2011 London riots contributed to how the riots unfolded, yet did not cause them. She sees emotions as the key factor that motivates social thought and action, indicating that online activism cannot be seen separately from offline relations and activity (Baker 2011). Harlow (2012) explores how SNSs fostered online activism that had concrete social and political effects in Guatemala. She refers to the mass protests that emerged on Facebook and Twitter in 2009 in response to a posthumously published video by prominent lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg accusing the Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom of having assassinated him. Harlow asserts that ‘what started as a massive protest organized via Facebook around Rosenberg’s murder has evolved into a more general pro-justice and anti-violence movement’ (2012: 4). This suggests that online activism serves to support and enhance offline action.

The involvement of SNSs in political uprisings and demands for social change has opened up a new space for research into the effects of social media on civic engagement and social action. SNSs seem to bear the potential to unite people and mobilise support for a particular cause, aid in organising action and serve to revive civic engagement in society. Chapter 7 will consider this emerging
discussion around the effects of SNS-use on civil engagement by critically analysing and historicising examples of contemporary social and political struggles.

3.3.4

iv) Virtual communities

Few studies have considered how SNS-use affects community engagement. Scholars like Putnam (2000) have lamented the decline of a sense of community and the diminishing amount of public spaces that allow people to come together in social activities. Tucker (2007) contemplates whether the advent of new information technologies like SNSs contributes to this trend. He asks: ‘what if our new “connected age” is actually pushing us further apart, making us not more informed, but less so?’ (Tucker 2007: 12; see also Turkle 2011). Westlake, on the other hand, believes that such dystopian visions of online engagement have ‘largely become irrelevant’ as online interaction and community-building become more and more part of everyday life for people in the developed world (2008: 23). Horrigan found that 90 million Americans were involved in online communities in 2001 and 28 million Americans ‘used the internet to deepen their ties to their local communities’ (2001: 2-3). These studies suggest that, rather than decreasing community engagement, the internet serves to support and reinforce existing offline communities and to build new ones.

Rheingold (1993) argues that the internet creates new communities. Chambers (2006) supports this idea but opposes the dichotomous understanding of online vs. offline communities inherent in Rheingold’s argument. She suggests that virtual communities do not replace but are supplementary to those of the physical world (2006: 114; see also Ellison et al. 2007). Similarly, Wilson and Peterson note that dichotomies of ‘offline and online, real and virtual and individual and collective’ should be deconstructed in favour of a ‘continuum of communities, identities, and networks that exist – from the most cohesive to the most diffuse – regardless of the ways in which community members interact’ (2002: 456).
Hampton (2003) suggests that the internet provides a space for the modern ‘networked individual’ (Wellman 2001, cited in Chambers 2006: 116) to partake in communities that are no longer geographically bound. Parks, on the other hand, claims that ‘it may be more accurate to say that virtual communities are often simply the online extension of geographically situated offline communities’ (2011: 120). His study of MySpace reveals that while SNSs provide the necessary social affordances for communities to be established, only a small percentage of users in fact take advantage of this (Parks 2011). These studies suggest that the internet, and by extension SNSs, can represent a new space for communities to emerge, flourish and continue however that this potential is not always made use of.

3.3.4
v) Conclusion

Current literature suggests that new ICTs bear the potential to increase social capital, encourage civic engagement and provide a space for communities to evolve. While some scholars remain suspicious of such claims, a large body of work indicates that internet communication impacts positively on the mentioned social factors. While only few have explored the use of SNSs in particular in shaping sociality it has been suggested that findings about online communities in general can be extended to SNSs (Parks 2011). Existing research proposes that ICTs may support and enhance social capital (Ellison et al. 2011; Offer 1997; Skågeby 2009) by forming new weak ties and strengthening existing strong ones (Chambers 2006; Ellison et al. 2007; Haythornthwaite 2005). Some suggest that this enables physically dispersed individuals to come together in new communal bodies and to organise social action (Brodock et al. 2009; Hampton 2003; Horrigan 2001; Watson 2008). SNSs are considered to further civic engagement in recent global social and political movements (Baker 2011; Cottle 2011; Harlow 2012). The internet has been represented as an environment liberated from geographical constraints in which new communities can emerge and existing ones can be strengthened (Chambers 2006; Hampton 2003; Horrigan 2001; Westlake 2008), however some question whether people indeed make use of this potential (Parks 2011).
This work provides some insightful suggestions about how SNS-use affects modern processes of communication and action. Considering how individuals have related to themselves and others in the past and how this has been translated into the present will enhance understandings of social capital, community engagement and social and political action by providing a different theoretical framework to address these issues from.

4.0 Conclusion and research questions
This thesis contributes to two domains of study: a theoretical body of work on selfhood, identity and how it is shaped in society, and more recent, largely empirical work on the role of online technologies in these processes. Classical structuralist, interpretive, interactionist and materialist interpretations of selfhood, as well as some more recent psychological, causal, symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological ones, commonly take self as an existing reality for granted. To certain extents Giddens, Mauss and Elias account for the flexible, changing and historical nature of concepts of selfhood, and Goffman and Butler acknowledge that identity is performed in relation to the expectations of others. However, these thinkers still make general claims about selfhood, and seek to define what “the self” is. A Foucaultian approach to selfhood gets around this problem of categorisation by thinking about the practices that shape individuals without seeking to produce a theory of the self.

Current research on internet and SNS-use commonly aims to establish conclusive findings on the impact they have on modern social life and subjectivity. It grapples with issues such as how SNSs benefit or harm the confidence, self-view and/or possibilities for expression of its users, how intimacy is managed and expressed on SNSs, how this affects offline intimacy, what the consequences of the perceived giving-up of privacy on SNSs are and how SNS-use affects civic engagement and a sense of community. Scholars disagree about whether new communication technologies revitalise society by enhancing these processes, or whether they contribute to the deterioration of these values. SNSs and the internet are still a relatively recent phenomenon and their uses and applications are constantly evolving. By proceeding to make such
judgements and generalisations, existing scholarship commonly disregards the multifaceted intentions and experiences of individual internet and SNS-users.

4.1 The research objectives
The following research objectives will guide this social theoretical investigation:

4.1.1 Main Objective
- To investigate the ways in which modern individuals relate to themselves and others in the service of shaping their ethical conduct and governing themselves.

4.1.2 Subsidiary Objectives
- To understand the public way in which modern practices of self-formation are executed and the role technologies play in these processes.
- To conceptualise SNSs as particular tools for forming relations of self to self and to others.
- To historicise examples of practices of self-formation in order to show how they have been translated, relocated and reactivated in modern society.

The exploratory and historicising nature of these objectives avoids making judgements or producing normative assertions about how things are done and how they should be in modern society. SNS-use serves as one example through which we can investigate these objectives. It is one particular practice that shapes the relations of modern individuals to themselves and others.

4.2 The contribution of the present study to existing scholarship
This thesis provides new ways of analysing SNS-use and theorising processes of subjectivation. Bringing social theoretical understandings of selfhood and sociological research in the area of internet studies into dialogue enables a new way of conceptualising both domains.
4.2.1 Contributing to social theoretical accounts of selfhood

Foucault's unique approach to subjectivation provides a nuanced way of thinking about self in terms of how it is formed as opposed to what it is. Foucault explored self as historical, contingent, transient and constituted through relations to self and others. He used historical analysis to trace stories about particular practices and their relations to power, truth and ethics. In this way, he was able to think about processes that come to shape self without tying down what this self is in a grand theory. This thesis applies Foucault's approach in order to conceptualise SNSs as tools for self-formation with historical roots and to reveal the continuing usefulness and applicability of Foucault's work. Chapter 3 will introduce Foucault's genealogical methodological approach and his four-fold schema for understanding the genealogy of ethics. This will then be applied to contemporary society in Chapter 4 as a way of thinking about how individuals are governed and govern themselves in modern techno-social hybrid societies. Exploring SNSs as one particular example of these processes will enhance social theoretical understandings of how selves are formed in modern society.

4.2.2 Contributing to work on SNSs

The quantitative data and interpretations provided by current research provide some insights into demographics of SNS-users and trends in the use of different sites. This thesis takes the existing work as a starting point from which to consider what engaging with these modern technologies means for the types of selves we can become in modern society. Conceptualising SNSs as tools for self-formation and accounting for their historical backgrounds reveals that how people use SNS has been shaped in contingent and complex circular processes. The key themes explored in the sociological literature on SNSs – identity-formation, privacy, intimacy and sociality (which includes conceptualisations around social capital, civic action and community engagement) – can be connected if we consider how they all relate to processes of self-formation. This will provide further insight into the role technology plays in shaping processes of self-formation, relations to others and levels of disclosure; the complexity of how people manage their privacy on SNSs, weighing up the costs and benefits of
publicly revealing private information, and the need to deconstruct dichotomous understandings of online vs. offline activity.

4.2.2

1) SNSs and identity

Existing work on SNS-use and identity-formation, self-expression and self-reflection commonly conceptualises SNSs either as means of bringing out dormant personality traits (Bargh et al. 2002; boyd 2008; Livingstone 2008; Turkle 1995; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Zhao et al. 2008) or as somehow corrupting normative ways of being (Buffardi and Campbell 2008; Dalsgaard 2008; Hills 2009; Rosen 2007). Both approaches conceptualise self as a pre-existing entity that can be either enhanced or corrupted by becoming involved with SNSs. By seeing self as pre-existent, even if affected by SNS-use, internet studies scholars do not acknowledge that SNSs are themselves ways of forming understandings of self. They disregard the continuing effects that our relations to ourselves and others, which include how we circulate with discourses, practices, power relations, norms and technologies, have on the shaping and re-shaping of selfhood. SNS-use is not simply a way of replicating a pre-existing offline identity in an online context but rather a vital way in which people try to make meaning of their existence in modern times. We should not think about identity on SNSs or about identity as affected by SNSs but rather consider how understandings of self are formed through the use of SNSs.

4.2.2

ii) SNSs and intimacy

Current research on intimacy and the internet commonly compares online intimacy to offline relations and makes assertions about how one affects the other. In this way it constructs a dichotomy between the two that depicts interaction on the internet as removed from other social spaces and communities. While there may be differences in the ways in which people interact online and offline, examples of self-forming practices from the past reveal that intimate relations are always ways of forming understandings of self and guiding people’s conduct. Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis will explore how
the relational practices of self-writing and *parrhesia* served to shape selves in the past. The focus will be on how the practices have changed since their emergence without claiming that they are changing intimate relations. Thinking about how people use SNSs today as tools for relating to themselves and others provides a more nuanced way of understanding intimacy on SNSs that does not dichotomise between online and offline conduct.

4.2.2

***iii) SNSs and privacy***

Existing scholarship on SNS-use and privacy generally suggests that people are becoming more open and willing to share the private details of their lives in public. Some suggest this indicates declining values in modern society, others believe that it opens up new possibilities for expression and communication. More nuanced accounts acknowledge that people may on one hand feel a demand and desire to be present in the public eye and on the other are unsure of how to handle this public presentation of self (boyd 2011; Livingstone 2008; Taddicken and Jers 2011). These approaches suggest that while boundaries between private and public may be shifting, people still care about their privacy (boyd 2011; boyd and Hargittai 2011; Gross and Acquisti 2005; Livingstone 2008).

This thesis also proposes that individuals today are more inclined to present themselves in the public sphere than in the past. However, SNS-use has neither caused, nor is it the result of, the openness that modern individuals display with regards to their privacy. Humans and the technologies they use are shaped in reflexive and reversible processes. Privacy is neither endangered, nor liberated by the use of new technologies. Rather, the way in which people use new technologies provides them with one way of navigating their understandings of privacy and publicness within the modern techno-social hybrid landscapes they occupy.
4.2.2  

iv) SNSs and sociality

Existing literature on sociality and SNS-use is split into two views. The first suggests that relations on SNSs are hollow and less valuable than real-life relations and represent a decline of engagement and interaction in modern society (Nie 2001; Nie et al. 2002; Tucker 2007). The second proposes that SNS-use can enhance social capital, strengthen social ties and support civil action (Chambers 2006; Ellison et al. 2007; Haythornthwaite 2005; Quan-Haase 2002). Like much of the existing scholarship on intimacy and privacy, current sociological work on social capital, civic engagement and communities commonly makes a distinction between offline and online action. It portrays the internet as a space separate from other social activity and interaction. It also ascribes to a cause-and-effect narrative that proposes that SNS-use leads to more/less sociality or that it exemplifies the decline/success of modern society.

This thesis will explore how SNS-use contributes to communal action, engagement, social capital and the achievement of social and political change without making judgements or looking for causes and effects. Chapter 7 will explore how speaking truth through the use of SNSs became a political and ethical tool in the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010-2011. This will reveal that using SNS to work on social capital, communal action and shaping communities in modern techno-social hybrid societies is intimately tied to processes of self-formation.

4.2.3 Conclusion

This thesis provides a different way of addressing how SNS-use relates to themes like identity, intimacy, privacy and sociality that emerge from current sociological, cultural and media studies about these sites. It proposes that SNSs can be conceptualised as tools for relating to self and others in the service of establishing guidelines that shape the conduct of individuals. SNS-use is thus seen as one way in which individuals understand themselves and their intimate

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relations, handle their privacy and engage in political, social and communal action, among many other things. This kind of analysis is based in a Foucaultian understanding that self is not a pre-existing and unchanging social reality but rather a historically contingent, constantly shifting, indefinable idea. Bringing this critical and historicising social theoretical analysis to the concepts of SNSs as cultural tools and novel technologies is a unique way of addressing SNS-use that also enriches current theory on understandings of self.

Most present studies on SNSs disregard or do not acknowledge the historical contingencies that shape modern practices. Some recognise that new technologies are embedded in historical, cultural and social contexts (Herring 2008; Westlake 2008) however do not draw connections between older practices, their modern continuations and the conditions and possibilities they offer to their users in terms of becoming selves. This thesis will historicise practices of inscribing self and speaking truth through the use of SNSs to reveal the historical roots of the use of these sites and to show how SNS-use can problematise, reconfigure and redefine processes of subjectivation. SNS-use thus becomes one particular modern practice that allows us to think about some of the possibilities and problems that individuals are faced with today in forming understandings of themselves.

This thesis contributes to the two bodies of work that have been identified in this literature review, namely social theoretical accounts of self and processes of subjectivation, and internet studies research on the use of SNSs in modern society. The first part of this thesis provides a theoretical framework for thinking about how online practices serve as tools for self-formation. Chapter 4 will propose that the way in which people understand themselves, their relations to others and their daily conduct today, is shaped by three interrelated factors: One, the psychologised and rational-economic attitude to life; two, the demand and desire to execute practices of self-formation in public and three, the flows between humans and technologies that shape modern techno-social hybrid landscapes. Chapter 5 will elaborate on this last point by showing how technology has contributed to the proliferation and reconfiguration of old ways
of forming subjectivities, yet is not solely responsible for their continuation. The second part of this thesis will then explore some specific case studies of SNS-use as practices of self-formation. This will ground them in historical narratives and problematise their use in order to show that they are not simply tools for revealing identity, intimacy, privacy and sociality, but are rather intimately tied up with how people understand themselves in relation to these themes and practices. This type of analysis brings a more critical social theoretical way of understanding SNS-use to current literature in the field of internet studies, as well as providing the theoretical body of work on self with new examples for thinking about modern processes of self-formation.
CHAPTER 3 – THEORY AND APPROACH

1.0 Introduction

This study is a Foucaultian-inspired problematisation of self online. Foucault’s use of historically aware criticism is a useful tool for analysing the history of the way in which things are done at present, looking for contingencies rather than causes and locating continuities and discontinuities between past and present procedures in order to understand some of the ways in which modern individuals shape understandings of themselves. By historicising modern practices of self-formation and exploring their ancient predecessors we can become more aware of some of the taken-for-granted ways in which people behave and conceptualise their existence in this world. Foucault’s genealogical approach and his four-fold schema for understanding how people have governed their daily ethical conduct in the past can be applied to the study of modern technologised practices of self-formation.

Both, the methodological tools that Foucault provides us with, and his theoretical work, are applicable to thinking about modern processes of self-formation. Especially his later exploration of ethics and practices of self offer a useful framework for addressing the government of self. This thesis will adopt Foucault’s themes in three key ways in order to explore new examples. The first involves exploring processes of subjectivation in order to understand some of the ways in which people make meaning of their existence in the world, without seeking to define what “the modern self” is. The second is employing Foucault’s development of the genealogy of ethics as a heuristic device to consider modern processes and problems of self-formation. Third, this thesis will extend Foucault’s account of techniques of self into the technological realm by exploring the circular and reflexive relations of human, non-human and hybrid entities involved in modern technologised practices of self-formation.

As outlined above, Foucault’s approach to self provides a unique way of thinking about self and the multifaceted practices and relations it is engaged in in everyday life. It stands out from most other theoretical considerations of
selfhood and identity in that it problematises understandings of the existence of an a priori self and focuses rather on processes of self-formation. Applying Foucault’s approach and theories to the use of SNSs allows us to render SNS-use a modern practice of self-formation that is steeped in ancient techniques of self. Foucault studied self-writing and truth-telling as age-old self-forming techniques. We can still detect continuities and discontinuities between these practices and the ways in which people write and speak out on and through SNSs today. SNS-use is one particular example of the ways in which people become selves today by relating to themselves and others according to certain ethical principles in the service of governing themselves.

2.0 Introduction to Foucault

Through the course of his intellectual career, Foucault pioneered a multifaceted and unique way of addressing key philosophical, sociological and historical questions. In an interview in 1983, Foucault defined his work along three main axes; knowledge/truth, power and ethics (1997a: 262). Foucault developed and built on these three themes throughout his career. His early work was concerned with epistemological questions, soon followed by a turn to the relations of power and discipline that shape conduct and a final focus on the ways in which selves are formed according to ethical guidelines established through their relations to themselves and others. Foucault thus explored how self is constituted as a knowing subject, as subject to being governed by others and by itself and as an ethical agent (1997a: 262).

Foucault’s work was united by a concern with understanding how the individual is formed in society, yet he never claimed to define the essence of “the self” or of humankind. Rather, he explored the historical contingencies and social processes that have been involved in shaping Western understandings of Man as the object of scientific investigation, power relations and moral codes, as well as as a knowing, governing and ethical subject. Foucault did not conceptualise one particular self as an ahistorical, given entity or a social reality, as many of his predecessors and contemporaries did. He claimed that understanding the individual as an administrator of knowledge (the self as knowing being that can
objectively analyse and understand the world around itself) and/or as administrated by power from above (the self as passive shell that accepts unquestioningly the rules and sanctions it is presented with), was to simplify the complex interaction between the two and the multiple other factors that play into the shaping of selves. Instead, Foucault sought to understand self as a historically contingent and shifting category invented, shaped and reshaped through changing truth claims, power relations and ethical practices.

In his early work (1970; 1972; 1973) Foucault employed an archaeological approach in order to investigate the histories of knowledges from a perspective of truth. Later, he turned to a genealogical method that was concerned with the histories of techniques of domination from a perspective of power (1977; 1990). In the final part of his oeuvre, Foucault developed the genealogical approach in the realm of ethics (1985; 1986; 2005; 2010; 2011). He outlined a genealogy of ethics that historicised human conduct in terms of ethics as a way of considering how people have come to understand themselves and manage their existence in society in the past. Foucault’s writings on ethics built upon his earlier work on knowledge and power. In this way, he showed that the relations of subjects to themselves and others are tied up with broader social and political understandings, practices, norms and discourses that they are engaged in at different times. Foucault’s interrelated work on knowledge, power and ethics can be applied to new examples and developed to produce insights into modern processes of self-formation and the use of new online tools.

2.1 Foucault’s “methods”
Foucault himself avoided defining a particular method to be identified with his work and did not align himself with a particular existing approach. He was strictly opposed to limiting his investigations by ascribing to a set methodology and adjusted his *modus operandi* throughout the course of his research. However, there are continuities in the way Foucault approached his investigations. All of Foucault’s work was concerned with historicising understandings and practices that have become taken-for-granted notions and revealing how they were shaped. Commentators have divided his approach into
an early archaeological method and a later genealogical one, even though Foucault never clearly defined and differentiated between the two. Foucault’s later genealogical approach lends itself well to the types of questions addressed in this thesis. Constructing a genealogy of subjectivation (see also Rose 1998) by historicising specific practices of self-formation enables us to think differently and more critically about some of the mundane daily activities we engage in (like using SNSs) and what this can reveal about the ways in which we come to understand and govern ourselves and the world around us.

2.1.1 Archaeology: The history of knowledge through truth

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault made his only systematic excursion into methodology. In his previous book, *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault established a way of conceptualising knowledge and truth that historicises discourse and reveals not what we know and what is true but how we speak about things to render them as facts, universal knowledge or truths. He suggested that different ways of thinking (‘discursive formations’ (Foucault 1972)) are accepted as valid ways of making sense of the world at different stages of history according to the particular rules, processes and understandings (‘discursive practices’ (Foucault 1972)) that preside at the time. Epistemic shifts in these understandings readjusted the arrangements of knowledge, according to Foucault. Foucault did not make greater social and political factors and structural changes responsible for the shifts that occurred. Rather, he saw the shifts themselves as conditional, historical and contingent. Foucault was not interested in what caused these shifts but rather in what constituted their transformations. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault established that, as a methodological approach, archaeology provides a tool for understanding the conditions that made it possible for certain discourses to emerge, become accepted and be transformed. Foucault was not concerned with analysing the content, meanings or implications of these discourses. He explored how they were constituted. Dean aptly summarises archaeology as an approach that ‘respects the being of discourse, its materiality, its location in time and place, and seeks to account for it in terms of its conditions of existence’ (1994: 17).
Foucault’s archaeological approach steps back from the content of discourse in favour of analysing the conditions of its emergence. It is not concerned with assessing the truth or falsity of statements but rather with exploring the conditions that render a notion true or false. In this way, archaeology opens up for question the often taken-for-granted ways in which people think, act and understand the world around them. Thinking in this way can be unsettling, since it casts doubt on the reassuring concept of truth upon which we base our understandings and expectations. However, it can also be grounding, in that it reveals the historical contingency of experiences, and anchors them in daily practices, making us aware of the possibility to shape and constitute them ourselves, rather than being administered by external forces. Foucault’s archaeological approach is a valuable tool that can be employed in all kinds of research to engage critically with existing concepts and understandings. Foucault’s later turn to a genealogical method supplemented his archaeology and can be used to consider modern processes of subjectivation.

2.1.2 Genealogy: The history of techniques of domination through power

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault developed his genealogical approach. He never declared a move from archaeology to genealogy or defined genealogy as a particular methodology. In an address at Berkeley (1983), Foucault suggested that archaeology was always the methodological framework of his analyses whereas genealogy was its aim. He stated that

> genealogy is both the reason and the target of the analysis of discourses as events, and what I try to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves: our knowledge, our practices, our type of rationality, our relationship to ourselves and to the others (Foucault 1983).

Influenced by Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality, which criticised the way in which relations of power came to shape morality, genealogy enabled Foucault to combine the positivist and historical nature of his archaeological approach with what Dean has described as ‘a form of patient criticism and problematisation
located in the present’ (1994: 20). While eschewed from the point of view of the present, genealogy still remained concerned with understanding the historical contingencies that have come to shape discourses, practices and knowledges. Genealogy problematises taken-for-granted practices by tracing back the line of their emergence in order to reveal their conditionality and heterogeneity. It seeks to uncover that the way in which processes are normalised and accepted is dependant on contingent reversals, accidents and coincidences and cannot be simply assumed as given.

While Foucault's archaeological work investigated the history of knowledge by analysing truth, genealogy explored the history of techniques of domination through the study of power. It enabled him to connect the theoretical effects of discourses with their strategic purposes by accounting for power relations (Dean 1994: 18). He suggested that power and knowledge implied one another, and that this power-knowledge dyad becomes a way of governing populations – not (necessarily) as a negative source of domination, but rather as a necessary and productive force to shape society and subjectivities. Foucault's depiction of power highlighted its relationality; for Foucault, power was everywhere, implied in all relations between people, and, while potentially dangerous, was not to be understood as an inherently bad thing. He suggested that what entails 'the omnipresence of power' is that 'it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another' (Foucault 1990: 93). While power implied dominance it was not always administered from above (Foucault 1990: 94). Rather, Foucault conceptualised it as circulating in interpersonal relations and in this way guiding the conduct of individuals.

Archaeology was a theoretical framework through which Foucault analysed discourses as events in order to show how people do what they do, say what they say and understand the world. Genealogy applied this way of analysing to the dimension of power in order to address the conditions that make the discourses possible in the first place, and the disciplinary techniques they shape. Later, Foucault also analysed the discourses around sexuality and the relations
of power these produced to conceptualise how selves are formed in relation to ethical guidelines. The links that Foucault drew between power and knowledge, and extended later into ethics, exemplify how Foucault applied his archaeological framework through genealogy in order to consider how individuals become subject to being governed by themselves and others.

2.1.3 Historicisation and Problematisation

Foucault’s early archaeological framework, and its application to a genealogical approach, are characterised by their historicising and problematising nature. In all of his work, Foucault sought to investigate the historical conditions that framed the emergence of discourses, power relations, institutions, norms and practices, our understandings of where these social processes have come from and the ways in which they become problematised, disrupted and re-shaped. Historicisation and problematisation provide valuable and unique ways of approaching the research questions this thesis seeks to address that other lines of inquiry fail to achieve.

2.1.3

i) The history of the present

Foucault repeatedly asserted that his investigations were ways of doing the ‘history of the present’. This involved tracing back in history the matter-of-fact ways in which contemporary individuals engage with their daily practices in order to uncover how they have come, and continue, to be shaped. Thus, for Foucault, no practice, norm or social relation was ever to be taken for granted. He brought to light their contingent historical roots without defining beginnings or end points. Foucault suggested that

the search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself (1984: 82).

Hence, Foucault’s analyses sought to question and problematise practices by alerting to their historical roots. In this way, Foucault engaged more critically with how the truth claims that many others accept as given, or try to cover up, are formed and become normalised. For example, in History of Madness (2006),
Foucault questioned, criticised and problematised the birth of psychology and psychiatry as disciplines. He highlighted the sometimes questionable, scandalous and unpleasant coincidences that established practices and discourses as normal, neutral and accepted.

While looking back in history in order to identify what has come to shape us, we can never simply assume an exact continuation of old practices in new times. Foucault argued for the singularity of events. He acknowledged that practices are never transhistorical, yet suggested that they can help us think about contemporary problems. He remarked that

among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what’s going on now – and to change it (Foucault 1997a: 261).

Foucault did not declare normative notions of how things are done but rather sought to understand the conditions that enabled practices to be invented, challenged and reshaped. In this lies the strength of his historicising approach; questioning how things have come to be shaped and taking account of their histories in order to think about them in new ways and thus open up possibilities for change. Historicising the use of SNSs in this thesis will provide a new way of thinking about them as modern tools for self-formation.

2.1.3

ii) The history of problematics

Foucault’s line of inquiry was further characterised by a concern with problematisations. This constituted both, a way of conceptualising history, and an approach to analysing contemporary practices, relations and discourses. Foucault saw the moment when a to-date unproblematic, established practice is criticised, challenged and overthrown as key indicator of a shift in the relations between knowledge, power and ethics. As an approach, problematisation steps back from a practice considered normal or given in order to analyse it critically, and question the conditions under which it was established, and the meanings it has been given. Foucault suggested that his work was about
trying to analyze the way institutions, practices, habits, and behavior become a problem for people who behave in specific sorts of ways, who have certain types of habits, who engage in certain kinds of practices, and who put to work specific kinds of institutions (2001: 74).

Foucault thus sought to understand how people become anxious about, and start questioning, practices and behaviours that they previously accepted and engaged in unquestioningly, and how this sets up new practices and behaviours. While he was interested in problematisations, Foucault was not concerned with finding solutions. He did not see it as his place to judge and prescribe “better” ways of doing things. Rather, he engaged critically with the present and alerted others not simply to accept the processes they are involved in but to see themselves as active in their shaping.

Foucault suggested that his 'history of problematics' was a way of doing the 'history of thought'. The history of thought differs from the 'history of ideas' approach, which is concerned with systems of representations, and from the notion of the ‘history of mentalities’, which establishes assumptions about attitudes and actions and ascribes them to the reader of a text (Foucault 1997b: 117). It provides a critical way of analysing how a given notion is problematised, rather than studying how it is represented or made meaning of. It considers how solutions to problems are constructed, rather than what adequate solutions might be. Foucault stated that

for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it...To one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made...But the work of a history of thought would be to rediscover at the root of these diverse solutions the general form of problematization that has made them possible’ (1997b: 117-8).

Problematisation then is a way of doing the history of thought, which focuses precisely on the grey area where transformations from one accepted way of thinking to another occur. This moment when relations and understandings shift reveals how contingent the construction of human behaviour is. Foucault had a unique way of engaging with, questioning and making the object of
inquiry what so many other approaches (such as hermeneutic or idealistic ones, which have solutions to problems built into their critique) take for granted. He engaged with the problems that instigate change, provoke the establishment of solutions, and launch new conceptualisations of the world, which, in due time, are overthrown again. In this way, problematisation is ‘not ... an arrangement of representations but ... a work of thought’ (Foucault 1997b: 119).

2.1.4 Applying Foucault's approach

Foucault’s critical historicism and his problematising approach can be used to question concepts that have become accepted as truths. Foucault investigated the conditions that establish how we understand ourselves and the world we live in. His approach is critical and de-stabilising, and reveals the contingency of what too often gets taken for granted. It proposes new ways of thinking differently about everyday practices, and opens up possibilities for change to occur. It provides a radical way of interrogating contemporary sociological questions that scholars in diverse fields of study have applied, ranging from politics/government (Dean 1999; 2007; Dean and Hindess 1998; Burchell et al. 1991; Rose 1999a; 1999b; 2003; 2006), over identity studies (Calhoun 1994; Hacking 1985; Rose, 1996; 1998), the sociology of law (Hunt and Wickham 1994), education (Ball 1990; Popkewitz and Brennan 1998), gender studies (Butler 1999; Fraser 1989), discourse analysis (Fairclough 1993) the sociology of medicine (Lupton 2003; Rose 1994), to embodiment literature (Shilling 2003; Turner 1984; 1987), to name but a few. Foucault himself suggested that his work should act like a toolbox which other researchers from a multitude of disciplines should be able to reach into and adapt to their own work (Foucault 1994 [1947]). Dean comments on Foucault’s approach, suggesting that the critical use of history ... make[s] intelligible the possibilities in the present and so can yield to neither universalist concepts of rationality and subjectivity nor metanarratives of progress, reason, or emancipation. It is this latter move that makes his critical history an effective tool for historical sociologists (1994: 21).

Similarly, Kendall suggests that the Foucaultian approach is particularly useful when applied to new empirical examples (2011: 78). This thesis will employ Foucault’s tools by historicising and problematising some very specific practices
that people engage with today, in order to understand better how individuals become selves in modern society. It will not collect new data but rather apply Foucault's problematising approach to provide new insights into existing social practices, particularly the use of online social networking sites.

As a way of analysing processes of subjectivation, Foucault's approach stands in opposition to narratives of progress, which propose causal explanations, and critical narratives, which call for the reconciliation of the subject with itself, nature, rationality, etc. (Dean 1994: 3). The first views general structures as causing social progress. The second criticises these structures for impeding progress. Both make general assumptions about the conduct of individuals without considering the multifaceted factors that come to shape and re-shape human action and selfhood. They take the self to be an unchanging, given entity that has always been there as part of social reality. Neither of these approaches takes into account the effects of historical transformations, the contingency of events and the multiplicity of factors that influence the formation of knowledge and discourse, power and subjectivities. Employing a Foucaultian historicising and problematising approach makes it possible to get away from these limitations. It frees the notion of the a priori, unchanging self, and turns it into an unfixed, contingent and historical category. Foucault's unique approach enabled him to consider the genealogy of subjectivity, which conceptualised the conditions that have shaped the relations of individuals with themselves and others and the ethical guidelines they employ in the service of governing themselves and others. Foucault's approach can contribute to forming an understanding of the types of practices that shape modern selves and their conduct.

2.2 Theoretical background

Foucault's investigation of ethics and subjectivity establishes a theoretical framework for analysing ways in which selves are formed in contemporary societies. Modern practices of self-formation, human conduct and relations then serve as new examples of techniques of self. Thinking about SNS-use as a practice of self-formation, and accounting for the technological mediation of this
technique of self, open up new ways of thinking about these sites that go beyond their use as tools for communication and expression. SNS-use can be seen as one example of a way in which people today come to relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct.

2.2.1 Self

As established above, Foucault’s approach to self stands out from dominant theoretical accounts of selfhood, most of which conceptualise identity as a pre-existing reality. Foucault did not try to account for how “the self” is realised under certain social conditions (like Durkheim, Parsons, Merton) or how human action can produce social structures and structural changes (like Weber, Marx, Simmel). Rather, Foucault redirected the focus onto the processes that come to shape selfhood in the first place. In this way, he suspended causal explanations for the ways in which humans behave and for how society is shaped. Foucault’s way of thinking makes it possible to question the concept of the self itself. Rather than seeing selfhood as an inherent essence that exists and can simply be expressed in social contexts, or needs to be freed from the constraints of social conditions, Foucault conceived of selfhood as shaped by numerous external influences, practices and techniques. Unlike most other theorists, Foucault did not propose a general theory of the self. He steered clear of trying to define what the essence of the self is and instead focused on the processes that shape self.

The previous chapter suggested that Giddens, Elias and Mauss make some useful contributions to thinking about self. Giddens is particularly effective in showing how self is a reflexive project that humans invent and work on themselves, rather than a static social reality. However, he evokes this as a characteristic particular of modern times, ignoring the historical contingencies that have come to shape this introspective work of self on self. Elias and Mauss acknowledged that “the self” is a socially constructed category, the understanding of which has changed at different stages in history. It is also worth noting how ethnomethodologists like Garfinkel, and social interactionists like Goffman, free the idea of self from being completely pre-determined by
acknowledging how individuals bring order to social settings. While these approaches move in the right direction by understanding self as a recent category and as constantly changing, they still make self subservient to social order or social interactions, and seek to define what the self is in terms of a general theory. By focusing on processes of self-formation rather than on self itself, Foucault did away with all naturalness, inherence and truth to the notion of selfhood, and freed self up as a contingent, unintentional, accidental and shifting category that is shaped by, and shapes, diverse practices, beliefs, relations and problematisations. Foucault’s problematisation and historicisation of self enables us to pose new questions and investigate selfhood from a different perspective to most other theoretical accounts of self and identity.

In line with his historicising and problematising approach, Foucault was not interested in studying systems that produce self but rather in understanding how self is formed out of the problematisation of systems (Kendall 2011: 67). For Foucault, self was a historical category that is shaped by forms of discourse and knowledge, relations of power and practices of self (Dean 1994: 201). Hence, the formation of subjectivities involves multiple processes, connections, assemblages and reconfigurations of self with other humans and objects, concepts and understandings, laws and institutions, norms and subversions, etc. This renders self a transient and plural entity with multiple and ever-changing instantiations. From a Foucaultian perspective, self is one way in which individuals give meaning to their existence in line with the practices and processes they are tied up in in their everyday lives. It is not a pre-defined model for human behaviour and not a predictable and unchanging shell that encloses the human. Rather, it is a set of practices and activities that people engage in in order to navigate through the world they live in. Dean highlights that ‘the problem is how to form oneself, not in the absence, but in the presence of a plurality of codes, and with a multiplicity of means’ (1994: 216). A myriad of multifaceted conditions make it possible for subjects to become selves. SNS-use is one way in which contemporary individuals do this work of themselves on themselves. Foucault’s anti-naturalist and anti-essentialist approach to
understanding self enables us to think about possibilities for self-formation rather than theories of self.

### 2.2.2 The Genealogy of Ethics

In *The Use of Pleasure* (1985: 6), Foucault suggested that there had been three successive theoretical shifts in his work. Dean summarises these as shifts from ‘the analysis of discursive practices of the human sciences’, to the investigation of ‘the relations, strategies and techniques of the exercise of powers’, to the exploration of the ‘forms and modalities of the relation of the individual to the self’ (Dean 1994: 34). Foucault’s later focus on ethics and subjectivity began with his turn to historicising the discourse and practice of sexuality, which he saw as one key aspect to the way in which selves and their conduct are formed (1990). He developed this work by focusing on the ancient Greek culture of the care of self in the second and third volumes of his work on the history of sexuality (1985; 1986) and in his 1981-2 lectures at the Collège de France (2005). In the final years of lecturing before his death in 1984, Foucault then connected his study of ethics and subjectivity back to truth and power, by exploring the notion of *parrhesia* (2001; 2010; 2011).

Dean suggests that for Foucault, ‘ethics [was] an elaboration that begins with the problematisation of conduct’ (1994: 195). Foucault analysed the practices, events and problematisations that shape the conduct of individuals in order to show how subjects become ethical beings. He was not concerned with ethics as a moral philosophy or with assessing and suggesting ethical concepts. Rather, he investigated ethical conduct from the point of view of the relation of self to self and to others. In this way, he analysed the work individuals do on themselves in order to act in accordance with certain guidelines. Foucault established four elements that make up the way in which ethical conduct is constituted:

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21 See Foucault (1997a: 263 ff), where he outlines each of the four elements with detailed examples. See also Dean (1994: 197-199) for a good summary of Foucault’s four-fold approach, as well as Dean (1999) and Rose (1998) for contemporary developments of Foucault’s genealogy of ethics into modern neo-liberal, psychologised societies.
1) the core matter (ethical substance) that ethics are applied to, such as pleasures, desires or feelings.

2) the mode of subjectivation, which is the way in which people come to accept the rules that guide their ethical conduct.

3) the self-forming activities through which people apply the rules for their conduct to their ethical substance.

4) the overarching reason or goal (the telos) that makes people want to act ethically in the first place.

Summarising how these four elements work to form ethical conduct, Foucault explained that shaping self involves a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal (1985: 28).

Employing his method of historicisation and problematisation, Foucault focused on certain key times in history when he saw significant shifts in the constitution of these four elements. He showed the problematisations that reconfigured the ethical conduct of the ancient Greeks in later Antiquity and again in particular early Christian groupings (see Foucault 1997a; 2005; see also Chapter 4 of this thesis). Foucault was hesitant to make any conclusive suggestions about ethical conduct in modern society. He indicated that the modern ethical substance might be feelings (1997a: 263), the mode of subjectivation something in between a juridical and medical/scientific framework (1997a: 267) and the telos self-fulfilment (1997a: 261).

For Foucault, understanding the genealogy of ethics was a way of conceptualising the relations between truth, knowledge, power and subjectivation, and in this way drawing together some of the guiding concepts of his lifetime of work. He was interested in the way in which selves are formed through their ethical conduct as an exercise of freedom linked to specific practices and techniques. Foucault suggested that ‘freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection’ (1997c: 284). Hence, ethical conduct is a form of
subjectivation based on freedom and the care of self. In the final series of lectures Foucault gave at the Collège de France in 1982-4 (2010; 2011) and at Berkeley in 1983 (2001), Foucault explored the ancient Greek practice of *parrhesia* – free/frank speech or truth-telling. In these lectures he showed how speaking truth was both a way of caring for self and others, and a political means of achieving change in ancient Greece. Foucault explained that binding oneself to the truth was the highest exercise of freedom (2010: 67), and that freedom was the precondition for speaking the truth. *Parrhesia* was intimately tied up with the relations of self to self and to others and thus with the way in which individuals govern themselves and are governed by others. In this way, Foucault’s late turn to ethics and subjectivity complimented his work on knowledge and power and cast new light on his early work.

### 2.2.3 Techniques of self and processes of folding

In thinking about the practices and guidelines along which modern individuals construct an understanding of themselves and others, and shape their daily conduct, it is particularly relevant to consider Foucault’s work on techniques of self. According to Foucault, techniques of self are the practices, understandings and norms that

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\text{permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1988: 18).}
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Techniques of self are thus specific practical activities that individuals engage in, in order to assemble themselves in line with external expectations, influences and rules, and their own desires and aspirations. They aid people in applying the rules that guide their ethical conduct to their own actions and behaviour. Foucault explored *parrhesia* as one specific technique that the

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22 An important distinction, even if only a subtle nuance, that only few of those who apply Foucault’s work on practices of self acknowledge, is between techniques and technologies of self. Kendall highlights that Foucault distinguished between techniques as singular practices and technologies as groups or systems of techniques (2011: 72). In this thesis SNS-use is conceptualised as one particular technique of self-formation within the system of technologies of the internet.
Ancients employed which was intimately tied up with the care of self and the constitution of ethical conduct. Other practices like meditation, enduring certain tests or writing a *hupomnemata* – a type of personal notebook – were further self-forming activities involved in the ancient care of self (Foucault 2005: 83-95). Even though self-care became obscured by knowing self in early Christianity (Foucault 1997a), people still shaped their conduct and understandings of self through specific techniques of self such as confession, fasting and praying.

Deleuze's notion of the fold (1988; 1992) is a useful way of thinking about the related processes that shape our behaviour. Deleuze suggested that individuals form understandings of themselves, and in this way come to act ethically, by folding in external influences and then again externalising these influences through their behaviour and interaction with others. Just as when a piece of cloth is folded in half and in half again, the outside of the piece of cloth is folded into the inside, so is the formation of self a process of internalising expectations and experiences. And just as the piece of cloth can easily be unfolded to reveal what was folded in, so are experiences of self-formation externalised back into specific ways of acting, thinking and speaking. Hence, self is formed in complex, reflexive and constantly reconfiguring processes. Deleuze asserted that ‘the outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the inside but precisely the inside of the outside’ (1988: 97). Like Foucault, Deleuze did not see selfhood as a pre-formed existing entity that individuals can simply express through their actions. Rather, he considered how self is shaped by, and simultaneously shapes, the practices, behaviours and norms it engages with through these processes of folding in and unfolding. Relations with others influence the relation to self as experiences with and of others are folded into conceptions of self. Deleuze also acknowledged the involvement of non-human entities in the infinite processes of folding in, unfolding again and refolding that shape ethical conduct and human subjectivity.
Deleuze noted how all of Foucault’s work was characterised by this way of understanding the world in terms of foldings or doublings of insides and outsides, which are not projections of one another, but rather exist in mutual processes of interiorisation and externalisation (Deleuze 1988: 97-8). In folding in the outside, individuals come to relate to themselves. This then shapes their understanding of themselves and the ways in which they can act, and the things they need to know about the world they live in. Deleuze noted that Foucault saw in ancient Greek culture a unique way of approaching the relation of self to self in the service of mastering oneself that was ‘derived from power and knowledge without being dependent on them’ (Deleuze 1988: 101). Carrying out particular exercises and activities was a way for the Greeks to engage with the outside world and fold it in to their interior. In this way they formed a relation to self and mastered themselves in accordance with an aesthetic existence. Hence, they governed themselves according to a particular knowledge about the world and in this way produced a subjectivity that was ‘a derivative or the product of a “subjectivation”’ (Deleuze 1988: 101).

Deleuze’s notion of the fold and Foucault’s techniques of self show how everyday practices like SNS-use, establish ways for people to understand themselves and manage their conduct. As individuals move between different contexts, situations and people, they fold in a variety of different factors and unfold them again, to present themselves as a particular type of self in that particular situation. Hence, subjectivities are shaped and re-shaped according to the different contexts individuals are in, possibly multiple times in one day.

2.3 Conclusion – From techniques of self to technologised practices

Processes of folding and unfolding and thus shaping self have always involved material tools. The ancient Greeks used notebooks, writing styluses, papyrus and parchments. Early Christian self-forming practices also involved scriptures and other practical tools, such as the water used in Baptism or, much later, the rosary to aid in keeping count of the number of prayers said. These tools became part of the practices and understandings through which people shaped their conduct. Today, the number and variety of tangible objects that are
involved in the daily activities and self-forming practices we engage in, have increased exponentially. Many have become technologised and many more will be in the future. We wake up to alarm clocks, use electric toothbrushes, boil water in electric kettles, watch the news on TV, make our way to work in cars, buses, on scooters and trains, communicate with one another through telephones, mobile phones and internet tools, are entertained by radios, DVDs and more online media, and work with computers and calculators in offices that provide air-conditioning and electric lighting. Clearly, the list could go on. While engaging with self and others in the service of governing conduct has always been mediated by material tools that influence how people act and make sense of their being in the world, navigating through the complexities of modern life involves an increasing array of technologies that demand a certain competency and knowledge from their users. Therefore we need to consider the role of new online technologies in shaping modern ethical subjects.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT), famously pioneered by Callon and Law (1982) and Latour (1991), provides a useful way of thinking about the role of non-human entities in processes of self-formation. The bottom line of ANT is the assertion that complex shifting assemblages of human and non-human actants shape and re-shape social interests and activities (Latour 1991: 107-8). It acknowledges that non-human actants are equally as involved in forming ethical conduct and shaping selves as humans are. For example, Latour shows how speed bumps come to regulate our behaviour by forcing us to drive at a certain speed, or how the large objects often attached to hotel keys make people deposit the key at reception before leaving the hotel. ANT is not technologically deterministic however; it does not propose that technology controls the way in which individuals act and become selves. Rather, it suggests that humans invent technologies to carry out actions that people previously performed themselves. Latour and Johnson (1988) used the example of how the door groom – a metallic arm attached to doors to make them close automatically – substitutes for the action of a human physically shutting the door behind him/her. The door groom prevents the door from staying open. In this way a non-human device comes to delegate human action and redistributes abilities. Human conduct is
thus shaped in processes of mediation and reflexivity with non-human entities. However, humans also shape the technologies they employ in their daily lives. Gibson (1977) and Norman (1999) suggest that non-human objects offer certain affordances or possibilities for action. This is a useful way of thinking about them as it endows equal agency to the technologies and those who decide to employ them. In being assembled together in networks (Latour 1991) or machines (Rose 1998), human and non-human actants come to shape and be shaped by one-another in mutual processes.

Haraway (1985; 1991) and Michael (2006) provide sophisticated applications of this type of approach to the realm of technology and self-formation. Haraway’s is a feminist critique of essentialist views of identity, which alludes to the cyborg as a hybrid organism that entails machine and human, reality and fiction, as a more useful, non-binary alternative to understanding subjectivity. Michael looks at the everyday use of technologies as opposed to analysing the radical changes that some propose they have made to society. These scholars acknowledge the important part that technologies have to play in the shaping of subjectivities without over-emphasising their agency. SNSs represent one such technology that modern individuals are assembled with, and engage with, to form their ethical conduct. Foucault’s historical accounts of ancient practices of self-formation, and ANT’s acknowledgement of the involvement of technology in shaping human action, provide a useful framework for thinking about SNSs as technological techniques of self that give rise to new ways of forming self, which are steeped in ancient traditions.

3.0 Tying up method and theory: History, problematisations, self-formation and modern technologies
Applying Foucault’s historicising and problematising approach to current practices in order to think about the formation of self in relation to knowledge, power and ethics provides a critical way of engaging with the processes involved in shaping the conduct of individuals today. The work of Latour and those associated with his ANT-approach enables us to account for the complex assemblages of humans with technology. A Deleuzian understanding of the
folding in of the outside to form self can be applied to new examples of processes of subjectivation in order to think about the genealogy of modern ethics and the technologisation of techniques of self.

3.1 A genealogical line of inquiry

The methodological approach of this thesis is based on Foucault's genealogical line of inquiry. It adopts some of Foucault's empirical research on specific practices of subjectivation (in particular self-writing and parrhesia) in order to consider what the twenty-first century analogues to his examples may be, and where the sites lie in which these practices continue today. The problematisation of these practices in the past transformed and reconfigured them into new iterations in new assemblages. Analysing these changes provides insights into how people establish the truths that guide their conduct, as well as the relations of power through which they are governed and govern themselves. Looking to the past to understand modern practices of self-formation does not imply that we can find answers to modern problems in ancient ways. It is not about diagnosing the ills of our times and proposing solutions to these dilemmas. Rather, a problematising and historicising approach seeks to uncover some of the ways in which people today and in the past understand and form themselves, and are formed as ethical subjects.

Foucault has provided a useful way of conceptualising self as a notion that has changed throughout history, and gets shaped and re-shaped in the context of different assemblages with other subjects, objects, discourses, practices, norms, laws, institutions and beliefs. He showed how self is formed through discursive practices linked to knowledge and truth, through relations of power (not necessarily always in terms of domination but of freedom and resistance too) and through ethics (daily conduct, practical activities, processes of folding, unfolding and re-folding). Locating some of the practices Foucault historicised within contemporary society allows us to explore some very particular possibilities for subjectivation, or options that are on offer for people to shape their understandings of self. The next chapter will show how a particular combination of factors that are prevalent in modern Western societies have
contributed to the reconfiguration of ancient practices of subjectivation, and come to shape modern ethical conduct and self-forming techniques.

3.2 Foucault in the context of SNSs

Foucault’s line of inquiry and theoretical insights can be usefully applied to thinking about the formation of selves in their circulation with new media technologies. Ancient practices, such as self-writing and parrhesia, have been problematised, reconfigured and translated into modern society, and reactivated in new contexts, for example on SNSs. Conceptualising SNSs as new tools for self-formation from a Foucaultian social theoretical point of view draws attention to the historical roots of SNS-use, which are left largely unexplored in existing work in the field. To consider how ancient techniques have been problematised, reconfigured and reactivated in the context of modern truths, knowledges, power relations and through their implementation in the technological space of the internet, provides a valuable insight into how selves are formed today. It is a way of applying Foucault’s tools to analyse new examples of processes of self-formation.

3.2.1 Possibilities for subjectivation

Thinking about how particular techniques of self-formation have developed throughout history, and locating them in contemporary society, enables us to consider some of the possibilities for subjectivation that are on offer to modern individuals. Using SNSs provides people with one way of forming understandings of themselves that is mediated by self-to-self and self-to-other-relations. Considering how particular age-old techniques of self have been translated and reformulated into the context of SNSs is a way of thinking more critically about the ways in which people interact on and with these sites. It questions where some of our assumptions about daily practices have come from and problematises normative understandings of selfhood. This reveals that the notion of self is accidental, contingent and heterogeneous and shaped in historical processes, reversals and coincidences. By problematising the things we think we know, the ways in which we are governed and govern others, and our understandings of who we are, we can come to imagine new ways of
knowing, of engaging with others, of acting and ultimately, of becoming selves (Dean 1994: 216).

3.2.2 The examples

Using existing cultural data in the form of Foucault’s work on ethics and subjectivity, as well as some of the quantitative findings of contemporary studies on SNSs, permits the exploration of examples, both of ancient techniques of self-formation and of sites of their modern translation, problematisation, reapplication and reconfiguration. It would be impossible to investigate all ancient practices of self and all of their modern parallels within the realms of this thesis. In order to illustrate the theoretical points he was trying to make, Foucault picked examples that were particularly pertinent, telling and revealing. Kendall and Wickham suggest that ‘Foucault’s methods involve the generation of surprising stories’ (1999: 22). This thesis also explores examples of self-forming techniques that Foucault historicised and applies them to new examples that reveal how these practices are still implemented today in new ways. Foucault did not chronicle history systematically to tell a story of how society has progressed or regressed. He was concerned with exploring the conditions of possibility that have shaped the present. Similarly, the examples used in this thesis do not suggest that ancient self-forming techniques have evolved and been improved or impaired. Selecting particular examples that reveal interesting stories about some of the ways in which people become selves today provides tools for thinking about the shaping and re-shaping of norms and truths, power relations and ways of governing self in modern society.

The historical techniques this thesis examines, namely self-writing and parrhesia, have been selected based on Foucault’s study of ancient practices. Foucault established the pertinence of these practices as self-forming activities in the past, yet they resonate in ways in which individuals use SNSs today. Using case studies of specific online practices, and exploring their historical continuities and discontinuities, provides a way of investigating the types of relations, behaviours and understandings that people are engaged in today in
the contexts of modern, technologised societies. Analysing these examples can reveal something about the ways in which we become selves today. By becoming aware of where our ways of governing ourselves today came from we can become more conscious of what shapes us and think more critically about these often taken-for-granted processes that come to administer our conduct.

3.2.2

i) Why self-writing and parrhesia?

Self-writing and *parrhesia* are two particular examples of ancient self-forming techniques that have been translated and transformed throughout history. Foucault explored how writing about, to and by oneself has been a means of engaging with and shaping self in the past (1997d). Chapter 6 will reveal that writing is still employed as a tool for mediating relations of self to self and to others in modern technologised contexts. The use of SNSs involves inscribing self in particular ways (on the profile page, in status updates, in comments on other users’ content), in order to show oneself to others and communicate with them. This makes it a relevant example of a modern self-forming activity that can reveal things about how people constitute themselves today. Similarly, *parrhesia* – an ancient technique of governing self and others through speaking truth frankly, courageously and voluntarily – resurfaces in the use of SNSs. Chapter 7 explores how people speak out about themselves in personal, revelatory and sometimes transgressive ways on these sites, with an onus on being honest, open and “authentic”. It will reveal that speaking out on SNSs has been employed in recent political struggles and charitable causes, in order to achieve change. Hence, a parrhesiastic mode of speaking seems to have been translated into contemporary society as a practice of governing self and others. Exploring these specific examples of the translation of ancient techniques of self-formation into contemporary practices provides and insight into the types of practices, rationalities, relations, techniques and technologies people are assembled with today, and how they come to shape selves and their ethical conduct.
3.2.2  

ii) Why SNSs and why Facebook?

SNS-use has become part of the daily lives of more and more people in today’s developed, technologised world. It is a mundane way for modern individuals to engage with, understand and manage themselves. Current work on these sites has not considered them in this way. SNSs are not the only sites where this modern self-forming activity takes place. Television talk-shows, self-help groups, student political organisations and senior citizen programs are just some other examples of practices through which modern individuals constitute understandings of themselves and establish guidelines to live by. SNSs are relatively new, technological phenomena that provide a novel field of inquiry for investigating the genealogy of subjectivity.

Looking at a broad range of SNSs, and using examples that seem particularly pertinent for exploring modern processes of self-formation, rather than selecting one or several specific SNSs, is a Foucaultian way of approaching research that refrains from limiting the scope of what may be useful examples from the outset. While Facebook emerged as a particularly pertinent case study for exploring the use of SNSs as techniques of self, other SNSs, blogs and websites where people write about and speak out about themselves have provided further explications of assertions made in this study. Allowing for the exploration of a multitude of examples that might be useful in illustrating how people use technologies as tools for self-formation in the context of contemporary techno-social hybrid Western societies constitutes an exploratory approach that follows promising leads. It endeavours to provide new insights into the ways in which selves are formed today. Particular status updates, comments, posts and videos were selected in this thesis because they served as good examples of the ways in which individuals employ SNSs as tools for self-formation. Some of these examples originate from personal engagements with SNSs, others come from existing academic studies or journalistic news and magazine articles and opinion pieces.
3.3 Conclusion

By historicising and problematising taken-for-granted practices and considering the genealogy of the formation of selves we can gain insights into the types of practices, assumptions, power relations, truths and knowledges that guide individuals in their ethical conduct. Living in contemporary developed societies assumes and demands a certain technological competency from people. Deliberating how ancient self-forming practices have been translated and technologised in modern society provides insights into the complex assemblages that modern individuals are involved in in their day-to-day navigation of the world. Thinking about SNS-use, processes of self-formation and their technologisation can thus tell us something about how selves are governed and govern themselves today. This is not to make judgements or normative assertions about modern society, nor to propose a generalisable theory of self. Rather, it explores how the types of truths we are offered, the power relations we are involved in, and the techniques of self-formation we engage with form our selves, and how they have been shaped in historical processes.

4.0 Conclusion

Foucault’s line of inquiry and theoretical insights guide the approach taken, and assertions made, in this thesis. Four key aspects of Foucault’s work that have informed this thesis include: One, the historicisation of practices, two, their problematisation, three, thinking about self in terms of processes of self-formation and, four, considering the interplay of knowledge, power and ethics.

Foucault’s unique approach of historicising the present and problematising taken-for-granted practices provides a useful tool that can be applied to all kinds of theoretical investigations. It involves tracing back in history and questioning the practices, norms and behaviours that are seen as given social realities. It reveals that the ways in which things are done at present are the results of contingent turns of history. By focusing on the specific moments when a previously smoothly operating process is interrupted, overthrown and replaced by new procedures, Foucault’s approach addresses problems rather
than suggesting solutions. Foucault was not concerned with tracing progress. He investigated the historical conditions, accidents and reversals that have shaped the present. In this way he revealed the conditionality, heterogeneity and multiplicity of the ways in which things are done. The advantage of this type of approach is that it opens up for inquiry a range of concepts and ideas that much other social scientific work takes as a given. It can be destabilising and disquieting to constantly question and problematise the things we base our daily conduct in. However, it seems more risky to accept them as inescapable. In this way, it is actually reassuring to question where our practices, norms and behaviours have come from, in order to imagine a future that is less predetermined and more open to contingencies.

Foucault told a story of a transient, plural and ever-changing understanding of self. He avoided defining what “the self” is (a feat most other theorists take up) and instead explored how self is shaped. He explored the types of relations, techniques and understandings subjects become involved in and how they shape different possibilities of becoming selves. Foucault’s lifetime of work was based around three broad topics, namely knowledge, power and ethics. While he emphasised different ones at different times in his career, the three topics interweave in most of his work and are united by his continued interest in subjectivity. He considered how self became a knowing subject as well as the object of scientific investigations, and showed that selves are formed through specific techniques and in relations to others and to themselves. In this way, Foucault saw self as the conditioned result of knowledge, power and ethics. His unique method and approach to self enabled him to take into account the effects of historical transformations, the contingency of events and the multiplicity of factors that influence the formation of discourses and perceived truths, the dynamics of relations of power and the possibilities for subjectivation.

Foucault’s approach can be applied to new empirical examples. Modern self-forming practices can be historicised and problematised in order to make assertions about the possibilities for subjectivation that are on offer to individuals today. This allows us to question some of the practices that other
social scientific research commonly takes for granted, and to deconstruct the notion of “the self” as an *a priori* essence. Foucault’s later work on ethics and subjectivity, particular his genealogy of ethics and the notion of techniques of self, are a useful framework for thinking about the use of SNSs. It reveals that SNSs are not simply tools for showing self or communicating with others but are indeed ways of constructing an understanding of the world by engaging with self and others. These new technologised self-forming practices remain steeped in older practices that have been problematised and reconfigured in the past and translated into the present. Applying Foucault’s work and methodological approach to the use of SNSs reveals new ways of connecting and understanding some of the possibilities on offer to people to become selves today.
CHAPTER 4 – THE GENEALOGY OF ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

1.0 Introduction

Foucault's endeavour to historicise the ethical conduct of individuals generated a detailed account of how people have come to constitute their behaviour and understand themselves at different stages in history (1985; 1997a). He suggested that there were four aspects involved in the way in which people govern their ethical conduct: The ethical substance, the mode of subjectivation, the self-forming activity and the telos. We can apply these four categories as a tool for investigating modern processes of self-formation. In doing so we need to consider some of the more general socio-cultural processes, norms, laws and ideologies that shape modern life, without asserting that they inherently define human action. Three factors seem particularly influential in shaping modern processes of self-formation: One, the psychologised and rational-economic attitude that people have to their lives; two, the more and more transparent way in which people present themselves and the practices through which they relate to themselves and others in public and, three, the increasing hybridity of techno-social modern societies. Thinking about these factors provides insight into some of the continuities and discontinuities between ways in which people have established their ethical conduct in the past and how they do this today.

The psychologisation of neo-liberal societies and the notion of the enterprising self have become well-established concepts within scholarly literature on processes of self-formation. Theoretical and empirical work has also considered the blurring of boundaries between private and public and the increasing use of technology in modern everyday life. By highlighting the connections between the three factors, and considering them in the context of a Foucaultian genealogy of ethics, new insights into the ways in which individuals become selves in modern society can be gained. This will suggest that the core substance that ethics are applied to today is ambitions and aspirations, which reflect an internalisation of social and political goals and ideologies, supported by governing bodies. Through the application of psy techniques, individuals
internalise the goals of policy makers and state leaders as their own aspirations and again externalise them by living them out under the gaze of the public, often through the use of new technologies. This constitutes the modern mode of subjectivation. The activities that people engage in, in order to form their conduct, involve a modern form of self-care that is performed in public. The telos or reason why humans endeavour to act ethically today is (self)-fulfilment, the brackets indicating that people are primarily fulfilling the goals that the government want them to pursue, which they have internalised as their own.

Other Foucaultian scholars have adapted Foucault’s genealogy in similar ways (Barry et al. 1996; Dean 1999; 2007; Dean and Hindess 1998; Rose 1998; 1999a; 1999b). This thesis adds to this body of work by establishing a connection between psy and rational-economic discourses, the public lives modern individuals live, and the technologisation of society, and by applying this framework to a new example of modern self-forming activity, namely the use of SNSs. This thesis also shows the continuing pertinence of Foucault’s work by applying his historical study of the genealogy of ethics to contemporary examples. It allows us to explore what the practices, norms and rules are that shape us as selves today and where they have come from. Becoming aware of some of the processes that have shaped ethical conduct in the past enables us to consider continuities and discontinuities between these age-old practices of self-formation and modern ways through which we establish guidelines to live by. It can be difficult to reflect on a time and culture that we are engaged in and that is changing and shifting with every day. This is perhaps why Foucault was hesitant to make conclusive remarks about modern ethical conduct and processes of subjectivation. However, with the help of Foucault’s historical analyses we can become more aware of where our own behaviours, understandings and relations have come from, and how they have been shaped. This then allows us to think historically and critically about the processes involved in our self-formation and, rather than take them for granted, shape our selves in more conscious and free ways.
Foucault emphasised three general and interrelated themes as key to forming people's conduct: Knowledge, power and ethics. His early work (1970; 1972) focused on understanding how the subject is shaped in the context of the discourses or regimes of truth that it is enrolled in. Next, he accounted for the role of power relations in processes of subjectivation. In the later stages of his career, Foucault developed his notion of disciplinary techniques of power to conceptualise techniques of self – practices and relations that individuals engage in, in order to form themselves as ethical subjects. He explored the genealogy of ethics (1985; 1986; 1990; 2005; 2010; 2011) to suggest that certain guidelines aid human beings in making decisions about how to behave and understand themselves. As introduced in the previous chapter, Foucault argued that there are four main aspects to this ethical code: the ethical substance (substance éthique), the mode of subjectivation (mode d’assujettissement), the self-forming activity (pratique de soi) and the telos (téléologie). He analysed three different historical stages (ancient Greco-Roman culture, Stoicism and early Christianity) in terms of these four aspects, in order to account for continuities and discontinuities between the ways in which people relate to themselves and others in order to act ethically and form their understanding of themselves. In this way, Foucault's work accounted for the interrelation between knowledge, truth and discourse, relations of power and practices of self in shaping individuals throughout history.

Foucault saw the origins of our ethical conduct in the ancient Greek practice of epimeleia heautou – the care of self. He showed how the ancient Greeks employed specific techniques and practices in order to pay attention to, and care for, themselves in line with the desire to master themselves in accordance with living a beautiful life. This practice was simultaneously an attitude towards life for the ancient Greeks. In order to care for themselves, ancient Greeks chose to employ specific, and often lengthy, techniques for working on self, paying

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23 He develops these thoughts extensively in *The Use of Pleasure* (1985). A summarised and more comprehensive description can be found in an interview *On the Genealogy of Ethics* (1997a).
attention to self and applying the right kinds of knowledge to these processes (Foucault 1997a: 269). The ancient Greeks took care of themselves in order to know how to conduct themselves and thus assemble a set of guidelines to live by (Foucault 1988: 25). They were guided by the desire to live a “good” and “beautiful” life, which determined what types of knowledge they needed to attain (Foucault 1997a: 270).

Foucault traced this technique of self through time and showed how changing discourses, power relations, laws, norms and values transformed the way in which individuals understand and conduct themselves at different points in history. He asserted that the emergence of Stoic thought somewhat reversed this way of understanding self by replacing the care of self as the key to ethical conduct with a concern with knowing self. In this way, he considered how a shift occurred from ethics to morals, and from subject to agent.

According to Foucault, the first aspect that plays into the assemblage of an ethical code is the ethical substance. This is the core matter to which an individual applies the established guidelines for his/her conduct. For the ancient Greeks, the ethical substance was the aphrodisia (Foucault 1997a: 267) – sensual pleasures and carnal acts. For the early Christians, it was sexual desire or the temptations of the flesh. The second element involved in establishing ethical guidelines to live by is the mode of subjectivation, which encompasses the way in which people come to accept the rules for their ethical conduct. The ancient Greeks made a personal or aesthetic choice to conduct themselves ethically in order to lead the most beautiful life possible (Foucault 1997a: 266). This changed in Stoicism, when the decision to act ethically was no longer aesthetic but rational (Foucault 1997a: 264); the Stoics’ actions were determined by a rational understanding of what it meant to be a universal human being (Foucault 1997a: 264; 266; 267). This mode of subjectivation was transformed again with the emergence of Christianity, when the incitement to act morally became a matter of obligation to the divine law (Foucault 1997a: 268). The internally invented ethics of the Greeks and Stoics that was derived
from personal or rational conceptions was replaced by an externally prescribed rule for how to live by the Christian moral code.\footnote{This is not to suggest that the emergence of Christianity meant that people no longer engaged with themselves to make meaning of their existence. It actually reinforced the notion of constituting self through moral codes, and constantly working on, and bettering, oneself. However, whereas for the Greeks this process of relating to self was derived from having the right kind of knowledge, and sought to result in the government of self, it did not depend on knowledge and power (Deleuze 1988: 101). The Greeks established their own ethical codes for behaviour through particular exercises and activities. The Christians believed in a divine moral code that told them what kind of behaviour was right or wrong, which they had to engage with and manage their lives according to. It should also be acknowledged that speaking of ‘Christianity’ as a whole is a monolithic way of conceptualising it. There were many different interpretations and cultures within Christianity all of which accounted for what behaviours are moral and upright in different ways. Yet, they are united in their belief in a higher entity – God – whom people act in relation to.}

The self-forming activity is the way in which the rules entailed by the mode of subjectivation are applied to the ethical substance in order for individuals to be ethical subjects (Foucault 1997a: 265). Hence, it involves particular activities and practices. The ancient Greeks worked on their ethical substance through tekhne (Foucault 1997a: 265) – both a practical activity and the knowledge, understandings and ethical conduct that the diligent practice of the activity generates. This constituted managing the various roles they had within different contexts, such as being a husband and head of the home in the oikos, and a leader in the polis, and integrating the skills required to perform these roles with leading a good and beautiful life. Ancient Greek and Stoic self-forming activity involved extensive practices of taking care of self in order to create a beautiful life. Whereas a decisive strand of ancient Greek thought – the Socratic/Platonic philosophy – saw the acquisition of knowledge as a recollection, a decipherment of facts or issues already available to the individual, and the Stoics considered knowledge as something that needed to be cultivated and learned (Foucault 2005), both embraced the care of self, the work performed by an individual on himself, as ‘one of the main rules for social and personal conduct, ... for the art of life’ (Foucault 1988: 19), and for accessing knowledge or ‘truth’ (Foucault 2005: 15-16).
Foucault suggested that this changed in the context of early Christian societies. The self-forming activity took ‘the form of self-deciphering’ (1997a: 268). Christians performed activities on their ethical substance in order to eradicate their desires so as to act neutrally (Foucault 1997a: 269). While early Christian Mysticism still employed inner technologies to decipher oneself, the later monastic tradition discounted the practices of caring for self as selfish and immoral (Foucault 1988: 23). Acting ethically was no longer about caring for oneself but about renouncing self in order to cleanse, purge and save one’s soul. Knowledge and truth were seen to pre-exist in the divine laws imposed externally by ecclesiastical institutions. An individual did not have to decipher or cultivate his/her knowledge, but rather had to comply with the divine moral code. Christians still engaged in particular self-forming activities, such as confession, which shaped their understandings of themselves, and guided their conduct. Their self-forming activity focused on self-examination, and commonly resulted in self-renunciation. It depended on knowing the right moral codes and adhering to divine laws in order to better oneself in the hope of being saved. Foucault showed that this shift in the relation between the care of self and the knowledge of self is vital to understanding the self-forming activity of different historical times.

The final aspect in the genealogy of ethics defined by Foucault is the telos. This is the reason why an individual endeavours to act ethically; the goal of applying established ethical guidelines to the ethical substance through various self-forming activities (1997a: 265). For the ancient Greeks the objective was self-mastery (Foucault 1997a: 267), or ‘the moderation of pleasures’ (Dean 1994: 198); managing desires and knowing which behaviour was acceptable in different situations and at different times. The ancient Greeks and Stoics viewed their lives as a work of art, which it was in their hands to shape and create, and to make as beautiful as possible. Christians pursued immortality and purity (Foucault 1997a: 268). The goal of acting ethically was to be saved and admitted to Heaven. To reach this salvation Christians had to renounce themselves (Dean 1994: 198). Hence, rather than living out their pleasures in accordance with a
beautiful existence, Christians devoted their lives to God, and were expected to repress their desires. The shift in teloi from ancient Greece to Christianity highlights the dichotomy between the inwardness, self-directedness or focus on self of Greek conduct (albeit as a precondition for successful public conduct as a citizen, politician, family-head, etc.), and the outward-directedness, selflessness and external imposition of rules of Christian behaviour.25

3.0 Modern ethical conduct: Psy-economic, public and technological influences

Foucault claimed that the moral code itself – the definition of which type of behaviour is acceptable and which is not – virtually stayed the same in ancient Greece, Stoicism and Christianity and even in contemporary society. However, he suggested that what changed are the ethics – the ways in which individuals relate to themselves (Foucault 1997a: 265-6). According to Foucault, the Stoic conception that replaced the concern with caring for self with the notion of knowing self still guides the way in which we interpret ancient philosophy, and how we form our own ethical guidelines to live by today (1988: 22). He indicated that the Christian pastoral concern with confessing sinful behaviour and renouncing self in order to ensure salvation has further fostered this attitude (Foucault 1988: 22). It turned self-formation into a process of knowing the rules (established by God and enforced by the Church) for how to conduct

25 Foucault also emphasised how different teloi were connected to different ways of understanding the relationship between act, pleasure and desire in different cultures and times (1997a: 269). The ancient Greeks were particularly preoccupied with managing the act involved in sexual behaviour and less worried about the involvement of pleasure and desire. The telos of self-mastery led to a focus on how, when and what were the specific ways of doing things in order always to dominate others and never be dominated. Thus, mastering self meant managing the acts one was involved in; pleasure and desire were secondary (Foucault 1997a: 268). Eastern (particularly Chinese) conceptions of sexual behaviour focused on pleasure and its controlled and deliberate prolongation. Desire and the act itself were less important (Foucault 1997a: 269). Christian ethics, based on the telos of salvation and immortality, primarily attended to desire – not in order to enjoy and maximise it but rather to repress and eradicate it. Acts were merely functional, and pleasure was disregarded (Foucault 1997a: 269). According to Foucault, this shift from a focus on acts in the earlier Greek tradition to desire in Christianity began with a late Stoic condemnation of desire (Foucault 1997a: 268). The relations between act, pleasure and desire in the context of different teloi affected the shaping of ethical conduct and understandings of self.
oneself properly rather than establishing these rules oneself through the care of self.

Foucault showed how this attitude is mirrored in modern Cartesian epistemological thought, which views knowledge as a rational endeavour disconnected from the care of self and emphasises the thinking, hence knowing subject as gateway to the theory of knowledge (Foucault 1988: 22). Knowing self has become the guiding principle to ethical conduct which, according to Foucault, may indicate why we see ethics as necessarily linked to social, economic or political structures today (1997a: 261). Caring for self and acting ethically is no longer a matter of personal choice, as it was for the Ancients, but is now imposed on people by external laws and guidelines (first religious, now scientific and juridical). It involves knowing the rules and standards according to which one is expected to think and act in certain ways.

Considering the connection between the psychologisation of, and rational-economic attitude to life, the desire and incitement to bare self in public, and the use of new technologies in forming and expressing self, can help us think about how ethical conduct is constituted today. Dean (1994: 197-8) has proposed a useful continuation of Foucault’s genealogy of ethics into contemporary society. He suggests that the modern ethical substance (ontology) is desire in the form of sexuality, the mode of subjectification (deontology) is psy knowledge and techniques, the self-forming activity (ascetics) is self-decipherment and the telos (teleology) is self-fulfilment in the form of the emancipation of self (see also Rose 1998). Taking into account new practices that are involved in becoming selves (all the while remaining conscious of their historical roots) in the context of contemporary society, like the use of SNSs, can help in developing further understandings of how modern individuals constitute their ethical conduct today.

Today, there is a great focus on psychological notions of finding one’s “true self”. We are incited to discover our “inner self” and then express it as authentically as possible (as opposed to cultivating, deciphering or renouncing self as in the
past). The rational economic mentality that emerged out of the neo-liberalism of
the 1970s instigates us to weigh up the costs and benefits of all possible actions,
and encourages us always to maximise our potential (Becker 1993). In this way,
modern individuals choose to act ethically according to the external rational-
economic guidelines that they internalise as their own wants. At the same time,
individuals today are concerned with their appearance in public. They feel a
demand to show themselves and to adhere to the expectations of others. This
perceived demand is folded into self and externalised as an individual desire to
reveal oneself to a public audience. In this way, modern ethical conduct is
shaped by external expectations (of how to act, to be efficient, to maximise one’s
potential, to lead a fulfilled life) which are internalised (through the psy
attitude) into personal drives, and again lived out in the eye of the public,
commonly through the use of technology.

Clearly, knowledge and discourse, as well as power relations, surface as key
aspects involved in the shaping of (modern) ethical conduct. Externally imposed
guidelines for being the best self one can be, and revealing this self in the public
realm for all to see, are internalised by individuals who align them with their
own desires and aspirations. The individual subject becomes the object of
discourses that guide how s/he should act and reveal him/herself in public.
These discourses suggest ways for individuals to become selves that are in line
with the rational-economic goals of governments. The relations of individuals to
themselves and others – whether family members, work colleagues or
governing bodies – influence how they govern themselves, become governable
and are governed by others.

We can consider how modern ethical conduct is formed in terms of the
psychologisation, publicness and technologisation of modern life. A brief
overview of some of the key literature on the psychologisation of everyday life
and the notion of the enterprising subject (Rose 1998), as well as on the
increasing demand for, and desire of, individuals to live their lives in public, will
follow. This will provide a basis from which to establish how the ethical
substance, mode of subjectivation, self-forming activity and the telos of
contemporary society are shaped by these interrelated factors. The third factor, the technologisation of modern society, will be dealt with in the following chapter for a more comprehensive discussion of its role in channelling how individuals conduct and understand themselves in terms of their use of SNSs.

3.1 The enterprising self

The concept of the enterprising self arises out of neo-liberalism, which subsists as the dominant political paradigm for modern Western societies. Foucault suggested that liberalism ‘is to be analysed as a principle and method of the rationalization of the exercise of government ... which obeys ... the internal rule of maximum economy’ (2008: 318). After World War II, German ordoliberals used liberal governance to rebuild their state and society based on the economic institution (Foucault 2008: 24). American neo-liberals also built their state based on economic goals but made liberalism ‘a whole way of being and thinking’ (Foucault 2008: 218). They extended economic analysis and market rationality to non-economic social factors such as marriage, delinquency, birth rates, etc. (Foucault 2008: 323). Neo-liberal Chicago School scholars applied this way of thinking to conceptions of self-formation. They described human skills and aptitudes as “human capital” which the enterprising self was to utilise and maximise in order to gain economic benefits. An individual was to make decisions about his/her education, relationships, medical care, etc. according to attaining maximum economic benefits at minimum expenditure (Becker 1993: 43).

This way of understanding the human being as an economically-driven subject is encapsulated in Foucault’s notion of homo œconomicus (2008: 270) and Rose’s enterprising self (1998: 154); the individual as someone who reacts systematically, rationally and economically to environmental conditions. Rose notes that

the enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and acts upon itself in order to better itself (1998: 154).
In this way, neo-liberal politics, based on the model of the enterprise, produced an understanding of self as a rationally-acting and economically-driven being.

3.2 The psychologisation of everyday life

Linked to the concept of the enterprising subject is the notion of psychologisation. The ‘psy’ mentality of modern society (Rose 1998) serves to translate the rational-economic objectives of governments into subjective human desires. Rose has discussed extensively how disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry, counselling and social work, which are marketed as ‘expertises of human conduct’ (Rose 1998: 33), impact on the way in which formal institutions and entire states are governed, as well as on the lifestyles of individuals. According to Rose, the psy disciplines have become an omnipresent and pervasive part of modern life. He states that ‘it has become impossible to conceive of personhood, to experience one’s own or another’s personhood, or to govern oneself or others without psy’ (1998: 34). Psy disciplines allocate therapeutic qualities to practices of governing individuals. In this way, they work to transform strictly economic goals and cost-benefit calculations into more subjective, individual desires.

Since the individual is free to make his/her own choices in modern democratic societies, psy techniques need to ensure that what the individual wants is also what is most beneficial for the state (Rose 1998: 160). For example, rather than simply constituting a way of making money, work has come to be seen as a form of self-fulfilment, pleasure and satisfaction. The worker is granted autonomy and control over his/her work because the employer relies on the fact that the workers’ enterprising sense of self will align his/her goals with those of the company (Rose 1999a: 105; 106). Rose states that the neo-liberal citizen is not to be dominated in the interest of power, but to be educated and solicited into a kind of alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally or socially priced goals or activities. Citizens shape their lives through the choices they make about family, work, leisure, lifestyle, and personality and its expression. Government works by ‘acting at a distance’ upon these choices, forging a symmetry between the attempts of individuals to make life
worthwhile for themselves, and the political values of consumption, profitability, efficiency, and social order (1999a: 10-11).

Psy techniques ensure that this symmetry between what the individual wants and wider political and economic goals is achieved. In this way, modern processes of subjectivation are entangled in the rational-economic goals of modern governments and the psychologisation of these political objectives that turns them into individual choices.

The impact of economic rationality and psychological techniques on the modern way of life is well established in scholarly literature (see Barry et al. 1996; Becker 1993; Dean 1999; 2007; Dean and Hindess 1998; Foucault 2005; Rose 1993; 1998; 1999a; 1999b). It is not enough to consider only this factor though when thinking about how modern selves are formed and governed today. In addition to the psy and rational attitude towards modern life an increasing demand for and desire by individuals to live their lives in public, and the technologisation of day-to-day self-forming activities, shape modern ethical conduct. However, we need to be careful not to assume that these factors determine human action. They merely play a role in the complex assemblage of individuals with external norms and practices and with other individuals and institutions.

3.3 Public lives

3.3.1 Blurring public and private

In ancient Greek and Stoic cultures, private and public realms were strictly separated (Foucault 1986: 41). Mastering private matters by caring for oneself was the prerequisite for successful public (and in particular political) conduct. According to Foucault, a successful relation of self to self ‘set the forms and conditions in which political action, participation in the offices of power, the exercise of a function, [was] possible or not possible, acceptable or necessary’ (1986: 86). Hence, caring for self in private enabled the formulation of a set of values or guidelines which provided the basis for public conduct. The Stoics employed particular techniques to care for themselves that were focussed on inwardness. Turning one’s gaze away from others and directing it toward
oneself so as to resist curiosity and become more aware of, vigilant, and concentrated on, the relation of self to self (Foucault 2005: 219) served to ‘enlarge the soul’ (Marcus Aurelius, cited in Foucault 2005: 296). Private conduct, independent thought and a focus on oneself as opposed to others, represented key elements of the Stoic care of self. The Stoics sought to understand self rather than adhere to the demands and expectations of others. Only once this independent and confident relation of self to self was established did they believe that successful, self-assured and stable public conduct and relations to others could be achieved.

In modern society, concerns with the appropriate separation of public and private still seem rife. Sociologists have lamented the increasing individuation and the decline of public participation in modern society (Sennett 1986; Putnam 2000). As established in Chapter 2, some suggest that the emergence of the internet represents a revival of civic engagement, political involvement and community ties (Chambers 2006; Dalsgaard 2008; Ellison et al. 2007; Hampton 2003; Horrigan 2001; Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Watson 2008; Westlake 2008). Others are concerned that people are becoming too open about their private lives, revealing too many details about themselves in public forums, and putting themselves at risk of exploitation, theft and surveillance (Nie 2001; Tucker 2007; Schrock 2009; Van Mannen 2010).

The clear separation between private, where self is formed according to specific techniques of inwardness, and public, where self is presented, is increasingly being blurred in contemporary societies. While forming self for the Stoics was an ongoing process that did not cease at some point after which they would come to act publicly, they performed deliberate activities in private to care for self away from their public/political action. Individuals today compile the formation and presentation of self into one and the same public activity. They fold in the opinions, demands and expectations of others, and externalise them again in the public execution of practices of forming self. The technologisation and acceleration of modern life have contributed to a shift in focus from the private care of self as pre condition for public conduct, to a preoccupation with
the end-product of public performance. Self is formed at the same time as it is performed. Modern individuals still seek to understand and care for themselves in line with the psy-economic rationality of developing and maximising self, however part of this process now involves showing oneself to a public audience.

3.3.2 Mediating the relation of self to self through the expectations, opinions and responses of others

Establishing guidelines to live by and conduct oneself ethically in modern society involves the management of public expectations, opinions and norms. Individuals today relate to themselves in public activities and under the constant scrutiny of others. This affects the way in which they form their ethical guidelines for conducting themselves. Individuals govern their conduct, and are governed by others, through their public appearance.

3.3.2

i) The expectation of transparency

Modern individuals base their conduct on the perceived expectations of others. Rose argues that neo-liberal forms of governing have made public opinion a reckoning force in regulating the conduct of individuals:

A “private” realm of personal desires and predilections was … delineated, to be regulated by the force of public opinion, by the pressures of civil society and personal conscience, but not by the use of the coercive powers of the state’ (Rose 1999a: 229; emphasis added).

Modern individuals are expected to make their conduct as transparent as possible in order to always be present and available to others. The use of new technologies has both proliferated this expectation and made it easier for people to respond to it. In this way, ethical conduct is shaped and expressed simultaneously, as opposed to successively, and adapted constantly according to the reactions of others.

Using new online technologies such as SNSs makes it possible for modern individuals to become available, contactable and present for others to see at all times. This intensifies their public presence, and affects how they think about themselves and their conduct. One study by Duxbury et al. (2006) shows that
users of ‘work extending technology’ (such as mobile phones and emails) appreciate the way in which these tools assist and support their work in terms of organisation and easier communication with others. However, users also report that these technologies put pressure on them to be available all the time to employers, colleagues and clients, and that this places additional demands on both their professional and private lives.

The expectation for transparency and constant availability has blurred the lines between public and private. This affects how people form guidelines according to which they constitute their behaviour in every day life. They engage more with the demands of others and reveal themselves constantly to a public audience. In this way, modern individuals also make themselves more governable. They make it easier for governments to access their private details and use them to their own advantages. A complex network of public expectations, individual desires, technological advancement and political/social/legal discourses fosters a demand for more transparency and a willingness by individual citizens to provide it. Psy techniques are involved in translating external expectations and rational-economic goals of governments (to maximise productivity in the workplace; to have access to more information about its citizens; to ensure individuals adhere to rules of their own accord) into individual desires (to fulfil expectations of work colleagues, family members and friends; to be noticed by and present in the minds of others; to fulfil themselves).

3.3.2

ii) Speeding up and multi-tasking to care for and bare self

While people expect more transparency from one another today they also make haste to present themselves in the public eye more and more. They internalise the demand to constantly appear in the public realm to turn it also into a personal desire. Sociological accounts of modernity and postmodernity commonly suggest that time and space have become compressed and that social and cultural processes are speeding up (Gane 2006; Wajcman 2008). This speeding up of modern life has transformed the care of self from a deliberate,
slowly performed and considered activity into a series of short actions that are made public. Lash (2002), McLuhan (1997) and Virilio (1986) comment on the challenges the acceleration of life poses for the creativity and mindfulness of modern individuals and their experience of reality. Rosa suggests that

an acceleration of the speed of life ... is likely to have effects on individuals’ experience of time: it will cause people to consider time as scarce, to feel hurried and under time pressure and stress (2003: 9).

These thinkers suggest that the speeding up of day-to-day life, and the perceived pressure this puts on people, impairs their ability to care for themselves. They imply that people today, as in the past, want to understand their place in the world and make the most of their lives, and are encouraged to do so through psy discourses. However, they argue that finding time for oneself poses a challenge to modern individuals (Nowotny 1994).

Stoic self-care was a time-consuming exercise performed for its own sake in order to cultivate a relation of self to self. It was linked to particular practices and techniques (Foucault 2005: 83-95) like self-writing (in the form of correspondence and entries into private notebooks), meditation, abstaining from certain things to practise self-control, and the endurance of tests. The acceleration of modern life has not eliminated this engagement of self with self but rather has transformed it. What used to be a lengthy activity has become a matter of short, intermittent, yet frequent processes. The use of the status update on SNSs is a perfect example of the quick and public ways in which individuals reflect on and present themselves today. Guided by the rational-economic aspiration to maximise productivity at minimum expenditure of time and effort, modern individuals engage with themselves constantly in their day-to-day activities, caring for themselves at the same time as they bare themselves to a public audience. They use technology to further facilitate this multi-tasking and maximise the amount of people they can present themselves to, and be connected with, at the same time.
3.3.2

iii) The awareness of having an audience

Modern individuals subject themselves more and more to the scrutiny of a relatively public audience. They broadcast what was previously seen as private behaviour into the public realm. As the next chapter will demonstrate, technology plays a key role in this shift. Knowing that one's actions may be watched and judged by others affects what an individual does. Foucault established this in using Bentham’s Panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary society (1977). He showed how the latent apprehension of hierarchical observation governs the conduct of individuals who come to act according to external rules and norms on their own terms. The awareness of having an audience for one's day-to-day conduct, and the perceived expectations this audience holds, impact on the relations people have to themselves and others. By submitting themselves, and the processes through which they form themselves, to the scrutiny of others, modern individuals make themselves governable and subject to external discourses and truths.

The Stoics opened themselves up to an other as a means of attaining advice and reassurance and transforming self (Foucault 2005: 130). Today, individuals present their private conduct to an only vaguely defined mass audience. The internet has both proliferated and facilitated this behaviour. boyd has referred to this as the invisibility of audiences in online environments, arguing that ‘a mediated public could consist of all people across all space and all time’ (2008: 126). Schrock (2009) speaks of a ‘privacy paradox’ in the way that people treasure the freedom of expression the internet affords, however may not always consider the consequences of exposing themselves so publicly. Modern individuals have to weigh up the costs and benefits of being transparent, present and visible in the public realm, and giving up (parts of) their privacy. Forming self today occurs under the gaze of a public audience.

3.3.3 Public self-exposure: Weighing up the costs and benefits

In 1987, McLuhan flagged that ‘electric speeds of information literally create the mass man and obliterate the private man’ (503). Fifteen years on and
McLuhan’s assertion seems ever more applicable. Through the use of technology, modern individuals disclose details of their private lives to their public audience. The perceived expectation to be transparent and always available, the haste to perform the practices through which they shape their selves in public, and the awareness of having an audience, influence how people relate to themselves and others today. Feeling compelled to put their private lives on public display, and seeking out this public exposure, people weigh up the costs and benefits of surrendering their personal lives to public scrutiny, and feeling noticed and acknowledged by their “audience” through their constant self-disclosure.

The internet, and SNSs in particular, have proliferated possibilities for becoming present to a public audience. Rosen (2007) remarks that one of the main objectives of online social networking is self-exposure. She states that ‘the creation and conspicuous consumption of intimate details and images of one’s own and others’ lives is the main activity in the online social networking world’ (2007: 24). She questions whether ‘this technology, with its constant demands to collect (friends and status), and perform (by marketing ourselves), in some ways undermine[s] our ability to attain what it promises—a surer sense of who we are and where we belong?’ (2007: 16). For Rosen, the costs of public self-exposure outweigh its benefits. She implies that the simultaneous processes of working on, and presenting, self in always up-to-date accounts does not suffice as a means of attaining a stable relation of self to self as the basis for relating to others and conducting oneself ethically.

Clearly, the public presentation of private details about oneself has a part to play in the way individuals govern themselves and are governed by others. However, rather than simply accepting the fact that modern individuals seem more willing to present themselves in the public realm, and then judging the effects of this factor (as scholars like Rosen like to do), a critical and historically-aware approach accounts for where these practices have come from, and how they come to shape the ethical conduct of modern individuals. Embracing this
latter approach allows us to shine new light on taken-for-granted concepts and explore them from a different angle.

3.3.4 Expert advice and the public
The calculated, rational communication with others, and the pressure to perform in public, make people susceptible to psychological treatment. To alleviate the anxiety caused by the public exposure of self, individuals look to the authority of experts to guide their ethical conduct. Rose has commented on the proliferation of self-help manuals, television talk-shows, agony aunt columns in magazines and other psychologised techniques (1998: 34) through which modern individuals seek out the advice of experts to help them understand and relate to themselves. He states that ‘the quotidian affairs of existence have become the occasion for introspection, confession, and management by expertise’ (Rose 1998: 159). The life of an individual becomes an enterprise that needs to be worked on, improved, maximised and fulfilled. Certain expert bodies make truth claims with regards to how individuals should behave in order to be normal, happy and fulfilled. In this way, individual conduct is mediated by psy techniques, and thus aligned with the goals of the state.

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2003), Horkheimer and Adorno commented on the way in which mass culture, or ‘the culture industry’, imposes rationalised models of behaviour on the individual which s/he is to conform to. In this way, self becomes objectified and defined in economic terms as success or failure. Horkheimer and Adorno suggested that underlying ‘powers’ – the state’s economic and political goals – determine the conduct of citizens.

   Everything else, idea and crime, suffers *the force of the collective*, which monitors it from the classroom to the trade union. But even the threatening collective belongs only to the deceptive surface, beneath which are concealed the powers which manipulate it as the instrument of power. Its brutality ... keeps the individual up to scratch (Horkheimer and Adorno 2003: 162; emphasis added).

Rather than attributing the translation of governmental goals into individual behaviour to psychological techniques and expert authority, as suggested by
Rose, Horkheimer and Adorno identify the public as powerful (albeit superficial) force in moulding and directing the conduct of individuals.

Ultimately, it is a combination of both factors that is influential; modern individuals feel a pressure and desire to present themselves constantly to a public audience. The potential anxiety this may cause then becomes the target of psy techniques and expert advice, which claim to be able to tell individuals what is right and wrong, and in this way enable them to construct a surer sense of who they are and how they should behave. However, seeking out advice is becoming an increasingly public endeavour. Modern individuals present their problems on television talk-shows, in magazines and on online sites, where they not only invite the advice of experts, but also (or instead) turn to a public audience for guidance. Becoming ever-present in the public realm leads individuals to feel unsure about how to act, making them turn to experts – ironically in public forums. Clearly, the public, along with economic, psychological and technological factors, plays a significant role in shaping the relation of an individual to him/herself, others, and hence his/her ethical conduct.

3.4 Modern ethical conduct: Applying Foucault's genealogy of ethics

Keeping in mind the way in which rational-economic calculation and psy techniques, the blurring of lines between public and private and the technologisation of modern society affect modern processes of self-formation, we can explore what constitutes ethical conduct today. Table 1 below provides a basic summary of Foucault’s explication of the genealogy of ethics in the past and an outline of how it can be adapted to contemporary society.
Table 1: The genealogy of ethics: From the Greeks to the Christians to contemporary society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Substance</th>
<th>Greeks</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Moderns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the core matter that provides the base for the application of ethics</td>
<td>Aphrodisia – sensual pleasures; carnal acts</td>
<td>(Sexual) desire; flesh</td>
<td>Aspirations; ambitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mode of Subjectivation | the way in which people come to accept the rules for their ethical conduct | Personal and aesthetic choice (self-devised) | Divine law (external code) | Internalisation of political goals as personal choice through psy techniques and public opinion |

| Self-forming activity | how the rules entailed by the mode of subjectivation are applied to the ethical substance | Tekhne – managing roles in accordance with a “beautiful” existence (the care of self) | Self-examination through self-deciphering (knowledge of self) | Publicly exploring and expressing self (commonly through the use of technology); (transparency; caring for and baring self) |

| Telos | the ultimate goal or reason why the individual partakes in the self-forming activity | Self-mastery; moderation of pleasures; life as a work of art | Immortality, purity, salvation through self-renunciation; life dedicated to God | (Self)-fulfilment; maximisation of potential; life as cost/benefit calculation |

3.4.1 The ethical substance: Ambitions and aspirations

i) Economic objectives and psychological techniques

Foucault proposed that the core matter that individuals apply their ethical codes to today is feelings (1997a: 263). He acknowledged that ‘it's not always the same part of ourselves, or of our behaviour, which is relevant for ethical judgement’ (Foucault 1997a: 263). Considering the rationalisation, psychologisation, publicness and technologisation of modern life, it seems more accurate to say that individuals today begin their work of establishing ethical conduct with ambitions and aspirations. While these are linked to feelings like love, passion, disappointment, fear and hope through specific psychological
techniques, these feelings are rather a product of our aspirations than their foundation. The ambitions and aspirations of modern individuals mirror the economic and political objectives of their governments, which are translated into individual desires through psychological techniques and perceived public expectations.

For example, many modern individuals strive to achieve a healthy and active lifestyle. Governmental bodies encourage this attitude as a means of making citizens act in accordance with their political and economic goals. A healthy population means lower costs of healthcare and less economic losses caused by those unable to work due to sickness. Clearly, governments also believe in the benefits of a healthy lifestyle for the individual him/herself. They endeavour to align their political-economic objectives with the ambitions and aspirations of their citizens. Psy techniques translate political objectives into individual aims. Expert authorities, such as doctors, politicians and the media, reinforce the rules and norms that governments establish, by advising individuals on how to act, and reassuring them of the appropriateness of their conduct.

A specific example helps to illustrate how the aspirations and ambitions of modern individuals are based on the objectives of governing bodies in Western societies. In 2010, the Australian government launched its *Measure Up* campaign (Australian Government 2010a), which sought to raise awareness about increasing obesity rates and the risks associated with being overweight. As part of the campaign, the Government produced a series of television advertisements. The first features a young man walking along on a path laid out with a tape measure. As he progresses along the path, he ages and advances through life. We see him starting a job and a family, and along the way incrementally gaining weight. Towards the end of the ad he appears to be in his early forties and overweight. He attempts to play with his daughter, chasing after her, yet struggles to keep up. The ad ends with the slogan: ‘the more you gain, the more you have to lose’. Throughout the ad, a voiceover provides facts and statistics about obesity such as ‘one in two Australian adults is overweight’ and ‘for most people, waistlines of over 94cm for men and 80cm for women
increase the risk of some cancers, heart disease and type 2 diabetes’ (see Australian Government (2010b) for script of ad; archmadtrix (2008) for video).

This advertisement shows how governments use psychological techniques and rational-economic calculations to shape the conduct of its citizens. The objective for a healthy population is aligned with the aims of individual citizens by appealing to their emotions; the ad instils fear about getting sick or dying due to the consequences of living an unhealthy lifestyle, and anxiety about jeopardising the quality of relationships to loved ones. The double entendre in the statement ‘the more you gain the more you have to lose’ refers to the weight the man has put on, as well as to the valuable, non-material and irreplaceable things he has acquired in his life, such as his family. The psy tactic of appealing to the viewers’ emotions is coupled with the rational-economic appeal to weigh up the costs and benefits of being obese. At the end of the advertisement viewers are asked to consider how they ‘measure up’ compared to what the government proposes is a healthy waistline circumference. It establishes a numerical norm (94cm for men, 80cm for women) according to which people are expected to orient their goals and actions. This appeals to the individual, who sees him/herself as an enterprise to improve and perfect; it provides a rational-economic goal to strive for, and reassures the individual of what is normal and desirable. In this way, psy techniques and calculated logic come to shape the aspirations of modern individuals by aligning them with the objectives of governments. Modern individuals then base their ethical conduct on these aspirations.

3.4.1

ii) The presentation of self in public

Modern individuals fold in external expectations to guide their ethical conduct. The publicly-mediated nature of modern life, alongside psy techniques and rational-economic calculation, shapes people’s aspirations and ambitions. They apply their ethical conduct to goals and aspirations they establish as their own according to what they think others expect of them. In addition to governmental campaigns that promote a healthy lifestyle, the people an individual interacts with, and presents him/herself to, contribute to fostering this attitude. Today, a
healthy physique is associated with a certain appearance – slender, yet not too thin – and lifestyle – healthy diet and moderate exercise – which modern individuals are incited to strive for. Those who do not conform are scrutinised and judged by the public audience they expose themselves to in their daily conduct. Rose has commented on the way in which the feeling of shame in combination with the entrepreneurial quest to be the best one can be, makes people want to adhere to perceived norms and expectations (1999b: 73). Modern individuals subject themselves so much to the examination by others that the expectations of their audience get translated into their own aspirations and ambitions.

3.4.1

iii) Governing aspirations and ambitions: Reversals and freedom

Claiming that what we see as our own ambitions and aspirations are actually the goals and objectives of others is not to suggest that the choices we think we are making of our own accord are in fact pre-determined. Rose argues that ‘the irony is that we believe, in making our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives, our ethical systems, and our political evolutions, that we are, freely, choosing our freedom’ (1999a: 11), however that ‘this is not to say that our freedom is a sham. It is to say that the agonistic relation between liberty and government is an intrinsic part of what we have come to know as freedom’ (Rose 1993: 298). Hence, while this critical analysis of modern ethical conduct may seem to suggest that individual aspirations are entirely controlled by governments, it would be wrong to assume that humans simply become puppets for authorities to manoeuvre against their will. Rather, the cycle of economic and public demand, turned into individual aspiration through psy techniques, and again exhibited in public for approval, effectively ensures that the wishes of both the government and the individual are met.

In democratic societies, citizens have the right to make demands of their governing bodies, which the latter have to consider in shaping their policies. This is what Rose has termed the ‘reversibility of relations of authority’, which suggests that ‘what starts off as a norm to be implanted into citizens can be
repossessed as a demand which citizens can make of authorities’ (Rose 1993: 296). In this way, the aspirations and ambitions that individuals shape on the basis of the rational economic goals proposed by governments can also be turned back on governments when citizens make demands of authorities and call for change in the ways in which they are governed. Chapter 7 will reveal how speaking out freely on SNSs in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings has served to demand and achieve social and political change. In this case, individuals under autocratic regimes demanded to be governed in more democratic ways. This shows that people do not always unquestioningly conform to the ways of acting that governing bodies propose for them, and that the ethical substance of ambitions and aspirations can be redefined by individuals themselves in moments when existing ways of governing are challenged and problematised.

3.5 The mode of subjectivation: Publicly, governmentally and psychologically regulated personal choice

The modern mode of subjectivation, or the way in which people accept the rules for their conduct, is personal choice guided by the demands and expectations of others, including governing authorities. As established above, in a successfully functioning democracy the choices modern citizens make of their own accord are aligned with what governments see as best for their people, as well as for the economic development of the state (Dean 1994; 1999; Foucault 2010; Rose 1998). In addition, the conduct of individuals is mediated by the expectations they perceive their public audiences to have of them. Psy techniques and practices, such as the advice of experts, translate governmental objectives and public expectations into individual goals. In this way, people make their own choices, yet these are aligned with governmental objectives and public expectations. Individuals today make the choice to adhere to what others tell them is right.

In thinking about modern ethical conduct, Foucault wonder[ed] if our problem nowadays is not, in a way similar to [the Ancient Greek one], since most of us no longer believe that ethics is
founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life (1997a: 255).

He argued that, as Western societies became increasingly secularised after the eighteenth century, a tug of war between a medical/scientific and a juridical mode of subjectivation emerged (Foucault 1997a: 267). This suggests that, similar to the ancient Greeks, modern individuals adhere to an ethical code out of personal choice. However, whereas in Ancient Greece the members of a male elite established their code for acting ethically independent of social and political institutions, today this personal choice is guided by governmental objectives and public expectations. Foucault repeatedly lamented the fact that ethics today always are related to juridical, authoritarian or disciplinary structures (1997a: 260; 261). Rose claims that the autonomous individual today is free to choose his/her actions to the extent that these choices align with the aims and attitudes of the government, which the individual has internalised as his/her own (1998: 167-8). He describes this as a ‘space of regulated freedom’ (Rose 1998: 166). Hence, modern individuals are not free to shape their conduct according to what they think entails a beautiful life (as elite Greek males were), but are rather ‘obliged to be free’ (Rose 1999a: 217). Their personal choice is made to align with political, public and economic expectations, and is performed (commonly via the use of technology) in the public realm. Thus, the modern mode of subjectivation is personal choice that is publicly, governmentally and psychologically regulated and technologically mediated.

The Measure Up TV ad is one example of how individuals are incited to make choices about how to conduct themselves that align with public and political expectations. The ad implies that being healthy, active and fit is desirable. It suggests that it is in the own best interest of individuals to strive for this kind of lifestyle, as it will make them live longer, healthier lives, which they can enjoy at maximum capacity. The ad constructs a discourse that connects being overweight with an inability to care for oneself and one’s loved ones. In this way, it makes a truth claim about what is necessary to be happy. It proposes a certain lifestyle that is in line with political and economic interests, and appeals to the individual to make the choice to adhere to this lifestyle of his/her own
accord. Hence, the modern mode of subjectivation - the way in which individuals accept and apply certain norms or rules of how to conduct themselves to their ambitions and aspirations (the ethical substance) – is guided by political demands (to be healthy and able to work and contribute to the economy) and public expectations (of how to care for oneself and one’s family). Psy techniques that appeal to the entrepreneurial drive of modern neo-liberal individuals to be their best, and to their emotional desire to care for their loved ones, translate these external demands into personal aspirations.

3.6 The self-forming activity: Public presentation of self as a work in progress

The self-forming activity entails the way in which the mode of subjectivation is applied to the ethical substance, and is enacted in practices, or techniques of self. Modern individuals simultaneously shape and reveal themselves through their self-forming activity. They form their understandings of self while putting their actions on public display. New technologies, such as SNSs, are becoming more and more involved in this self-forming activity. Today, taking care of self in order to manage daily life involves fulfilling the perceived expectations of others, and constantly having a public presence. Thinking rationally and economically, modern individuals constitute their lives as projects to work on, improve and get the best possible gains out of. Rose suggests that people today are incited ‘to develop a “style” of living that will maximise the worth of their existence to themselves’ (1998: 157). The psychologisation of modern life turns these rational-economic objectives into personal desires and incites people to engage with themselves as psychological beings who need to find their “true self” in order to become happy and successful individuals.

People then turn to the advice of so-called “experts” to help them choose the right self-forming techniques to shape their conduct. Self-help books propose to people how they can be their best, counsellors advise them to make pro and con lists to assess the happiness of their relationships, doctors tell them when and what tests are necessary to check up on their health, the media propose healthy lifestyle techniques, including how to eat, exercise, dress and act, reality TV
shows put the daily lives and struggles of modern individuals on public display, celebrities become role models for how to look, act and think. All of these discourses and pre-made plans become normative guidelines for individuals that mould their behaviour and aid them in managing the complexities of their daily lives.

The perceived expectations of others, and the desire to adhere to these expectations, shape modern self-forming activity. People seek to explore and understand their inner stirrings and motivations, however these are shaped by the external demands of others. Furthermore, modern individuals perform their self-forming activity in the public realm. The reality TV show *The Biggest Loser* is an example of how people apply the politico-economic/public demands to be slim, healthy and fit to their own goals and aspirations through specific practices (like dieting and exercising), and how this self-forming activity is executed in the public realm today. Contestants on the show have accepted the guidelines for how to look and live that normative expectations propose to them. They have internalised these as their own goals and aspirations. They then seek out expert advice – that of the trainers and nutritionists on the show – in order to shape themselves in accordance with these rules, and in order to fulfil what have become their goals. They perform the activities they engage in to reach their goals, and the progress they make, in the public eye. Modern self-forming activity is both inner-directed and mediated by outer demands and pressures, and characterised by a transparent nature.

Embarking on an exercise and dieting regime through a reality TV programme is only one of many examples of specific practices that make up modern self-forming activity. Chapter 6 will show how self-writing has been employed as a way of exploring, understanding and expressing self. Using modern technologies like SNSs has made this age-old self-forming activity into a publicly performed practice. SNS-users are constantly aware of being under the scrutiny of their public audience. They seek to adhere to the expectations of others, and simultaneously endeavour to shape and fulfil themselves. They permit others to witness and judge the process of forming themselves as a work in progress.
this way, the public becomes another form of expert advice that shapes the ways in which individuals govern themselves and others. Modern self-forming activities thus become public performances.

3.7 The telos: (Self)-fulfilment

The telos is the reason why people decide to conduct themselves ethically. It is what motivates people to engage in self-forming activities that work on their ethical substance. Today, people seek to fulfil themselves. They are incited by external discourses to identify economically driven goals, such as to lead a healthy and active lifestyle (along with many other imperatives such as to attain a high-quality education), in order to be a successful and productive contributor to the workforce. They are encouraged to devise a plan that will ensure these goals are achieved in the most effective way possible. This involves weighing up the costs and benefits of potential actions in order to maximise outcomes and live up to public expectations. Identity is portrayed as a reflexive project that can be shaped and improved and must be worked on constantly. Individuals are told to ‘never give up’, ‘reach for the top’ and ‘strive for perfection’, in order to become the best selves they possibly can.

People today seek to adhere to certain ethical codes that shape their behaviour in order to become fulfilled individuals. As their aspirations are mediated by politico-economic and public expectations, fulfilling oneself simultaneously fulfils external objectives that seek to ensure social order, productivity, health and security for the state. Hence, the telos that drives the ethical behaviour of modern individuals can be described as (self)-fulfilment, suggesting that the expectations people seek to fulfil are not simply generated by themselves but rather are mediated by external forces.

Foucault contrasted the Greek ‘ancient culture of the self’ with the modern ‘Californian cult of the self’ (1997a: 271) to suggest that external demands and psychological techniques have come to shape the modern telos. He claimed that in the Californian cult of the self, one is supposed to discover one’s true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytic
science, which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is (Foucault 1997a: 271).

He argued that modern individuals use logical reasoning to figure out who they really are. They seek to access their inner “true self” and to present this self as authentically as possible to others. They no longer think of their lives as a work of art that they can shape and create, as did the ancient Greeks. Instead, they adhere to external ethical codes that enable them to maximise their potential, fulfil the external expectations they have internalised as their own, and put themselves on display.

Rose refers to Marcel Mauss who suggested that the Christian notion of the soul infused the legal and political framework of the person with an ‘internal existence’ (Rose 1999a: 221). Having a conscience made people accountable for their thoughts, actions and behaviours (Rose 1999a: 221). Confession was established as a way of ensuring that individuals behaved according to God’s divine law and could ask for forgiveness if they strayed from the rules. Rose argues that even though modern society is largely secularised, individuals today are still encouraged to critically examine their behaviour, speak about their thoughts and actions with others, and reflect on their conduct in order to improve themselves (1999a: 223). Experts of the psy disciplines define and reinforce the goals individuals are to strive for, and offer guidance in achieving these objectives (Rose 1999a: 3). The objective of modern ethical conduct is to achieve perfection and fulfilment in day-to-day life. Externally imposed rational-economic cost-benefit calculations, the advice of “experts”, and the expectations of others who get to witness the process of self-formation, inform the constitution of modern ethical conduct.

4.0 Conclusion

Foucault’s genealogy of ethics is a useful tool for thinking about how people come to act in the ways they do, and how they establish understandings of their place in the world. Applying the four categories he proposes as influential in shaping ethical conduct to contemporary society enables us to think critically about the processes, practices, institutions and relations that shape people’s
actions today. The substance that individuals apply their ethical conduct to today is ambitions and aspirations. The mode of subjectivation is personal choice, mediated by economic, psy and public demands. The self-forming activity is a public/transparent forming and performing of self, commonly through the use of new technologies. Finally, the telos that motivates modern self-forming activity is (self-)fulfilment. Economic-rational calculation, psychological techniques and public transparency interweave to mediate the formation of relations of self to self and self to others that shape modern ethical conduct.

The following chapter will develop an account of how new technologies have a key role to play in these processes. It will show how modern individuals become assembled with technologies in complex networks that shape their relations to self and to others. This then provides a basis for thinking about some specific examples of modern technologised self-forming activities that are rooted in age-old practices that have been translated, reconfigured and reinstated in new and different ways. SNSs are one technology and technique that provide modern individuals with a mundane way of navigating the complexities of modern rationalised and psychologised, technologised and publicly mediated life. Engaging with these technologies serves as a way for people to relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct and establishing guidelines to live by.

It can be difficult to decipher the ins and outs of a time and culture that we are still living in and that are constantly changing and developing. Being temporally and culturally distanced from a time and society, as Foucault was from the ancient Greeks, allows for a more decisive assertion about the ethical codes that guide it. Nevertheless, trying to understand the types of selves we are able to be today, and becoming conscious of the types of forces that influence our self-formation, enables us to actively notice, rather than just passively experience, processes of subjectivation. Even though we may not be able to fully understand all of the implications that living in our time has for our sense of self, we can try to become aware of what influences us and can then react to, and resist these
forces if need be. Foucault’s genealogy of ethics is a useful tool for analysing the taken-for-granted, day-to-day activities, discourses and power relations that come to shape the behaviours and assumptions of modern individuals.
CHAPTER 5 – TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES

1.0 Introduction – Self-forming techniques and the role of technology

By now it should be clear that this thesis is about considering some of the conditions that are involved in shaping modern processes of self-formation without diagnosing modernity or proposing a grand theory of self. It has been argued that the convergence of economic objectives and psycho-techniques, the presentation of self in the public sphere and the increasing technological mediation of day-to-day conduct, proposes new ways for people to understand themselves, act and relate to one another. It is important to spell out that this does not mean that these are symptoms of modern times that determine human action or prescribe set ways of acting. As suggested by Foucault, what changes with regards to the way in which society understands ethical conduct at different times is not the broad framework of what type of conduct is considered ethical or acceptable, but rather the relations that individuals have with themselves and others (Foucault 1997a: 266). Hence, there are always continuities and discontinuities between ways in which people have done this work on themselves in the past and how they are doing it today, and we can only consider what appear to be influential factors.

Ethical conduct today is shaped by the complex interrelations and interdependencies between humans and technologies, alongside the psychologisation and rationalisation, and the increasing demand and desire to make private life public that the previous chapter focused on. The ways in which humans employ technologies is not a simple matter of making a tool and using it to perform a certain action. Rather, human and non-human actants are intricately interconnected in complex networks in which they shape, and are shaped by, one another in reciprocal processes, which can sometimes produce unintended consequences. Technologies have a part to play in mediating how humans act and form social, cultural and political practices. Deuze (2011: 137) conceptualises modern existence as ‘media life’ – a life ‘lived in, rather than with, media’ (see also Deuze 2009). Similarly, van Doorn (2011) seeks to deconstruct the persistently made distinction between virtuality and real-life materiality,
arguing instead for the embeddedness of online practices in everyday reality. It is vital to get away from both sides of the structure-agency debate that has divided sociological approaches to explaining social worlds. We need to consider how all social entities circulate with one another and form, and are formed by, one another.

In order to understand the complex assemblages of people and technologies that shape modern techno-social hybrid worlds it is useful to supplement Foucault’s work on techniques of self with a practical analysis of tools and technologies that are implicated in the constantly changing processes and practices that shape and re-shape forms of self (see Kendall and Michael 2001; Kendall and Wickham 1999). Thinking about technologies as tools that assist and affect how self relates to self and others needs to acknowledge that they are not simply new inventions, but are steeped in older ways of doing things. Humans have always employed tools and techniques, including non-material techniques like those of the body, in managing their day-to-day lives. The mediation of these practices of self by new technologies has reconfigured the complex interrelations between humans and technologies; through the use of new technologies certain age-old self-forming techniques have become accessible to a greater mass of people who now execute processes through which they shape and re-shape themselves in real-time in the public realm. For example, the use of the status update on SNSs like Facebook has massified the practice of writing as a self-forming technique, and turned this form of caring for self into an ongoing public performance.

1.1 Supplementing Foucault’s techniques of self with a technological approach

Conceptualising SNS-use as a self-forming technique provides insight into one particular way in which people become selves today. It accounts for the hybrid networks of human and non-human entities that dynamically construct and transform social interests and actions (Latour 1991: 107-8). Latour states that ‘we are never faced with objects or social relations, we are faced with chains which are associations of humans ... and non-humans’ (1991: 110). Hence, we
need to do away with distinctions between humans and non-humans as active vs. passive, subjects vs. objects. Rather, people and objects, or different entities, are connected in actor-networks in which they ‘make [each other] do things’ by ‘generating transformations’ (Latour 2005: 107). Every “thing” presents a ‘positive offer of subjectivation’ (Latour 2005: 213; emphasis in original), which can be taken up by the actants that are assembled in networks to make up social action and understandings of self. Technologies like SNSs are involved in processes of self-formation yet neither cause, nor are invented as an outcome of, how people conduct themselves in modern society. The massification and transparency of modern ethical conduct is tangled up in complex networks of humans and technology that shape and constantly re-shape it.

Technologies afford certain possibilities for action (see Gibson 1977; Latour 2005; Callon and Law 1982; Norman 1999). These technologies may be electronic tools such as computers, the internet and older ones like the telephone, or non-electronically powered objects like clothes or cutlery. Even our physical bodies represent tools through which we come to shape our conduct (Mauss 1973). Non-material discourses and techniques of governing also have a role to play in the formation of selves, and are also entangled with technological processes. Examples of each will be explored below in order to show that modern self-forming activities are technologically mediated and performed in the public sphere. They extend relations beyond spatial and temporal barriers, and can result in people demanding and achieving social and political change by broadcasting their beliefs and truths to a wide public audience. Despite being reconfigured, changed and adapted through the use of new technologies, self-forming activities are always historically conditioned and can have unintended consequences. Often further associations with more techniques, practices and technologies are employed in order to resolve the unintended consequences caused by the initial use of technology.
2.0 **What technology has to offer**

2.1 **The affordances and uses of the Facebook status update**

The objects and technologies that individuals engage with in their daily lives offer themselves in certain ways to suggest particular avenues for action. Gibson (1977) established that all objects come with ‘affordances’; a certain set of possibilities for how they might be used. The status update on Facebook provides users with certain affordances, or ‘offer[s] of subjectivation’ (Latour 2005: 213). Every Facebook-users’ homepage is equipped with a textbox that bears the words “What’s on your mind?” Moving the mouse cursor over the box causes the cursor symbol to change from an arrow to a flashing “I” (text cursor) to indicate that the box can be clicked on and typed in. If a user indeed clicks on the box, the text “what’s on your mind?” disappears, and a blank space remains that allows the user to write his/her own message. In this way, the Facebook status update box is a technological tool that offers users the possibility of writing down what is on their mind.

Norman (1988) highlights that the affordances of an object or entity do not just offer, but in fact suggest, certain ways of employing the object. For example, if the question that appeared in the Facebook status box was different, for example “Where are you?”, the user would enter a different inscription into the box. Similarly, if the text did not automatically disappear from the box once the user clicked on it, it may not be as self-evident to him/her that it is possible to insert his/her own text in the field. Hence, the technological tool provides certain possibilities and indicates how these should be responded to. Yet, while the possibilities the machine offers may suggest a certain path of action, the intentions, values and past experiences of its user also come into play in the human-machine interaction. Even though the Facebook status box asks “what’s on your mind?” and not “Where are you?”, a user may still comment on his/her whereabouts. For years, the Facebook status box in fact posed the question “What are you doing?”. In a 2009 overhaul of the site this was changed to “What’s on your mind”. Seemingly, the types of things some users were stating in their status updates extended beyond what they were doing, causing the developers of the technology to make the question reflect the users’ answers.
more accurately. Inevitably, this change also affected how Facebook-users operate the site; it made certain suggestions about what users should write in their status updates. The wants and intentions of users shaped the technology, and, at the same time, using the technology influences the actions and expressions of users. The Facebook status update is one mundane example of the circular relations between technological affordances and the values, expectations, cultural backgrounds, ideologies and understandings of its users that are assembled in a network to form social action and shape the entities that perform it.

2.2 Extending the use of non-technical technologies

This thesis explores how technology in its literal, technical, electronic sense contributes to shaping modern practices of self-formation. Yet, all self-forming techniques, whether online or offline, modern or age-old, are tied up with other entities, objects, tools, artefacts or devices. The assemblages humans are involved in do not necessarily have to include technological or virtual tools like computers, the internet and SNSs, or even older, more taken-for-granted technologies like televisions or telephones. Books, pens and paper, dog leads, keys, candles – the list of tools that are involved in our processes of self-formation is endless. All objects contribute to the way in which humans navigate through, and make sense of, the world they live in (see Michael 2006). Our actions and relations are tied up in assemblages with other entities, which

26 In an even more recent re-design of the SNS late in 2012, the proposed question in the status update box changed once more to “What's going on, [name of user]”. Again, technological affordances, and the way in which users make use of them, converge to shape one another. It seems that the previous statements about what users are doing and what is on their minds have been combined and adapted to fit with the way in which people employ the status update (e.g. a relatively new trend is the increasing use of photo imagery to supplement status updates), and to promote a certain type of engagement with the site (the address has become more personal through the inclusion of the users’ name, perhaps to tighten the community feel). Olanoff (2012) suggests that ‘this might be an interesting technique to get people to share more’. A Facebook spokesperson claimed that site developers are ‘testing different variations to see how people like them’ (cited in Olanoff 2012). Our conduct is shaped by the technologies we are entangled with, yet at the same time the way in which we use these tools affects their design and re-design.
we enter in and out of, and which continuously shape and reshape our understandings of self.

The Christian confessional is a practice that, for a long time, has acted as a self-forming technique. While it involves primarily a verbal exchange between the priest and the penitent, other entities and actants like a Church, a confessional booth, particular learned prayers and sayings and other non-human entities commonly play a role in the practice of confessing. The physical bodies of the priest and the penitent are enacted in specific ways, such as kneeling, making the sign of the cross, folding the hands and saying particular phrases. Dominant religious, political and legal discourses and social and cultural norms further guide appropriate confessional conduct. All of these are tools and techniques that circulate with the priest and the penitent in shaping this particular practice of self-formation.

The iPhone ‘Confession’ application is an example of how age-old self-forming techniques have been translated and transformed into technologised self-forming tools. The application aids penitents in preparing for, and keeping track of, the confessional. Users set up a profile for customised examination of conscience. They can go through a list of the 10 commandments, as well as further prompting sub-questions, and mark the ones they feel they have violated and need to confess about. They thus create a record of their sins. A tutorial provides prompts for what to say when in the confessional booth to prepare users for the real-life ritual (Apple 2011a). App-developer Patrick Leinen claims that it ‘invite[s] Catholics to engage in their faith through digital technology’ (BBC News 2011a). User comments show that the app has worked to aid some Christians in living a more devout life. One reviewer claims that she ‘got a much better examination which focused more on living holiness rather than just “bumping into the commandments”’ (review by ‘universalcalltoholiness’ on Apple 2011a). Another user requested for the app to be done ‘with Face Time’ and for users to be able to ’get absolution’ through the app (review by ‘Augustine of Hippo’ on Apple 2011a).
Using the Confession app is an example of how humans and technologies interrelate to shape one another. The app may remind Christians of the religious and moral guidelines that should form their conduct. Those who have neglected attending confession may feel reassured of the procedures involved, and thus more inclined to seek out a priest to confess to. Use of the app can be customised by providing details such as age and time since the last confession. Providing these details changes the phrasing of commandments to make them age-appropriate. A fourteen-year-old boy, for example, will be prompted with ‘do I treat my body and others with purity and respect?’ whereas a forty-year old married man is asked ‘have you masturbated recently?’ (Beck 2011). Hence, user input changes the way the technology functions; human and non-human entities converge to shape practices for establishing ethical conduct in reciprocal interrelations.

While the Confession app is a novel technology that offers new means for subjectivation, it is clearly steeped in historical religious practices. Traditional ways of engaging with, and relating to, self and others are being complimented, extended and reshaped in the context of their involvement with new technologies. Another example of this in the context of religion is German pastor Michael Menzinger’s use of the Facebook chat function to engage with his community and hand out advice and condolences to his parishioners (Kahler 2011). People today still employ other non-technical tools, devices and techniques to manage their daily lives, understand their place in it and relate to themselves and others, yet new technologies come to extend, reconfigure and transform ways in which humans and technologies have been connected in the past to produce human action and shape non-human entities.

3.0 The complex networks that form modern conduct
Physical tools and technologies are not the only entities involved in shaping ethical conduct. Ways in which the body is enacted and dominant discourses and power structures also contribute to processes of governing selves and others. Yet, increasingly the body and political processes and discourses are
themselves becoming entwined with new technologies, which reconstitutes their roles in shaping subjectivities.

3.1 The body and online technologies

3.1.1 Theoretical background

Social theorists and thinkers have analysed the role of the body in the complex interplay of entities, relations and discourses that shape human subjectivity. Elias (2000) considered how manners and etiquette come to civilise the body in terms of socially acceptable behaviour. Foucault (1977; 1990) explored how bodies are managed and controlled as part of governmental techniques to ensure social order. Giddens (1991) claims that the loss of traditions and fixed social roles (like ‘mother’ or ‘husband’) causes people to focus on their bodies as something to work on reflexively through dieting and exercise regimes or cosmetic surgery. Goffman (1961; 1963; 1971) described the role of the body in managing impressions, preventing embarrassment and ensuring the smooth running of social interaction with others. Similarly, Butler (1993) depicts the body as site for the performance of gender. Both constitute the body itself as socially constructed.

While some of these conceptualisations of the body offer insights into processes of self-formation, it is Mauss who provides the most useful way of understanding that the body itself is a tool that humans employ to shape their ethical conduct. Mauss (1973) famously suggested that our bodies themselves offer the ‘first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means’ for shaping our conduct (Mauss 1973: 75). Scholars like Giddens, Goffman and Butler fail to detach the body effectively from “the self”. Mauss did not simply see the body as a way of expressing or showing selfhood but rather as itself an assemblage of external social, psychological and biological influences. Hunter and Saunders assert that ‘Mauss conceived of the body itself as the instrument and object of its own making’ (1995: 70). Mauss showed how even the actions that we perform out of a physical need, such as eating or sleeping, are culturally specific and shaped by social factors such as class, education and fashions as well as psychological mechanisms of imitation (1973:
This way of addressing the body, in terms of techniques that shape behaviour, elucidates that we need to consider the interwoven processes and multiple entities that humans are assembled with in order to fully understand how individuals constitute their actions. The body plays an important role in shaping the conduct of individuals as opposed to being merely the transmitter of their actions. People govern their bodies and their bodily attributes govern their behaviours.

With more and more of our interactions and daily proceedings taking place in digital spaces, the body's role in shaping relations of self to self and to others has been dismissed and devalued by some. In the early days of the internet, commentators claimed that in cyberspace the mind is detached from its fragile, superfluous bodily shell, and liberated from constraints and prejudices to do with race, class, gender, age and appearance (Baudrillard 1983; Gibson 1984; Haraway 1985). They portrayed technology as equalising and liberating tool that provides possibilities of being that eliminate physical constraints. Some more recent literature still hails the internet as an empowering setting where different identities can be explored and real-world physical barriers overcome. In her earlier work, Turkle describes the internet as a virtual laboratory (1995: 12) for ‘experimenting with multiplicity’ (1995: 260). McKenna and Seidmann (2008) assert that the face-less and anonymous nature of online interactions provides the freedom to express oneself without feeling restricted by expectations and social sanctions. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2008) claim that physical gating characteristics such as stuttering, an unconventional appearance or shyness are eliminated in disembodied virtual encounters. Wilson and Peterson (2002) refer to Steiner’s cartoon (1993) of one dog telling another that ‘on the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog’, to argue that identity can be reshaped and newly constructed in the online context regardless of real-life physicality. While these more recent studies are more optimistic about cyberspace and its possibilities than Baudrillard and Gibson were, they all imply that shedding physical appearances frees up the individual to express a truer, more accurate picture of self.
Other scholars acknowledge that the body matters in shaping understandings of self, whether online or offline. Muri suggests that arguments for disembodiment in cyberspace are contradictory because they portray the mind as detachable from the body, yet at the same time as being ‘altered by technological changes to the body’ (2003: 80). Casilli asserts that digital technology needs to be conceptualised as ‘a domain of affordances extending and enhancing physical presence rather than superseding it’ (2010: 2) (see also Lupton 1995; Slater 1998; Whitley 1997). While these scholars move in the right direction by recognising that technology, body and self are all affected by, and affect, one another, they fall short as they generally only consider the body metaphorically, not physically. They suggest that an awareness of one’s body in the offline world shapes online conduct. They do not acknowledge that real bodily techniques are involved in shaping online interactions and understandings of self. Mauss’ approach offers a useful way to consider how the physical body is actively and visibly enrolled in processes of folding in and unfolding experiences in order to be made up. It deconstructs the division between virtual and “real” spaces.

Hunter and Saunders suggest that neo-Kantian interpretations of Mauss have wrongfully attempted to take Mauss’ exploration of techniques of the body and mind ‘beneath…(to discover their formal conditions of possibility) and beyond them (to a vision of a liberated body and mind)’ whereas ‘Mauss’ whole endeavour…was to remain at the level of the techniques themselves’ (1995: 68). In the same vein, existing literature on the body and the internet commonly proceeds into metaphorical discussions. It asserts that the absence of the physical body in online interaction liberates the individual from physical constraints or, conversely, claims the particular body one has offline is affected by its involvement with new technologies. Mauss’ approach offers a useful way to consider how the physical body is actively enrolled in processes of being folded in and unfolded in order to be made up, whether online or offline. This enables us to deconstruct the division between virtual and “real” spaces, and to acknowledge that whether individuals interact and express themselves online or offline, their bodies play a role in the understandings they form of
themselves, the relations they have with others and the ways in which they govern their conduct.

Online technologies like SNSs implicate the body into the formation of self in new ways. The incorporation of photo and video-sharing practices into online interaction and self-presentation has made the physical body a visible part of technologised practices of self-formation. An emerging field of study explores the presence of ‘real’ bodies in cyberspace. Slater (1998) conducted an ethnographic study of the trading of sexpics on internet relay chat. Kreps (2010) considers how webcam chat on the SNS Chatroulette.com brings out exhibitionist and voyeuristic tendencies in modern individuals. Waskul (2010) investigates how the physical body becomes visible in televideo cybersex. Studies like these implicitly acknowledge that we need to consider how the body, and notions of the physical, are involved in the complex circulations between humans and technology, yet generally portray the body as a static entity dislocated from selfhood. They fail to acknowledge the many intertwined processes and practices involved in shaping individuals and their conduct. Coupling Mauss’ way of understanding the body, as a dynamic entity that changes and is changed by daily practices and norms, with a Foucaultian endeavour to analyse the formation of selves through processes of subjectivation, provides a more critical way of understanding how bodily techniques are being incorporated into processes of self-formation on the internet. This kind of approach can enhance the emerging work on new video technologies, the body and the internet.

3.1.2 The body in cyberspace

The incorporation of photo and video-sharing practices into interaction and self-presentation on the internet has enabled the physical body to become a visible part of online practices of self-formation. This opens up novel possibilities for people to shape their understandings of self and others. Every Facebook-users’ profile includes a profile picture. In this way, the physical body is visible and present in the use of SNSs. It supplements the written descriptions an individual posts about him/herself. When a user performs any action on the
site that is broadcast to the NewsFeed of other users the name and profile picture of the user show up next to the description of his/her activity. Whether s/he leaves a comment, posts a message, updates his/her page or requests to become friends with a new contact, the profile picture accompanies every interaction. A users’ body thus becomes a visible part of how s/he relates to self and others. Uploading photos and videos of themselves, their friends, family and pets, their holiday activities and travel destinations, their social activities and personal achievements as well as the strange and beautiful things they encounter in their day-to-day lives is a vital part of the way in which Facebook-users engage with themselves, others and the technological affordances of the site. Facebook also provides video-chat through which users can incorporate their bodies into the ways in which they interact on the site. The body is thus integrated as one of the many ingredients that users fold in and unfold in the processes of forming themselves on SNSs. Using these technologies also mediates how people manage and present their bodies.

3.1.2

i) Example 1 – Chatroulette and the transgressive body

Video-chat on Chatroulette exemplifies the complex associations of the physical, the technological and the social norms and standards involved in constituting the conduct of individuals in modern techno-social hybrid scapes. Chatroulette connects random strangers for video chat. Users can choose to talk to their assigned interlocutor or hit the ‘next’ button to be connected to another available user. Often physical appearance determines whether two users chat or find a new partner. An informally conducted, small-scale study of trends in the use of Chatroulette revealed that a person’s looks impact heavily on the length of a Chatroulette-interaction (NZSideways8 2010). A twenty-year-old (self-proclaimed) “average-looking” Chatroulette-user was ‘nexted’ by nineteen out of twenty people within 2.9 seconds of being connected. By contrast, his good-looking female friend was engaged in conversations with nine out of ten of her assigned interlocutors for a minimum of two minutes or until she decided to ‘next’ them (NZSideways8 2010). ‘Nexting’ people due to their physical appearance is a clear example of how bodily techniques that mediate actions
and interactions offline are equally present online, rendering a dichotomisation between the two spheres futile.

The body not only mediates interactions (and whether or not they take place) on Chatroulette but also the relations of users to themselves. SNSs like Facebook and Chatroulette simultaneously encourage users to become physically visible on the internet and provide the affordances that enable the corporeal representation of self online. The incorporation of video technologies on these sites enables users to make their bodies part of how they act and interact online. In this way, bodily techniques become part of processes of self-formation on the internet.

Chatroulette users commonly experiment with physically transgressive behaviour on the site. The anonymity (users do not have to register on the site, create a profile or provide personal details) and transitoriness (clicking ‘next’ irreversibly removes users from conversations) of Chatroulette interaction encourage users to experiment with transgressive behaviour. Users expose their bodies naked, masturbating, defecating, using drugs, dressed up in politically incorrect costumes, and even staging suicide (Anderson 2010). Chatroulette users transgress social norms through explicit bodily behaviour. The physical body thus is a visible part of online processes through which modern subjects shape and re-shape their understandings of self and govern their conduct.

3.1.2

ii) Example 2 – The anorexic body on SNSs

Transgressive bodily behaviour also features in the way in which SNSs are being employed in pro-anorexia movements like “Thinspiration” and “Proana”. These movements encourage anorexic behaviour and provide tips, photos and stories to inspire people to become thin.27 Recently, followers of the movements have

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27 Some Proana and Thinspiration organisations provide non-judgemental forums for suffering and recovering anorexics to interact with one another and
used Pinterest\textsuperscript{28} to collect and display pictures of extremely thin women, often endorsed with inspirational quotes like “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels”. Users also share tips on how to avoid eating and curb hunger and cravings. Pinterest-user Kayla Butler (2012) recommends: ‘wear a rubberband around your wrist. Snap it when you want to eat’ or: ‘clean something gross (toilet, litter box, boyfriend’s closet) when you want to eat. You will not want to eat after cleaning a litter box’.

SNS-use in pro-anorexia movements exemplifies the transgressive involvement of bodily techniques in technologised practices of self-formation. Far from being disembodied, as argued by Locke (1998), and to a more nuanced degree by Pascoe (Pascoe and Locke 2000) and Boreo and Pascoe (2011), these online communities implicate the physical bodies in virtual techniques of self. Pictures of thin bodies are used as part of the process of self-formation. In this way, the physical body is visible, relevant and an inescapable part of ways in which people form an understanding of themselves, regardless of whether this occurs online or offline.

Anorexic SNS-users relate to themselves and others in order to govern their conduct and understandings of self by posting pictures that inspire them to diet, exercise and become thin(ner), and sharing them with like-minded individuals. They base their aspirations around extreme interpretations of contemporary Western beauty ideals, and employ psy techniques and economic rationalisation to work on their minds and bodies in a constant desire to perfect themselves. Notably, they perform this work on themselves in public forums. They fold in the externally imposed perceived ideals and expectations of others, process them, work on them through psy techniques and unfold them again in ongoing processes of self-formation, which they put on display for others to see. Using get help. They do not endorse unhealthy eating habits (see pro-ana-nation.org, houseofthin.com and prettythin.com).

\textsuperscript{28} Pinterest is a SNS that allows users to collect and share images, videos and other content from around the web on themed virtual pinboards, and to follow and interact with other users.
SNSs become one tool for them, one particular practice, through which they shape their understandings of self and their day-to-day conduct.

3.1.3 Bodily techniques and forming self

Modern individuals navigate the complex hybrid networks they are enrolled in, and constitute themselves through technologically mediated bodily techniques. The proliferation of photo- and video-sharing on SNSs like Chatroulette, Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest and Instagram demonstrates that the body is far from irrelevant online. On SNSs, technological affordances, bodily techniques, power relations, norms and discourses, expectations and transgression meet to constitute ways for individuals to become selves. It is tempting to conceptualise technology as a great new development that liberates people from the constraints of physical gating characteristics (Zhao et al. 2008). However, technology should neither be seen as the one factor that enables people to become better, happier versions of themselves, nor as the human creation that allows them to realise and activate the true selves that lie dormant underneath physical constraints. Technologies, like bodily techniques, mediate social actions and processes of self-formation. The hybridity of modern techno-social life necessitates that we consider the role of technology in assembling individual and social action without being technologically deterministic. Technology is only one part of the complex networks through which modern subjects govern themselves and are governed.

3.2 Self and political techniques

Just as bodily techniques are intricately intertwined in the processes through which humans are made up, so do external political goals and regulations shape and govern human conduct. The previous chapter illuminated how modern neo-liberal governments use rational-economic discourses and psy techniques in order to incite their citizens to comply with norms and laws out of their own desire. Like bodily techniques, modern political ways of governing are increasingly becoming involved with new technological developments that shape how citizens are managed and manage themselves. Governments employ technology as a means of controlling the population and ensuring social order.
Obvious examples include increasing CCTV surveillance, the use of DNA profiling and data mining. At the same time, the use of technology has provided modern citizens with tools that allow them to become more involved in democratic processes and in this way to demand and achieve political change. Chapter 7 will explore how SNSs were used in the Arab Spring movement to produce social and political change and promote individual freedom. Technology is a vital aspect involved in processes of governing self and others and in shaping the types of selves that people can become, and the ethical guidelines according to which they regulate their daily conduct.

3.2.1 Technology for political control or a more democratic government?

Rose (2003) has usefully picked up Latour's and other ANT-proponents' understanding of the associations between different types of actors to suggest that networks are complexes made up of the coming together of state, market and civil society actors who work out shared cognitive, normative and regulative frameworks through flexible and dynamic interchanges. The interchanges between public and private, politics and electives, experts and lay members of the public emerge out of, and at the same time shape, an intricate system of ‘governing at a distance’ (Rose 1999a; 2003; see also Miller and Rose 2008). This neo-liberal type of regulation seeks to transform external economic or political objectives into individual ambitions and aspirations (our modern ethical substance), and to enable a more democratic, heterogeneous political landscape. Rose (2003) points out that modern internet communication technologies (ICTs) are being employed as part of this system. He shows how ICTs on one hand tighten state control and on the other promote a ‘de-statising’ of the state. He suggests that technologised ways of governing make possible global-level securitisation and micro-government. However, he also illustrates how using ICTs facilitates global, democratic interchange and facilitates political engagement on local and transnational levels (see also Sassen 2002).

The technological mediation of modern conduct amplifies the possibilities for governments to track the behaviour and attitudes of its citizens. In modern
techno-social hybrid societies, new technologies are increasingly enrolled in the day-to-day lives of individuals. People purchase goods, communicate with one another, search for information and organise social and professional encounters through the use of the internet and their smartphones. They leave traceable and permanent records through their (more or less) public online actions, which governing bodies, as well as companies and businesses, can access and use to anticipate and control people's behaviour. However, online interaction also makes it possible for civilians to become more involved in processes of governing. They can gain access to information about their governments. WikiLeaks is one recent example of how governments too become vulnerable to having their actions recorded, publicised and scrutinised through the use of modern technologies. Furthermore, individuals can employ new technologies to voice their opinions about how they are being, governed which can both threaten the state and improve leadership.

Coleman and Moss (2008) provide a good example of the oscillation between means of control and threat that new technologies encapsulate for the state in the context of 'government at a distance'. They investigate how European politicians employ blogs to create a sense of engagement and intimacy with their voters and to invoke spontaneity and immediacy. Coleman and Moss (2008) suggest that the association between politician (human) and blog (technology) makes it possible to govern and control people on one hand (influencing voter's opinions by creating a personal rapport between them and the politician), and to democratise the process of political governance on the other (facilitating dialogue between politicians and those they represent). Coleman and Moss' study shows how the hybrid assemblage of human politicians and online technologies mediates modern political activity, and shapes, and is shaped by, the ethical conduct of political actors and voters.

3.2.2 Technology as tool for political change

Barry emphasises that beyond the connections between politics and technology, government itself needs to be considered as a 'highly technical matter' (2001: 198). He argues that technologisation is not simply a historical stage or a
particular way of governing. Rather, technological devices and processes greatly affect political agenda-setting and bear potentials for solving political problems (Barry 2001: 201). He suggests that ‘perhaps more than ever before, technology is expected to carry the promise, or the threat, of radical social and political change in the future’ (Barry 2001: 210). While Barry may assign too much agency to technology, he does acknowledge that technical artefacts and truths always exist and circulate, are connected and constructed, in networks with other devices, humans, skills, knowledges, practices, institutions etc. Barry argues that ‘society fails to realise the potential of technology, and therefore to realise its own potential’ (2001: 210). The use of SNSs to speak truth and demand change in the uprisings in North Africa in late 2010-2011 suggests otherwise. Chapter 7 will show that people are aware of ‘the potential of technolog[ies]’ (Barry 2001: 210) and do employ them in meaningful ways to challenge government and to demand freedom.

3.2.3 Managing self-to-self and self-to-other relations through political technologies

Contemporary Western democratic governments manage individuals at a distance by encouraging them to act in line with rational-economic demands (to be healthy, efficient, self-motivated producers and consumers) and psychologised notions of self-improvement and achievement. New technologies become involved in these processes of managing the conduct of individuals. They provide opportunities for governments to tighten and optimise control as well as for individuals to adhere to and strengthen, or resist and challenge, the structures through which they are being governed. Being governed, and governing themselves, through the use of new technologies opens up new ways for individuals to manage their daily lives and their understanding of their place within the complex networks they are engaged in.

3.3 New assemblages, new affordances and new problematisations

Bodily techniques and political guidelines have always contributed to shaping the types of selves individuals can imagine themselves to be. People grapple with managing and presenting their bodies in accordance with social norms and
expectations, which can differ depending on social and cultural contexts. Political discourses and ways of governing prescribe certain schemas for how people can act, which they can either adhere to or challenge. Technology provides new tools for managing these processes of governing self and others. Bodily techniques and governmental tools for managing populations are becoming more and more tied up with online technologies. This redefines and reappropriates, as well as complicates and problematises, their roles in shaping the conduct of modern individuals.

4.0 Technology and the role of the other in relation to self
In becoming assembled with new technologies, older practices of self-formation have been translated, transformed and reconfigured to suggest new ways for modern individuals to relate to themselves and others. Foucault (1997d) showed how the ancient Greeks invited the gaze of an “other” by writing down their daily conduct. This made them more conscious of their actions and enabled them to receive guidance on how to act. Chapter 6 will show how this activity of writing about self to an other has been carried through history as a technique of self. As individuals inscribe themselves today on SNSs, the technological mediation of this self-writing has reconceptualised the shape and role of the other in the process of self-formation. The other has become a mass public audience. Additionally, the technologies involved in modern self-writing have themselves appropriated parts of the role of the listener and guide.

4.1 The other becomes the mass
Modern processes of self-formation are becoming increasingly transparent. SNS-users display how they shape their selves for others to follow. The work of self on self is carried out as a public activity. This permits researchers a new insight into modern self-forming practices. We can observe live how individuals form relations to themselves and others through the use of new online technologies. SNS-users shape their understandings of self in relation to a mass audience of others. The following are examples of status updates on Facebook29:

29 From the author’s personal use of the SNS.
Please accept my apology for the bitter and sad-sap moods I've been in over the past few months. In the process of renewing, refreshing and being positive, because there's nothing that wastes the body like worry.
~the vision that you glorify in your mind, the ideal that you enthrone in your heart, this is what you will build your life by, this is what you will become.

“Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage, for the greatest enemy of success is the fear of failure. True courage is simply the willingness to be afraid and act anyway” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Apologies to the friends I've been meaning to call but haven't. I'm kind of in a weird rut at the moment and not feeling particularly talkative. Hopefully I'll be over it soon. :/

In their assemblage with Facebook these individuals work on themselves in a publicly transparent way. Through their status messages, users simultaneously shape and reveal the way in which they understand and relate to themselves and others. SNSs afford users the possibility of sharing the work they perform on themselves with a vaguely defined mass audience, turning their self-forming activity into a transparent performance. In this way, the role of the other as listener and advisor has been opened up to a much greater mass.

4.2 Technological "others"

By being assembled with technology, roles get reappropriated and non-human actants can come to replace humans in performing certain actions (Latour 2005: 110). As modern societies turn more and more into techno-social hybridities, so do processes of self-formation. SNSs represent one technological tool that becomes an other; an entity users can approach as they try to navigate their relations to themselves. While the others that people reveal themselves to on SNSs are still humans, the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies is slowly but surely creating technological others for people to relate to. Facebook’s director of mobile partnerships, Emily White, comments on how her mobile phone
Apple’s *Siri* iPhone software also exemplifies the entanglement of modern relations and day-to-day conduct with new technologies. *Siri* functions as an artificially intelligent personal assistant. It has the ability to understand, respond in context-aware ways and delegate services according to the demands of the user (Sung 2011). Users are able to interact with the software via voice command and receive intelligent responses. So, for example, a user can ask *Siri* to “find a cheap restaurant around here”. *Siri* then responds (audibly and as a written message on screen) by making suggestions, asking further questions (such as “what kind of cuisine are you after”) and proactively searching for possibilities (Apple 2011b). Sam Liang, founder and chief executive of Alohar Mobile, a company that seeks to develop social mobile platforms, comments that in the future our mobile phone ‘should be able to understand [us] automatically’ (cited in Evangelista 2012).

*Sarah* the ‘FaceBot’ (Mavridis et al. 2009) is another example of a modern technologised other that humans relate to, and thus form understandings of, self and shape their conduct. *Sarah* is an artificially intelligent robot that can interact and engage with humans in the physical world and on Facebook through her own automatically updated Facebook profile page (Mavridis 2011: 291). *Sarah* recognises faces, can speak, navigate different contexts, interact and keep track of previous interactions and social relations. The robot is able to use Facebook in the same way as a human would (Mavridis 2011: 291-2). Interacting with *Sarah* on Facebook is a way of interacting with a technologised other. Clearly, the assemblage of humans with technologies increasingly mediates modern processes of interaction and self-formation. Technologies are appropriating the roles of human actors and thus opening up new possibilities for individuals to manage themselves and their relations to others in an increasingly complex techno-social hybrid world.
5.0 Avoiding technological determinism

5.1 Mutual circulations and historical roots

New online technologies increasingly delegate human action. However, it is important not to assign them too much agency. Human and non-human actants always are associated in mutual circulations in which they shape and re-shape one another continually. New technologies also are steeped in older ways of doing things. For example, revealing private thoughts and actions to an other as a way of understanding self does not just occur on SNSs. In the past, self-writing practices like the *hupomnemata* and the Christian confessional served the same purpose (see Chapter 6). Practices like these are transformed and translated by their circulation through new networks with new tools. This expands and alters their uses and functions, however they always have historical roots. Therefore, SNSs are not the technological advancements that were necessary in order for processes of self-formation to become massified and transparent. They are just one of the many tools through which individuals come to shape their relations to self and others, and thus establish guidelines according to which they govern their conduct.

Humans do not simply create technologies that permit them to live out pre-existing interests. Rather, human interests and technological possibilities are constituted in mutual and interactive processes (Callon and Law 1982). Hence, people did not decide that they wanted to make their daily lives more publicly accessible and as a result of this created SNSs. The development of SNSs brought with it the affordance for people to put their lives on public display and humans appropriated them in this way. Neither human nor technology prescribed this action; technological affordances and their users shape one another in intricately entwined and ever-changing processes that have distinct historical roots.

5.2 Assembling virtualised machines

Humans circulate in complex networks with other human and non-human actants and a range of discourses, norms and expectations. The increasing technological mediation of modern life is creating techno-social hybrid
assemblages that shape modern practices and understandings. Sassen states that cyberspace is embedded in the social, cultural, subjective, economic and imaginary edifice of offline life and structures (2002: 368-9). She conceptualises the associations between cyberspace and individuals as ‘in-between zones’ or ‘mediating cultures’ (2002: 370; see also Deuze 2011; Urry 2000; Van Doorn 2011). Rose notes that assemblages of humans and other entities form various possible ‘machines’. For example, connected to books, humans become literary machines, connected to tools they form work machines, connected to goods they constitute consuming machines (Rose 1998: 184). In the association of humans with SNSs, and the internet more generally, what may be formed then are virtualised machines. The assemblage of human, technology, psy mentality, economic-rational thinking and the demand/desire for public transparency, conjure up new ways for individuals to understand and shape their conduct. Posting a status-update on Facebook is one example of how human and technology intertwine to shape new ways for people to understand and present themselves.

Humans do not exist within just one steady assemblage or machine. They continually shift in and out of a range of different and complex networks. Consequently, the types of selves people become change according to the different people, objects, contexts and discourses they are assembled with at different times. In constant processes of folding in external influences and unfolding them again in the ways in which they relate to themselves and others, self is invented and reinvented. Today, this work of forming self is increasingly being performed in public through the use of technologies like SNSs.

6.0 Humans and technology: A tangled web of affordances, unintended consequences and new technical solutions

6.1 Expanding networks and new possibilities
Online social networking is a new way for people to shape their daily conduct and understand themselves. Location-based social networking reflects and fosters the demand and desire by modern individuals to subject themselves to a public gaze and make their self-forming activities visible to others. Location-
Based social networking uses GPS signals to locate a users’ whereabouts through any WiFi-enabled mobile device such as a mobile phone or tablet and enables him/her to broadcast his/her location to other users of the site. SNSs like Foursquare or Gowalla are specifically built around this type of service. Other SNSs are increasingly including location check-ins in their design. The Places application on Facebook allows users to “check in” at public locations like restaurants, museums, cultural sites or, more generally, towns or cities. This posts their location to the News Feeds of all of their Facebook contacts. The new Facebook profile Timeline even documents all past location check-ins on a map that is accessible to users’ contacts. Once checked in at a location, users can employ the “Here Now” function to find out whether any of their Facebook contacts are currently, or have been, in the same location or nearby. They can also browse the status updates that friends have posted from and/or about these locations, access information about the place, read comments left by others and access deals offered by businesses at or near the location.

Clearly, this technological affordance greatly expands the reach of the networks people are assembled in. They are no longer limited to immediate physical proximities and real-time. Rather, SNS-users can transgress space and time by accessing an archived account of information about places and people who have visited them in the past. This expansion of the networks that people circulate in can influence their perception of places and people, and their relations of self to self and to others. SNSs act as tools for forming understandings of self and others by providing individuals with an expanding record of information about the world they live in and the people that surround them. They come to guide the conduct of individuals by inciting them to share information about themselves in a public domain, and they facilitate global connections that traverse spatio-temporal boundaries. By becoming intertwined with new technologies like location-based social networking, modern individuals are assembled in virtualised machines that shape new ways for them to become selves.
6.2 Dealing with unintended consequences

The techno-social hybridities we circulate in can lead to failures and unintended consequences. For example, Facebook-user Kerri McMullen posted a status update on the SNS that revealed that she was going out to a concert one night. When she returned, her apartment had been broken into and burgled (Cluley 2010). Jim Louderback (2011) became paranoid about a dubious-seeming fellow Foursquare-user checking in at his son’s school. In both cases, the increased transparency and openness modern individuals express through their circulation in networks of technological possibilities, personal aspirations of showing (or showing off) where they are and what they are doing, and the expectations they perceive others to have of them to provide this kind of information, resulted in undesirable consequences. However, technology is often again employed to resolve problematic situations. A security camera in McMullen’s apartment caught the burglars in the act. She posted images captured by the security camera to her Facebook page and was thus able to identify one of the burglars as someone she had recently added to her contacts (Cluley 2011). Louderback used Twitter to contact the dubious Foursquare-user only to find that, far from being a dangerous paedophile, the person was actually the parent of one of his son’s classmates. Louderback (2010) states:

‘this guy and I weren’t friends, had never met, yet I could easily penetrate the veil of Foursquare and find out what he’d been doing, read his Twitter feed, peruse his Facebook profile’.

While the entanglement in tech-human networks caused a problem in the first place, it also opened up possibilities for dealing with these situations.

7.0 Conclusion – Technology and modern self-forming activity: New ways of doing old things

The increasing technologisation of modern life is a vital factor to consider when trying to understand modern processes of self-formation. The economic rationality and psy discourses that incite modern individuals to work on themselves constantly, to seek self-improvement and to maximise their potential, and the increasing transparency with which modern individuals open
up their self-formation to a public gaze, are entwined with, and enhanced by, this hybridity of the social and the technical. Supplementing Foucault’s notion of techniques of self with an ANT-based understanding of the role of non-human technologies in shaping subjectivities is a useful approach for addressing the ways in which people relate to themselves and others in our increasingly technologised modern society. People become involved in virtualised machines through their use of SNSs, and the affordances SNSs offer shape the ways in which people can become selves. While technologies offer certain possibilities for action (Gibson 1977), humans still make judgements and choices of how to take up these opportunities. In this way, humans and technology circulate in complex networks in which they influence and shape the formation of one another.

Bodily techniques and ways of governing have also become entangled with technological advancements. The body and relations of power have a long history of shaping the ethical conduct of individuals. Literature on the role of the body in cyberspace commonly conceptualises it as either entirely absent, as liberating the mind and freeing up new ways of being (Baudrillard 1983; Gibson 1984; Haraway 1985; Turkle 1995), or metaphorically, in terms of how physical attributes are reflected in online conduct (Casilli 2010; Lupton 1995; Slater 1998; Whitley 1997). Bodily techniques are vital to ways in which people relate to themselves and others and conceptualise their existence, whether online or offline. The recent incorporation of photo and video-sharing technologies into the online realm has made the body re-appear in its visible, corporeal form. Emerging studies on this new development in the techno-social hybridity of online social networking commonly focus on analysing the technology itself rather than exploring how the body features on them. They dislocate the body from selfhood by making it a static entity that gets placed on the screens of the internet without considering its role as a self-forming tool. Mauss’ understanding of bodily techniques and Foucault’s investigation into processes of self-formation provide useful ways for thinking about the body on the internet and its involvement in shaping the ethical conduct of modern individuals.
Technological advancements are intricately entwined with the ways in which individuals are governed and govern themselves in the modern political sphere. Technology provides governments with highly specialised techniques for governing citizens at a distance (Rose 1999a; 2003), and in this way ensuring control and social order. At the same time, citizens themselves can employ new technologies to challenge the regimes that govern them, and make demands in terms of how, and how much, they want to be administered. This highlights the ‘reversibility of relations of authority’ (Rose 1999a) that is inherent to neolibaeral ways of governing. Clearly, complex hybrid networks of citizens, state, power relations and technological advancements shape the ways in which individuals are able to imagine the types of selves they can be in modern society.

While the use of new technologies has advanced and altered certain social activities, technologised processes of self-formation always have historical roots. We can detect distinct continuities and discontinuities between age-old self-forming activities and the ways in which individuals use SNSs and other technologies to shape their relations of self to self and to others today. Yet, technology has contributed to the translation and transformation of ways in which people have constituted their ethical conduct in the past into modern practices. Through their assemblage with technologies these practices have become globalised, massified and publicly performed. More people have access to more ways of shaping themselves today, and their actions are able to reach a greater number of others. The involvement of new technologies like SNSs has redirected the role of the other in processes of self-formation to the mass. Increasingly, technologies appropriate the roles of humans and thus come to delegate human action.

Humans and technologies circulate in complex networks that provide users with new ways to exhibit their bodies in transgressive behaviour, to speak out against political and social constraints, to traverse spatial and temporal limits and to do all of this in very public and transparent ways. Barriers between
private and public are collapsing. While this may invite unintended consequences, such as increased surveillance and traceability, it in turn results in the development of new solutions through still further entanglements with more techniques, practices, technologies and entities. Circulating within complex networks guides and regulates human conduct and at the same time provides ways for individuals to manage and govern themselves. In this way, it opens up new possibilities for shaping and re-shaping subjectivities.

The following chapters explore some specific examples of ancient self-forming techniques and their modern analogues. This will illustrate more clearly some of the theoretical work put forward in the first part of this thesis. Foucault’s extensive historical analyses of self-writing (Chapter 6) and parrhesia (truth-telling) (Chapter 7) can be contemporised to show how the psychologisation of, and rational-economic attitude to, modern life, the incitement to bare self in public and the influence of our involvement with new online technologies, affect the relation of an individual to him/herself and others.
CHAPTER 6 – WRITING AS A TECHNIQUE OF SELF

1.0 Introduction
For centuries, people have employed writing to manage their daily conduct and form understandings of themselves. From ancient Greek practices of keeping a special notebook (huponnemata) and documenting and exchanging daily conduct via letter-writing, over religious confessional writing techniques, to Romantic, transgressive and therapeutic implications, we can see how people in the past have written about themselves and to others to shape their ethics, values, beliefs, understandings, and hence to fold in, and unfold, their subjectivities. In the psychologised, technologised and transparent contexts of modern Western societies, self-writing still functions as a technique of self that shapes how people govern themselves and others. Writing represents a way for individuals to talk about, and reveal, themselves to a public audience as a way of working on themselves and shaping their own lives and realities. New technologies like SNSs have made self-writing widely available as a modern practice of self-formation. People inscribe themselves consistently and publicly on SNSs. They expose the processes through which they shape their selves to a mass audience. It will become evident how self-writing has been translated and transformed from its early beginnings into modern techno-social hybrid societies.

2.0 Historical fragments on self-writing
Manguel remarks that the invention of writing made it possible to overcome ‘the obstacles of geography, the finality of death [and] the erosion of oblivion’ (1996: 179). A writer could spread his/her thoughts, immortalise them and ensure that they were remembered much more effectively than a verbal orator. As more people learned to read, writing became a way of communicating with others across time and space. In addition to its role of connecting people, writing has served as a way for individuals to engage with themselves, record their feelings, and express their thoughts – a self-writing. In ancient Greek and Roman culture, writing represented an important practical aspect of the notion of the care of self. It was translated into early Christian and Puritan religion and
eighteenth century Romanticism in the form of confessional writing. In the post-Enlightenment period, writing became a means of engaging with and expressing transgressive behaviour and in the twentieth century it was employed as a therapeutic tool in psychotherapy. Today, writing still manifests itself as a means for individuals to relate to themselves and others in the context of psychologised, technologised and highly transparent lifestyles.

Foucault explained that his ‘books aren’t treatises in philosophy or studies of history: at most, they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems’ (1991: 74). Similarly, this chapter does not seek to provide a complete history of writing. Rather, history is used to explore some of the ways in which writing has been employed as a particular practice of self-formation, and to suggest what this may be able to tell us about processes of subjectivation today. By looking at fragments of history that tell interesting stories about how people have engaged with themselves and others in order to shape their ethical conduct in the past, some of the continuities and discontinuities that have transformed and adapted these processes will become evident. Exploring some of the ways in which writing has been used in the past as a tool for self-formation provides a way of understanding how people use SNSs today to shape their ethical conduct. It enables us to explore how SNS-users engage with these sites as means of dealing with daily occurrences, confessing, celebrating transgressive behaviour and improving themselves.

2.1 Ancient Greek self-writing: Recording and managing self

Foucault showed how the ancient Greeks and Romans utilised different writing techniques in order to work on themselves (1997d: 208). In accordance with their telos of self-mastery, the ancient Greeks and Romans managed their conduct based on the principle of *askesis*, ‘a training of the self by oneself’ (Foucault 1997d: 208). This training was inextricably linked to very specific activities and exercises through which they conducted themselves in order to accomplish their high-quality existence based on beauty and the management of pleasures (Foucault 1997d: 208). Writing about and to themselves and to others represented one particular way in which the ancient Greeks managed and cared
for themselves. The two main forms of ancient Greek ethopoietic writing – writing that translates truth into a code for ethical conduct – were the *hupomnemata* and correspondence through letter-writing (Foucault 1997: 209).

The *hupomnemata* was a specific type of notebook which consisted of an ‘accumulated treasure’ (Foucault 1997d: 209) of notes on experiences, readings and conversations. Beyond merely recording these occurrences, the ancient Greeks reflected on their impressions of these experiences. This shaped their understandings of themselves and the world around them (Foucault 1997d: 210). Foucault suggested that reflecting on a reading in this way enabled the keeper of the *hupomnemata* to digest what he read, appropriate it and make its truth his own (1997d: 213). In this way, writing represented a way of formulating a personal truth; a framework for understanding the world and a guideline for how to conduct oneself in this world. Foucault suggested that the *hupomnemata* were ‘books of life, guides for conduct…among a whole cultivated public’ (Foucault 1997a: 273). Writing the *hupomnemata* was a way of ‘shaping … the self’ for the ancient Greeks (Foucault 1997d: 211). Through writing, they engaged with their experiences and with themselves in order to sort through the impressions they gained, interpret them and weave them into the web that made up their understanding of the world and guided their ethical conduct.

The ancient Greeks also wrote letters in order to relate to themselves and others. They examined their conduct, thoughts and behaviour and wrote them down in the form of a letter as part of their daily practice of caring for self. They shared their mundane daily experiences with a particular chosen other on a consistent basis. This unconcealed revelation of self to another affected both the writer of the letter, who was able to reflect on his thoughts and conduct, and its recipient, who attained an insight into the life of the other, which may in the future serve to inform his own conduct (Foucault 1997d: 214). Foucault noted that for the ancient Greeks correspondence was

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30 Masculine pronouns will be used in the discussion of ancient practices of self-formation, which were performed almost exclusively by an elite of male citizens.
something more than a training of oneself by means of writing, through the advice and opinions one gives to the other: it also constitute[d] a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others. ... To write [was] thus to ‘show oneself’, to project oneself into view, to make one’s own face appear in the other’s presence (Foucault 1997d: 216).

Writing a letter was thus a way of working on oneself in a similar way to reflecting on experiences and occurrences in the *huponnemata*. However, by exposing the written account of daily activities to the judgement of another, self-writing became introspective (Foucault 1997d: 217).

In Stoic thought, training oneself throughout life and seeking the help and advice of others shaped understandings of self and ethical conduct. Self-examination served as self-management and mastery of life's pleasures. By recording their mundane daily experiences the Stoics were able to reflect on their behaviour and to ensure that it coincided with the conditions for living a good life (Foucault 1997d: 219). In this way, keeping an account of their actions, and making themselves accountable to another sought to deter them from wayward behaviour in the first place.

2.2 Religious self-writing: The Christian confessional

The Stoic application of writing as a way of ensuring good conduct was the precursor to the Christian 'examination of conscience' (Foucault 1997a: 276). In early Christianity, writing was used as a way of confessing sins and asking for forgiveness. Christians did not record their experiences as a way of ordering and interpreting them, and thus shaping their beautiful existence, as the Greeks and Stoics did. Rather, Christian self-writing laid self bare to be judged and absolved by God. In this new way of thinking, the ultimate goal of ethical conduct became salvation and immortality, as opposed to self-mastery (Foucault 1997a: 268). McDonald suggests that the purpose of writing for the Christian was ‘not a prudential self-management so that one attains a maximum of pleasure or satisfaction of interests, but a self-purification in order to purge oneself of the unholy and become closer to God’ (1996: 58). Humphries remarks how the Christian confessional turned self-writing into a matter of self-
revelation, self-renunciation and self-effacement (1997: 131) rather than self-cultivation (1997: 136). Furthermore, he suggests that ‘not only does the writing of one’s confessions incite an ever increasing and penetrating gaze into the self by the self, it also effects a proliferation of confession among others’ (1997: 134). In this way, ‘writing becomes publicatio sui, a confessional strategy by which the self draws itself out of amnestic solitude and lays itself bare to the public gaze’ (Humphries 1997: 136).

St. Augustine’s religious autobiography *Confessions* from the third century exemplifies the yearning for forgiveness and devotion to God that characterised early Christian self-writing. St. Augustine wrote: ‘Oh Lord, my Helper and Redeemer, I shall now tell and confess the glory of your name and how you released me from the fetters of lust which held me so tightly shackled and from my slavery to the things of this world’ (cited in McDonald 1996: 58). Early Christians wrote down and reflected on their experiences not just to have a record of them but with the purpose of glorifying God. Gutman suggests that ‘the revelation of self, as it is hesitatingly presented in Augustine, is solely a vehicle to a higher end, which is the glorification of God’s beneficence and mercy’ (1988: 103). For early Christians, self-writing was a way of confessing sins, asking for forgiveness and praising God for His kindness, while still serving to guide the individuals’ conduct and hence managing the way s/he related to him/herself and to others.

2.3 *Puritan diary-writing: Greek record-keeping and Christian confession combine*

After the Reformation, writing a confessional diary became common practice for many literate individuals. Puritans no longer accepted the institutionalised heads of the Church as the mediators between them and God. Rather, they turned straight to God for instruction and forgiveness (Schaff 1908-14). McFarlane (1970) indicates that the need for a substitute for the confession may have caused the proliferation of diary-writing, particularly after 1650. Like Christian confessional practices, Puritan diary-writing served the purpose of confronting one’s obligations to God, to others and to oneself, investigating
one’s conscience, reflecting on individual conduct and showing gratefulness to God (Murray 1996: xxvi). Murray states that the Puritan diary was used as a confessional vehicle or more specifically as a replacement for the Catholic sacrament of auricular confession which had given pre-Reformation generations a spoken assurance of forgiveness (1996, xxvii).

The self-interrogation involved in Puritan diary-writing combined the Christian practices of examining one’s conscience and confessing one’s sins to a priest into a single procedure (Murray 1996, xxviii). Through writing, the Puritan entered an active dialogue with him/herself and with God, which enabled him/her to realise, and ask forgiveness for, his/her sins, without the mediating function of the priest.

In a sense, the Puritan diary combined some of the uses and functions of the ancient Greek *hupomnemata* and the auricular Christian practice of confession. It acted as a means for the individual to keep note of his/her thoughts and actions, as well as to admit his/her sins in order to obtain God's mercy. This shows how self-forming practices are translated and reshaped in new contexts, yet always have historical origins. Murray suggests that the Puritan believed that because his life experiences, his successes, his failures, his faults, were written, or in a sense stored permanently on the page, that his narrative arrangement of all of these circumstances constituted both a true mirror of himself and of his favor in the eyes of God (1996: xliii).

Thus actions were recorded as a means of understanding self and ensuring the most pious conduct possible. Furthermore, Puritan diary-writing, like keeping a *hupomnemata* and completing Christian confession, was intended as a frequent and regular practice. Kagle (1979) suggests that keeping a rigorous account of their conduct and thoughts represented a way for Puritans to detect an indication of what their calling was, and simultaneously to prove their commitment to the labours that God asked of them. McGiffert states that the keeping of a journal, which seems to have been an important point of Puritan piety, was itself a means of assurance, or was so intended. Ability to sustain this methodical, painful discipline could be regarded as a mark of a gracious soul, and the regularity of the
exercise may itself have contributed to the diarist's composure (1972: 18).

Puritans committed themselves to regular diary-writing in order to deduce whether they had been chosen. Furthermore, like the ancient Greeks and early Christians before them, Puritans recorded their actions/sins in order to remember them and improve their future conduct. In this way writing a diary enabled them to understand and manage their conduct. Puritan diary-writing was a means for remembering conduct, reflecting on it and deciphering self, and thus incorporated and combined elements of ancient Greek writing and the auricular confessional practice of the Christians.

The Reformation also brought with it increasing rationalisation and commercialisation, which impacted on the spread of writing. Objective and methodological account-keeping became ingrained in the manner of conduct of the Puritan (Murray 1996: xlv). McFarlane (1970: 5) notes the increased use of diary-keeping in Puritan communities after the Reformation as a manifestation of the proliferation of household accounting. Latham and Matthews suggest that the diary was one of a series of records, which by the 1660's included petty-cash books, account books, letter-books, memorandum books ... All were a means to a disciplined life, methods of canalising the stream of experience (1970: xxviii).

The organisation and rigour that was applied to daily activities then transferred to religious practices. Thus, Puritan journal-writing was characterised not only by the influence of the confessional religious mindset and the changing relationship between the inscriber, the Church and God, but also by the increasing rationalisation and methodical organisation of society.

2.4 Romanticism: Emotional self-exploration and secularised confession
A further by-product of the Reformation was the recognition and honouring of individualism. Mid-eighteenth century this evolved into the valorisation of emotions that characterised the Romantic period (Gutman 1988: 101). Within this context, self-writing was used as a secular way of expressing emotions in the service of self-reflection and self-improvement. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* is one of the first recognised manuscripts of the Romantic period.
Gutman suggests that Rousseau's work evidences 'the emergence of an individuality, a clearly defined self, above the threshold of visibility, and the valorization of the emotive life' (1988: 101). Writing for the purpose of anything other than religious devotion and sacred confession was a novel concept. Cohen states that by Rousseau's age... men had begun to see themselves not as atoms in a society that stretched down from God to the world of nature but as unique individuals, important in their own right. It was possible for the first time, therefore, for a man to write his life in terms only of his worldly experience, and to advance views on his place in the Universe that bore only a distant relationship to the truths of revealed religion (1953: 7).

Rousseau's writing described his actions and expressed honestly his feelings in a chronological format. He presented himself as a man with faults and imperfections, yet ultimately of upright and respectful nature. Cohen states that Rousseau took particular pride in recording – and even in somewhat exaggerating – his more disgraceful actions; in this way displaying an individualistic variant of the Christian virtue of humility (1953: 8).

Rousseau's self-writing had a confessional tone, yet was not written in devotion to, or appraisal of, God. Rousseau documented all his wrongdoings and transgressive thoughts in an attempt to alleviate himself of the guilt he felt. Gutman quotes from Rousseau's work and comments that motivated by guilt and shame and remorse, having discovered a secular form of the religious practice of confession that brought alleviation from such self-mortifying emotions, it is no wonder that Rousseau acknowledges that “a continuous need to put myself out brings my heart at every moment to my lips [to] ... confess unreservedly” (152) (1988: 105).

Rousseau's confession was not addressed to God and absolved to attain forgiveness or salvation, but rather sought to clear his conscience. Rousseau confessed as a means of justifying himself in the eyes of his potential readers (Gutman 1988: 105). He did not confess in order to redeem himself in front of God but rather to validate his existence for himself.
Rousseau vowed to expose himself entirely, even the petty details ... since I have undertaken to reveal myself absolutely to the public, nothing about me must remain hidden or obscure. I must remain incessantly beneath [my readers’] gaze, so that he may follow me in all the extravagances of my heart and in to every least corner of my life. Indeed, he must never lose sight of me for a single instant, for if he finds the smallest gap in my story, the smallest hiatus, he may wonder what I was doing at that moment and accuse me of refusing to tell the whole truth. I am laying myself sufficiently open (Rousseau, cited in Cohen 1953: 65).

Rousseau sought to uncover all his wrongdoing and shortcomings to his reader, and thus to justify himself for the person he was. Rousseau was prepared to give his public readership the all-knowing insight and ability to judge him that God possessed for the religious individual. Gutman states that the purpose of writing Confessions for Rousseau was 'twofold: to unburden himself of his shame, to reveal himself in his weakness ... and to create a “self” which can serve to define himself, to himself and to others, in the face of a hostile social order' (1988: 103).

2.5 Post-Enlightenment liberation: Exploring the transgressive

The exploration of personal wrongdoings and indecent thoughts through writing took a further turn in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the context of the Enlightenment, society became more secularised and reason came to replace divine law as the attitude towards explaining life. The influence of God and the Church as arbiters of right and wrong weakened. Liberty and individuality became the vantage points for human conduct (Bloch 2002: 8-9). The moral codes that guided the conduct of individuals changed, and individuals began to live less frugal lives. Sensual pleasures, lust and debauchery surfaced in these times of liberation, and writing became a transgressive tool. The works of the Marquis de Sade and the anonymous author of My Secret Life (published in 1888-1894) with the alias 'Walter', exemplify how this new sentiment was expressed in revelatory writing. Both de Sade and 'Walter' wrote explicitly about sex, lust and the subversion of norms in the name of satisfying animalistic drives. During asserts that ‘transgressive writing ... aims to clear an ideological space: a space for action, experimentation, chance, freedom, mobility. It also
breaks with the notion that writing is the product of a single and simple self’ (1992: 7-8). Self-writing was employed as a means of liberating, exploring and celebrating sinful thoughts and unholy pleasures.

The proliferation of erotic literature in eighteenth-century France encapsulated the nature of this new transgressive form of self-writing. Bloch states that ‘the eighteenth century was the century of the systematizing of sexual pleasures and pursuits’ (2002: 5). De Sade’s sexual, sinful and uninhibited writing is exemplary of this movement. Even though he repeatedly denied that he himself had committed the acts he described in his novels and plays, his sexually experimental life and unfaithfulness in marriage, which eventually led to his imprisonment, suggest a fascination with sexual transgression. De Sade wrote one of his most widely acclaimed works, *120 Days of Sodom*, while in prison, as a means of venting the (sexual) frustrations aroused by his confinement. The story revolves around four authoritarian figures who lock themselves and dozens of sex slaves in a castle for several months and unleash their vulgar desires in sexual orgies, abuse and torture, which eventually culminate in slaughter. Heumakers (1991) suggests that de Sade wrote this work to rebel against the authorities that imprisoned him. He states: ‘it seems as if de Sade wants to say: look at the elite that has expelled me!’ in an act of revenge (Heumakers 1991: 113). Schaeffner summarises that

*Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* [French title] is a reflection of [de Sade’s] distressing circumstances, his sexual preoccupations, his loneliness, his rage. Indeed, it expresses the quintessence of his nature’ (2000: 344).

Eighteenth-century transgressive self-writing was characterised by a yearning for liberation and the relief of dissatisfaction. Bloch suggests that ‘at no point in time in the history of the world, even under the Caesars, had literature been made a tool of vice in such a systematic fashion as in the *ancient regime*’ (2002: 31).

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31 For example in the introduction of his work *The Misfortunes of Virtue* he claims that ‘Yes, I am a libertine, I admit if freely. I have dreamed of doing everything that it is possible to dream of in that line. But I most certainly have not done all the things I dreamt of and never shall. Libertine I may be, but I am not a criminal, I am not a murderer’ (de Sade 1999: xvii).
45). For the first time, self-writing curiously explored and celebrated sinful behaviour rather than reproaching and reprimanding it.

‘Walter’s’ *My Secret Life* is a further example of post-Enlightenment transgressive writing. The work consists of eleven volumes published between 1888 and 1894. In them, ‘Walter’ provides a detailed account of a lifetime of sexual experiences. Written in the form of memoirs, they follow a diary-style structure remnant of the ancient *hupomnemata* and the early Puritan confessional diaries. Marcus (2009: 85) suggests that the way in which ‘Walter’ developed his sexual memoirs was by making an immediate diary entry after any given experience and embellishing it with minute detail over the following days. After deciding to publish his writings, ‘Walter’ re-read and edited his work repeatedly to make his account as exhaustive as possible. Marcus likens *My Secret Life* to a palimpsest that reveals to us the workings and broodings of a mind that had for an entire lifetime been possessed by a single subject or interest. It further reveals to us how that interest had shaped the mind and person which it possessed; how the mind which was possessed attempted in turn to cope with the forces which possessed it; and how, during the Victorian period, a man who tried directly to deal with the demands of sexuality lived and felt and thought (2009: 86-7).

‘Walter’ not only recorded his sexual experiences and desires in his writing but also reflected on them. By making the open, celebratory and unashamed expression of transgressive thoughts and behaviour the fabric of self-writing, authors like ‘Walter’ and de Sade managed their understandings of themselves and their relations to others.

‘Walter’ and de Sade wrote for a public readership, exposing their transgressive actions to the judgement of others. The awareness of this seemed to both unsettle and encourage the revelation of these authors. ‘Walter’ concealed his identity by using a pseudonym to publish his books. In the introduction to his writings, an also anonymous editor claims to be publishing the work posthumously. Marcus (2009) suggests that ‘Walter’ himself invented this figure in order to remain unidentified. In this way, ‘Walter’ literally ‘trie[d] to hide
himself behind himself’ (Marcus 2009: 82). Even though their work was so explicit, forward and affirmative of transgressive demeanour32, both ‘Walter’ and de Sade were apprehensive about being identified with the behaviour they described, aware of the judgement their public readership may pass over them. At the same time, this exposure seemed to be what the authors sought out and what encouraged their writing. ‘Walter’s’ indecision about whether or not to publish his memoirs exemplifies this duality. In one entry he stated:

the manuscript has grown into unmanageable bulk; shall it, can it, be printed? What will be said or thought of me, what became of the manuscript if found when I am dead? Better to destroy the whole, it has fulfilled its purpose in amusing me, now let it go to flames (2007 [1888-1894]: 22).

However, in a later entry ‘Walter’ reconsiders:

it would be a sin to burn all this, whatever society may say, it is but a narrative of human life, perhaps the every day life of thousands, if the confession could be had (2007 [1888-1894]: 22).

‘Walter’ seemed caught in trepidation between wanting to make his thoughts and actions known to a public readership and feeling ashamed, guilty and unsure about the reactions of others to his transgressive behaviour. Similarly, de Sade admitted to conceiving of the sexual transgressions he wrote of, yet denied having actually experienced all of the actions he described. Heumakers suggests that de Sade’s work deliberately explored that which is considered unthinkable; it expressed the ‘desire for excessive, in reality unfeasible, crimes’ (Heumakers 1991: 113). In this way, being aware of having a public readership influenced ‘Walter’s’ and de Sade’s writing.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century transgressive writing was confessional and sinful at the same time. It revealed the writers’ darkest and most sinister thoughts and actions, and celebrated them as self-exploration and expression. The liberal temperament of the times translated into the use of self-writing as a curious exploration and intensification of extremes. The awareness of having a

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32 In 120 Days of Sodom de Sade himself writes: ‘now, reader-friend, prepare thy heart and mind for the most impure tale that has ever been written since the world began, a book whose like is not to be found either among the ancients or the moderns’ (1987 [1784]: 78).
Public readership influenced the author’s writing, yet in a more complex and twofold manner than it did previous writers like Rousseau. Transgressive self-writers seemed to be torn between feeling ashamed and wanting to conceal their sinful thoughts and actions, and longing to confess and reveal them to a public audience. De Sade’s and ‘Walter’s writings exemplify this duality and show how writing has been a means of shaping relations of self to self and to others in order to govern conduct and shape oneself in the past.

2.6 Twentieth-century psychologisation: Writing as a therapeutic tool

In the late twentieth century, writing was used as a therapeutic tool in psychoanalytic treatment. In 1979, the Danish psychologist Peder Terpager Rasmussen was one of the first to encourage his patients to write about their experiences and feelings as a way of keeping account of, reflecting on and managing them (Terpager Rasmussen and Tomm 1992: 1). Psychoanalysts and doctors today still employ this method of treatment and patients still value its benefits and successes (Esterling et al. 1999: 84; Pennebaker 1997: 162). Psychoanalysis typically encourages individuals to analyse experiences that lie back many years as an indicator of present problems. Writing as a technique for self-discovery and expression and as a tool for self-improvement thus became institutionalised.

The literature on the use of writing in psychoanalytical treatment proposes that it enables self-discovery and healing (Terpager Rasmussen and Tomm 1992: 4). Pennebaker suggests that it can cause cognitive and behavioural changes and improve the mood and overall wellbeing of patients (1997: 162). Similarly, Esterling et al. claim that therapeutic writing ‘has been associated with increased insight, self-reflection, optimism, sense of control, and self-esteem’ as well as ‘improv[ing] organization and promot[ing] the development of adaptive coping strategies’ (1999: 92). Writing about their experiences is seen as a way for patients to understand themselves and their actions, and to improve the quality of their lives. In this way, therapeutic self-writing becomes a way of managing the relation of self to self. Modern therapy patients employ writing as a way of recording, reflecting on and managing their thoughts and conduct.
While eighteenth and nineteenth-century transgressive writing celebrated the unruly, modern psychotherapy again tries to regulate it. Therapeutic self-writing remains as a pathway to exploring and expressing self.

As discussed above, the awareness of an audience can influence the content of self-writing. Terpager Rasmussen and Tomm (1992) indicate that in some cases, no one ever reads what a patient writes. Knowing that they do not have to reveal their writing to anyone ‘enables the client to write more deeply about the issues and expose more than first intended, often with a subsequent realization that the area was not so dangerous to explore after all’ (Terpager Rasmussen and Tomm 1992: 5). The assurance of privacy serves to liberate the writer, allowing him/her to focus on him/herself entirely and to find the confidence to reflect on his/her most private thoughts. Bacigalupe states that for one of his patients ‘writing fostered an inner dialogue with herself’ (1996: 366-7). Other psychologists contend that writing is a way of exploring and expressing feelings and forming relationships (Bolton 1998: 79). Pennebaker observed that the subjects in his study, ‘when ... given the opportunity to disclose deeply personal aspects of their lives, ... readily [did] so’ (1997: 162). The presence or absence of a readership clearly influences what patients disclose in their therapeutic self-writing. Similar to de Sade’s and ‘Walter’s transgressive revelations, patients may be caught in between wanting to keep their thoughts private, due to the fear of how others may react, and wishing to disclose how they feel to others to attain their advice and feedback.

The interplay of the spread of literacy and the psychologisation of society has shaped the use of writing as a therapeutic tool. Social and economic changes that occurred at the start of the twentieth century dramatically increased literacy rates. Urban and suburban sprawl, the move from agricultural to industrial to informational production, corporate and global businesses, improved and more demanding educational practices, the technologisation of communication and media, and the abundant availability of printed texts, have contributed to making most people in the developed world able to read and write (Brandt 1995: 650). No longer do only elite members of society have
access to the ability and the technical means to write. The rise of the ‘psy’ sciences – psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, social work, etc. – as expertises on human subjectivity (Rose 1999a: 3) has contributed to fostering a concern with personal fulfilment, improvement and perfection in all areas of life.

The literature on psychoanalytic writing commonly renders it ‘a cost-effective, mass-oriented medium of expression and communication’ (Mumford et al. 1983, cited in Esterling et al. 1999: 94; see also Bolton 1998; Terpager Rasmussen and Tomm 1992). In this way, self-writing has developed from being a self-examining and confessional tool for the elite to a universally available medium for understanding and expressing self. Bolton suggests that today reflective and expressive writing is private and self-directed, and in principle available at any time to anyone with basic writing skills. Like the other arts and physical and talking therapies, it can offer access to memories, feelings and experiences. It can help to clarify and organise thoughts. It can encourage development and expansion of understanding because it forms a lasting record which may be worked on later. It can be torn up unread, or form an effective communication with chosen others (1998: 79).

Writing in psychotherapy has deepened the content of, and broadened access to, self-writing techniques. Self-writing still exists as a way of engaging with oneself, confessing or uncovering misdeeds, reflecting on one’s actions and interacting with others.

2.7 Autobiography: “Self-life-writing”

Autobiographical writing is the literary manifestation of self-writing. Literally, autobiography means “self-life-writing”, consisting of the Greek words auto, bios and graphe. The term was introduced at the end of the eighteenth century (Olney 1980: 4), however Olney (1980: 4) suggests that humans wrote autobiographies long before. All of the applications of self-writing discussed above – ancient Greek, religious, Romantic, transgressive and therapeutic – are autobiographical. Gusdorf maintains that every work of art is autobiographical to some extent (1956: 44) and Olney suggests that autobiography ‘is practiced by almost everyone’ (1980: 3) in some shape or form. Writing about self does
however presuppose a particular cultural context that recognises the consciousness of self. Gusdorf maintains that ‘autobiography is not to be found outside of our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man’ (1956: 29). Only where a person distinguishes him/herself from others as an individual can s/he construct a written understanding of this unique existence. The applications of self-writing as ancient record-taking, spiritual confession, secular self-exploration, transgressive revelation and therapeutic treatment all derive from being conscious of self and confronted with the awareness of one’s lone existence. As a way of examining self, confessing sins and reflecting on thought and action, self-writing shapes the individual and his/her outlook on life. Gusdorf notes that ‘autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it’ (1956: 38). In this way, autobiographical writing is a reflexive engagement with the experiences an individual has that shapes his/her relations to self and others.

3.0 Self-writing on SNSs
Self-writing still functions as a means for individuals to engage with themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct in the context of modern psychologised, transparent and technologised societies. SNSs represent one modern site where self-writing can be practised and published. SNS-users employ the sites as tools for recording experiences and thoughts, reflecting on them and exposing them to a public readership. Using SNSs provides modern individuals with a way of understanding and expressing themselves and being recognised by, and receiving help or advice from, others.

There are certain continuities and discontinuities between various historical uses and applications of self-writing discussed above, and the ways in which people inscribe themselves on SNSs today. SNS-users employ these sites as tools for self-revelation, confession, self-management and self-improvement. SNSs can also serve as sites for the expression of transgressive thoughts and actions and for experimentation with, and celebration of, controversial behaviour. Self-writing on SNSs is based on regular updates and authentic revelations. Still
incited to confess and reveal themselves, modern self-writers now make their
self-inscriptions available to the gaze of a mass public audience. By circulating
in complex networks with technologies and other entities, SNS-users come to
employ the sites as tools for self-formation that have historical roots in ancient
practices of subjectivation.

3.1 Exploring identity; becoming selves

SNSs have been described as virtual laboratories (Turkle 1995: 12) for
recording, interpreting and understanding thoughts, feelings and actions. Bargh
et al. comment on ‘the Internet’s ability to facilitate self-expression’ (2002: 35)
and to Livingstone ‘it seems that for many, creating and networking online
content is becoming an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and
social relations’ (2008: 394). Nussbaum (2007) comments that young SNS-users
archive their adolescence on these sites. She outlines how seventeen-year-old,
‘hyperconnected’ Caitlin Opperman is virtually present on Xanga, Blogger,
Facebook, Flickr, Vimeo and MySpace, recording and representing herself as a
means of remembering, understanding and evidencing her existence
(Nussbaum 2007: 4).

Writing about self on SNSs however is not just a way of exploring, interpreting
and expressing identity, as indicated by the work of the above-mentioned
scholars. By conceptualising the use of SNSs as a technique of self-formation, we
can understand the role of these sites in shaping subjectivities. This opens up
new ways of understanding the complex interrelations between humans and
modern technologies in modern hybrid techno-social landscapes. It allows us to
consider SNS-use not in terms of how identity is staged on these sites, but rather
in terms of how these sites act as tools through which selves are formed.

The previous chapter framed the status update on Facebook as a technological
tool that incites users to reveal ‘what’s on [their] mind’. Many Facebook-users
employ the status update to record and reflect on their personal experiences,
successes, failures and faults. Consider the following update posted by one Facebook-user\textsuperscript{33}:

Cleaned up the house a bit, spent 3 hours riding the horses to, on, and from the beach, did grocery shopping for the next 2 weeks, and now preparing to make BBQ veggie and real chicken. CV updating will follow that, and then hopefully a bath. Good Sunday, if I do say so.

Most current literature on SNS-use would suggest that this status update is a way for the writer to express herself, express an identity and/or show herself (or show off) to others. While this may be accurate, considering SNSs as tools for self-formation which are steeped in historical practices, and shaped by the psychologisation, technologisation and increasing publicness of modern life, provides new and different insights into the ways in which people use SNSs to shape their understandings of self.

A rationalised and psychologised modern mindset proliferates the demand and desire for people to talk about themselves, be productive and improve themselves. The status post cited above manifests this sentiment. It reveals the writers’ daily actions to others, portrays a sense of efficiency and reflects on daily conduct by suggesting that the writer had a good day. The writer of this post creates a written account of herself and in this way relates to herself and others. Technology incites this constant reflection by offering possibilities of engaging with oneself and relating to others. Users respond to this technological affordance by creating a permanent record of their actions, which helps them to manage their conduct and establish guidelines to live by. Using writing to constitute relations of self to self and to others on SNSs is a public activity; at the same time as they form an understanding of themselves through their self-writing, SNS-users bare themselves to a public audience. In this way, the process of self-formation becomes a public act. Hence, the age-old practice of self-writing as a tool for subjectivation has been translated and transformed throughout history and re-established in the way in which people use SNSs today. We can see remnants of older ways in which people have constituted

\textsuperscript{33} From the author’s personal use of the site.
themselves in this modern practice, as well as the establishment of new techniques.

3.2 Inviting the gaze of an other

In manifesting themselves to a public readership, SNS-users seek ways of substantiating themselves, of being recognised and of obtaining help and advice. In ancient Greek letter-writing, the gaze of one particular chosen individual was invited to rest upon oneself as a means of simultaneously inspecting oneself and receiving guidance from the correspondent. Christian self-writing addressed a divine other – God – and also exposed self to external recognition, help and guidance. With the secularisation of self-writing in the Romantic period, the intended readership extended to encompass a larger general public. Rousseau, de Sade, ‘Walter’ and numerous other autobiographical authors, sought to share and manifest themselves to a broad audience through their self-writing. In this way, they established a relation to others. Nevertheless, their inscriptions continued to engage with and work on self. Modern individuals similarly employ SNSs to make themselves known and attain recognition or advice from others, at the same time as exploring their relation of self to self.

In the past, knowing that one, or several, other/s would read one’s self-writing affected how writers inscribed themselves. Self-writing is always a relational practice. Foucault remarked that both the ancient Greek care of self and the Christian confession led to an ‘intensification of social relations’ (Foucault 1986: 53). Hence, confessional self-writing ‘develops a need for those who can listen and offer advice effectively, those trained in the art of the inducement and decipherment of the soul’s confession’ (Humphries 1997: 134-5). ‘Walter’ and de Sade were caught in oscillation between wanting to share their transgressive sentiments and being afraid of judgement. SNS-users today similarly weigh up the benefits and drawbacks of making their private lives public by giving others access to what they write.

boyd has commented on the invisibility of audiences in online environments, arguing that ‘a mediated public could consist of all people across all space and
all time’ (2008: 126). The expansion and blurring of the composition of who
gets to read what is written has reconfigured the practice of self-writing.
Nussbaum suggests that SNS-users ‘think of themselves as having an audience’
(2007: 3). One nineteen-year-old blogger Nussbaum interviewed states that she
writes her blog posts according to what she imagines her audience wants to
read. Being aware of the potential judgement by their readership influences
how SNS-users inscribe themselves. Westlake claims that ‘the internet is indeed
a stage for performing the self, with Generation Y inviting, albeit cautiously, a
certain level of surveillance. But it is surveillance driven by desire’ (2008: 38).
While Westlake describes the desire for surveillance as characteristic of the
SNS-generation, some of the ways in which self-writing has been used
throughout history show that self-revelation and exploration have been part of
writing as a technique of shaping the relations of self to self and to others in the
past.

Foucault argued that the ancient Greeks used self-writing to “show
[themselves]”, to project [themselves] into view, to make [their] own face
appear in the other’s presence’ (Foucault 1997d: 216) and to seek out guidance
and support from others. The status update function on many SNSs incites users
to share their feelings and experiences with others. Users also employ the status
update to seek out help. Consider the following Facebook status updates:

    Any lawyer friends on here have experience with employment
    law/workplace discrimination stuff? Anyone gone through
    something of that nature?

    Has anyone had a PAO [periacetabular osteotomy surgery] or know
    anyone who has had it done? Any experiences would be helpful.

By posing questions about workplace discrimination and dangerous hip
surgery, these writers grant an insight into what is going on in their lives, and at
the same time are able to ask for advice and information to guide and optimise
their future conduct. They employ technological tools to make themselves
public, work on themselves, talk about their problems and weigh up costs and
benefits of future conduct. Once again it becomes evident how the
psychologisation, technologisation and publicness of modern life manifest themselves in the ways in which people use SNSs as means of shaping their day-to-day conduct and understandings of themselves and others.

3.3 Confessional and transgressive self-inscriptions

Self-writing can still be used as a confessional practice in modern psychologised societies. Foucault famously suggested that the proliferation of science and the institutionalisation of the confessional have shaped a society obsessed not only with knowing but also with telling. He stated that 'Western man has become a confessing animal' (1990: 59), arguing that

one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, what is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about (1990: 59).

Rosen is adamant that one of the main objectives of SNS use is self-exposure. She states that ‘the creation and conspicuous consumption of intimate details and images of one’s own and others’ lives is the main activity in the online social networking world. There is no room for reticence; there is only revelation’ (2007: 24). Beyond simple self-exposure, revealing actions and wrongdoings through writing on SNSs still serves as a way of relating to self and others in modern psychologised societies. Individuals confess as a means of managing and improving themselves at the same time as showing themselves to others and in this way relating to them.

SNS-users, employ self-writing as a means of governing their conduct and ensuring they live according to established ethical and moral guidelines. The following Facebook status update exemplifies how SNS-users employ the sites as confessional self-management tools:

Question: I haven’t done my 2010 tax, it appears the only way to do it is to fill out the form and post it (can’t find etax 2010). Do I legally have to do it? Will bad things happen if I don’t?
The user admits to not having completed her tax return for the year, and asks for advice from her contacts on whether or not she is legally obliged to still do this. She confesses her wrongdoing and builds on her relations to others to guide her future conduct. She unfolds herself and again folds in the experience of revealing herself on Facebook, in order to shape her understanding of self and govern her conduct.

The confessional and self-revelatory nature of online self-inscription can lead to transgressive presentations of self. Turkle (2011) analyses how online confessional sites like PostSecret, LifeChurch.tv and MySecret allow individuals to reveal their sinful thoughts and wrongdoings anonymously and without repercussions. While the anonymity these confessional sites provide distinguishes them from SNSs, Turkle asserts that ‘people say outrageous things, even when they are not anonymous’ (2011: 235). Brandi, one of Turkle’s interviewees, compares the confessional sites to Facebook and MySpace and claims that in general ‘online … I get the private out of my system. … I put my unhappiness onto the site’ (cited in Turkle 2011: 236). In this way, writing about one’s wrongdoings on the internet becomes a means of confessing transgressive behaviour in order to come to grips with it, relate to self and others and establish guidelines to live by.

Nussbaum describes how blogger Kitty provides detailed discussions of ‘the death of her parents, her breakups, her insecurities, her ambitions’ and raises the issue of sexual abuse as a topic for discussion with her readers (2007: 1). She posts nude photos of herself on her profile. Nussbaum claims she felt taken aback when she first saw Kitty’s blatant self-exposure (2007: 1). To Kitty, surrendering her privacy to the gaze of a stranger seems unproblematic. This suggests that she uses her blog as a reflexive means of coming to terms with her experiences, exploring herself and celebrating her actions, much like ‘Walter’ and de Sade.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, SNS-users have also employed live webcam chat on sites like Chatroulette to express themselves in visceral,
exposed and transgressive ways. They flaunt their sexualised naked bodies, masturbate, dance, strip and defecate. Others dress up in animal masks, Spiderman costumes, Nazi uniforms and more. Those really wanting to shock stage suicide, depicting lifeless bodies hanged from the ceiling of their room. The technological affordance of video chat has implicated bodily practices in the use of revelatory and transgressive online self-inscriptions. Through the use of SNSs, modern individuals engage with themselves, expose themselves to others and test the boundaries of established moral and ethical guidelines to form their conduct.

3.4 An ongoing process of self-formation

Like in the past, self-writers on Facebook inscribe themselves constantly and consistently, making their self-formation and ongoing process. The ancient Greeks, early Christians and Puritans believed in frequent and consistent inscription as a way of maximising the beneficial effects of their self-writing activity. The authors of early autobiographical memoirs and transgressive diaries similarly took care to keep a consistent and up-to-date record of their daily experiences. As a therapeutic tool, writing as often as possible is recommended to enhance the benefits of this self-reflexive work. The technological affordances of SNSs, and the modern desire and demand to make oneself visible to a public audience at all times, have proliferated the constancy with which SNS-users inscribe themselves on their sites. SNS-use has become part of everyday conduct, and writing about personal experiences, successes, wrongdoings and transgressive thoughts represents a way for people to engage with themselves and form an understanding of their actions and relations to others in modern psychologised societies.

SNS-users are encouraged to keep their profile pages up to date and to inscribe and re-inscribe themselves frequently. Shah argues that this 'giv[es] the sense of a fluid and changing persona, rather than a static description’ (2008: 215; see

34 see Jackson1323214 (2010), LOLCHATROULETTELOL (2011), Murano (2010), Ringerud (2010a; 2010b) for screenshots of some of these expressions of self on Chatroulette.
also Livingstone 2008). Hills notes that the frequently updated profile pictures on Facebook ‘become a short hand for changing, up-to-the minute performances of self’ (2009: 118). In continual processes of folding in the outside, reflecting on, and assembling it, and again unfolding it to present themselves, modern individuals relate to themselves and form their ethical conduct through self-writing. The writers’ experiences, the people s/he engages with, the things s/he reads, sees and learns, his/her interpretations and understandings of the world s/he lives in actively shape his/her subjectivity. Writing about oneself, now and in the past, serves as one tool that supports, encourages and enhances this process. Self-writing is thus a way of managing relations of self to self and to others and governing conduct.

3.5 Plugging in to new writing tools

Modern self-writing processes are mediated by their technologisation, yet still provide means for individuals to relate to themselves and others and establish guidelines for governing their conduct. Writing self into being on SNSs is not the same as doing so with pen and paper. New technologies come to shape self-writing in new ways. Self-writing on SNSs thus necessitates technological competency from the user. SNS-users literally plug into technological networks where they come to circulate with a variety of human, non-human and hybrid (avatars) entities. They have to learn to navigate through these complex systems by becoming literate in new ways of behaving and engaging with all of the entities involved. For example, status updates on Facebook are kept short and concise, usually no longer than a few sentences. On Twitter, a 140-character limit for individual posts turns this norm of briefness into a rule. The technology shapes users’ self-writing, yet users can find ways to get around constraints or limitations, for example by simply posting several posts after one another. The assemblage of human users, non-human technologies and hybrid avatars, shapes practices, norms and rules to reflect the interests, and meet the requirements, of all involved actants. The shortness of SNS status updates is not simply a result of technological restrictions but also a reflection of new processes of communicating, revealing self to public audiences and forming
understandings of self. In this way technology and human behaviour come to shape one another in relations of reflexivity.

The brevity of online self-writing is connected to the expectation of consistency. SNS-users commonly update their status at least once a week\textsuperscript{35}. Many users post new messages about what they are doing every day, some even several times a day. On Twitter, the box in which to inscribe self states ‘Compose new tweet…’, the three dots implying an impatient demand for an update. Similarly, on Facebook, the status update box persistently prompts ‘What’s on your mind’\textsuperscript{36}, asking users to share their every thought. LinkedIn invites users to ‘share an update’ when the status box is empty, also promoting a constant up-to-dateness in the self-reflection and inscription on the site. Perhaps as a result of not being able to say much in one post, perhaps as a reflection of the ongoing public mediation with which modern individuals think about and manage their lives, SNS-users write and re-write themselves into being on and through online technologies in a constant and up-to-date fashion.

There are continuities and discontinuities between older and modern online forms of self-writing. The virtualised machines that SNS-users are assembled in shape modern self-writing. The technologisation of the practice influences how users understand themselves and others through their online inscriptions. Online self-writers have to learn to navigate, work with, or work around, the affordances and constraints that modern technologies provide. While there are some disadvantages of not being able to engage face-to-face, there are certainly also benefits of this spatio-temporal distanciation between the writer and reader of online self-inscriptions. Similarly, the expectation to keep updates brief and consistent on SNSs produces positive and negative effects; users are able to show themselves at the same time as they form themselves, making the

\textsuperscript{35} Carr et al.’s 2008 study of seventy-four 18-22 year-old American university students revealed that they updated their Facebook status approximately once every five days (2012: 10). Hampton et al. similarly found that, on average, their sample of 269 random Facebook users updated their status or posted on someone’s wall nine times a month (2012: 4).

\textsuperscript{36} Or, more recently, “What’s going on, [name of user]”. 
processes of their self-formation publicly visible. This can however also result in ill-considered postings or misunderstandings. By being plugged into complex technological networks in which human, non-human and hybrid actants circulate and mutually shape each others’ affordances, behaviours and understandings, modern self-writers have to become literate in new ways and develop new competencies.

4.0 Conclusion
Writing has shaped, and continues to shape, ways in which individuals relate to themselves and others. Considering some fragments of history, which exemplify how writing has been used in the past as a tool for self-formation, provides interesting and telling examples of some of the practices that are involved in how people use SNSs today to write about themselves in the service of governing their conduct. By exploring continuities and discontinuities between older self-writing and its application on SNSs, we can see that modern self-writing has been influenced by, and shows traces of, ancient Greek self-writing as record-taking, of religious applications of writing as a confessional tool, of secularised uses of writing as explorations of inner thoughts and feelings, of transgressive writings, which celebrate the revelation of sinful thoughts and behaviours and of therapeutic writing, which seeks to work on, and improve self. Self-writing thus persists as one particular self-forming activity.

Modern self-writing occurs in the context of the incitement to discourse and the psychologisation of daily life. Individuals are encouraged to talk about, reflect and work on themselves constantly in a never-ending surge to improve and perfect themselves. They feel incited to reveal everything about themselves and their lives and do so in increasingly public ways. As more and more people are able to make themselves known to a broader audience through the affordances offered by technology, self-writing has transformed and spread from a self-examining and confessional tool available only to an elite male sector of the population, to a universally available medium for managing conduct and relating to self and others. The ways in which modern individuals are assembled with SNSs exemplifies some of these developments. It shows that writing still
shapes relations of self to self and to others, yet that modern individuals turn this self-forming activity into a public activity. Many SNS-users confess and reveal all about themselves, often in transgressive forms. Transgression becomes a way of attracting attention to self. The nonchalant ways in which modern individuals are prepared to expose themselves and their bodies through their online self-inscriptions makes this transgressive behaviour into a mundane daily activity and normalises it.

Writing is more than a means for expressing self or communicating with others. It can be employed as a way for people to understand and work on themselves and their relations to others. Self-writers do not simply present or perform a self that already exists within them. They form relations to self and others by exposing themselves to others and obtaining their feedback. They reveal, fold in and unfold themselves, and in this way constantly shape and re-shape their understandings of self. Self-writing involves folding in outside experiences and unfolding them again in ongoing, reflexive processes. People use self-writing to formulate a framework that guides their daily conduct, and to manage the complex worlds they have to navigate through.

Conceptualising SNSs as sites where self-writing as a self-forming activity can occur today, frames these online technologies as tools for self-formation. SNS-use is one example of the complex circulations of modern individuals with psychologised discourses, technological advancements and the demand and desire to make self visible in public. The way in which people publicly reveal their self-forming activity as they are performing it through their SNS-use opens up access for scholars to explore modern processes of subjectivation. Appreciating the historical contingencies that have influenced and transformed self-writing, and the new ways in which it has developed, provides insights into processes that shape the conduct of modern individuals.
CHAPTER 7 – *PARRHESIA AS A TECHNIQUE OF SELF: SPEAKING OUT ON SNSS*

1.0 Introduction – Technology and parrhesia

Chapter 5 explored the role of technology in the complex assemblages that shape conduct and subjectivities, and addressed how technology has been used as a political tool for the state to increase control, surveillance and regulation, as well as for citizens to challenge and resist authorities, and govern their own conduct. Being assembled with modern technologies like SNSs has opened up possibilities for individuals today to speak out about themselves and their wants and expectations (of governments, of others in their immediate surroundings and of themselves), and to demand and pursue freedom. Truth-telling has been employed as a political tool and mode of subjectivation in the past and still represents a particular technique of self through which modern individuals shape their conduct. In modern techno-social hybrid worlds, technological affordances allow people to voice and disseminate their truth in new ways to a vast public audience. Using SNSs to speak truth is a way for modern individuals to manage their relations to self and to others, and to demand and effect political, social and personal change.

Foucault explored the ancient Greek self-forming activity of *parrhesia*; a particular type of frank speech or truth-telling that arose out of the development of democracy in Classical Athens (Foucault 2001; 2010; 2011). The notion of *epimeleia heautou* – the care of self – led to the splitting of ethical *parrhesia* from political *parrhesia* in ancient Greece, which characterised particularly Cynic understandings of truth as a way of life. Democracy, truth-telling, free speech and ethical conduct became intimately related in the practice of *parrhesia*. The correlation between the problematisation of truth and processes of subjectivation is still relevant and applicable today. Truth-telling remains a way for people to establish a relation to self and others, and to form guidelines according to which they govern their actions. It subsists as a tool for achieving change and understanding self.
SNSs have been particularly amenable to the adoption and flourishing of parrhesiastic practice in contemporary society. They serve as one site for the re-emergence of both political and ethical *parrhesia*, and have had an impact on the reconfiguration of the practice. There are continuities and discontinuities between a modern, global parrhesiastic mentality of speaking truth to achieve change, and its predecessors in ancient Greco-Roman societies. While we cannot assume that our conduct replicates that of the ancient Greeks, exploring the practices they used to form themselves and their ethical conduct can provide clues about how we do this work today. Truth-telling represents a mode of subjectivation and tool for achieving change that is steeped in ancient historical practices.

Foucault’s schematic definition and account of the emergence and development of ancient Greek *parrhesia*, and his tentative suggestions about the continuation of parrhesiastic practice beyond the Ancients, provide a basis from which to investigate how telling truth is employed today as a means of managing relations of self to self and to others. *Parrhesia* has been translated and transformed by the confessional mindset and rational economic attitudes of modern societies, the incitement to bare self in public and the affordances offered by technology. Looking at particular examples of modern technologically mediated *parrhesia* from different contexts reveals that *parrhesia* still serves as an ethical and political tool for shaping subjectivities. This chapter will explore how people’s self-writing on Facebook is a way of speaking truth as an ethical mode of subjectivation. It will also show that the use of SNSs in the Arab Spring uprisings reveals how speaking out on these sites is used today in political contexts. While these examples may seem disparate at first, it will become evident that they illustrate how the assemblage of humans with technologies provides new ways of speaking truth and, in this way, shaping understandings of self and governing relations to self and others.

There is a circular, fragile and paradoxical relation between *parrhesia*, politics and the care of self which has problematised it in the past. The potential for *parrhesia* to be perverted (Foucault 2010: 182), the fragility of the concept and
its complex relation with democracy are still rife. Modern technologised parrhesiastic practice has become a global mass phenomenon as more and more people gain access to the use of SNS. Speaking truth through these sites has achieved political and social change. However, becoming more and more widely spread to a multitude of contexts and individuals also endangers the existence of parrhesia. Some may employ SNSs to voice speech that is cowardly, deceitful, non-productive (in the sense that no major change is achieved) or even dangerous. Yet, those who succeed in speaking parrhesiastically have made changes for the better.

This argument plays into a more general debate around whether social media promote, hinder or make no difference to the unfolding of political and social change that has been raised repeatedly in current scholarship and media. Rather than judging the usefulness of SNSs in supporting or hindering certain causes, they can be explored as tools that open up more possibilities for more people to voice opinions, demand change and work on themselves, increasing the potential for both, ill-considered speech and truly effective parrhesia. Speaking truth through SNSs represents a means of managing conduct, shaping subjectivities and governing others. Truth-telling subsists as a vital tool for governing self and others, which has been translated and transformed since its ancient origins in the context of modern techno-social hybrid worlds.

2.0 Foucault on parrhesia

2.1 Defining parrhesia: Frankness, belief, danger, criticism and duty
Liddell and Scott define parrhesia as ‘outspokenness, frankness, freedom of speech’ as well as as ‘licence of tongue’ (1843: 1344) or excessive speech; gossip. Parrhesia delineates a particular way of telling the truth (Foucault 2010: 52) that is linked at different historical times to political, philosophical and religious domains. Foucault described parrhesia as one of four ‘modalities of truth-telling’ (2011: 14), the other three being prophecy, wisdom and teaching (Foucault 2011: 14-25). He traced the transformation of parrhesia from the

37 See eg. Allnutt (2011); Gladwell (2010); Madrigal (2011); Morozov (2011a; 2011b); Shirky (2011).
Athenian political practice of public speaking, into the Hellenistic psychagogic practice of guiding the soul of the sovereign, and then into a philosophical notion of truth as a way of life (see also Hadot 1995). He showed how parrhesia turned from a political rationality into a mode of existence. He described parrhesia as simultaneously a virtue, a quality, a duty, and a technique (Foucault 2010: 43) and suggested that it ‘is situated at the meeting point of the obligation to speak the truth, procedures and techniques of governmentality, and the constitution of the relationship to self’ (2010: 45). Hence, parrhesia linked up speaking truth with political action and practices of self. Foucault’s study of parrhesia enabled him to bring together the three axes of his lifetime of work; knowledge and truth, power and government, and ethics and subjectivity.

Foucault’s (2001: 14-19) somewhat schematic depiction of ancient parrhesia identified five defining characteristics: (i) frankness or sincerity; (ii) a coincidence between belief and truth; (iii) danger or risk; (iv) criticism and (v) duty. Accordingly, a parrhesiastes – parrhesiastic speaker – expressed his beliefs directly and sincerely without rhetorical enhancement (Foucault 2001: 12). He always spoke the truth (Foucault 2001: 14); not a universal truth that relied on logical reasoning to be verified, but the truth the individual believed in and lived by. Speaking this truth meant risking punishment such as exile, death, the jeopardy of a friendship or loss of political regard (Foucault 2001: 16). The parrhesiastes’ courage to speak despite these known dangers proved his sincerity (Foucault 2001: 15). Parrhesiastic speech criticised someone in a superior social or political position (Foucault 2001: 17-18) in order to help

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38 Foucault has been criticised for selecting texts that create an unrepresentative notion of parrhesia (see Franěk 2006; McGushin 2007). Franěk notes that it ‘seems that Foucault needed to construe this ideal notion of parrhesia to be able to trace its displacement into ethics – and to be able to address the relation of ethics and politics’ (2006: 118).

39 Like ancient Greek self-writing, parrhesia was reserved almost exclusively for elite male citizens. There are exceptions where women speak parrhesiastically (see e.g. the dialogue between Clytemnestra and Electra in Euripides’ Electra (41 B.C.) or Creusa’s role in Ion (Euripides ca. 418-417 B.C.) (both cited in Foucault 2001)), however never in political settings. Slaves never got to speak parrhesiastically.
them improve their relation to self and government of others. The *parrhesiastes* spoke out of a sense of duty to his city, his people and his leader, but always voluntarily (Foucault 2001: 19). The courageous *parrhesiastes* endangered his life in order to benefit others. This elucidates the complex association between sincerity, truth, risk, criticism, duty and voluntariness that characterised *parrhesia*.

Telling truth was a way of relating to self and others. *Parrhesia* was relational and reciprocal; it affected the one it addressed as well as the speaker himself. Particularly in its later insertion into philosophy, the *parrhesiastes*’ criticism shaped his interlocutor’s understanding of himself (Foucault 2010: 43-4), and retroactively affected the *parrhesiastes*’ own mode of being (Foucault 2010: 68). In this way, *parrhesia* represented a form of government of self and others. While a relationship between the speaker and his target was the precondition for the speakers’ discourse, the *parrhesiastes* also always endangered this relationship through his critical and risky discourse (Foucault 2011: 11). *Parrhesia* had the potential to improve relations between people, enhance understandings of self and optimise the government of others. Today, truth-telling persists as a way of forming self and effecting change.

### 2.2 Ancient Greek political parrhesia

*Parrhesia* emerged as a political practice intimately tied to Athenian democratic government (Foucault 2010: 155). While any citizen in a democracy by definition held the right to free speech, in practice the privilege was not accorded to everyone. Some were seen to possess, by birthright, qualities that licensed political leadership, such as being able to recognise and communicate truth and its beneficial effect for others, and having the courage to risk being punished for their speech (Foucault 2010: 157). Foucault showed how Pericles’ honest leadership and sincere public orating exemplified the birthright and virtue that characterised political *parrhesia*. Euripedes’ *Ion* clearly demonstrates how important birthright was to the complex association between the constitutional right to speak truth and the question of political leadership that became associated in the practice of *parrhesia* (see Foucault
2010: 75-109). As Foucault explained: ‘the place of parrhesia [was] defined and guaranteed by the politeia [city’s constitution]; but parrhesia, the truth-telling of the political man, [was] what ensure[d] the appropriate game of politics’ (2010: 159). The delicate balance between parrhesia and democracy was attenuated by the ‘ascendancy’ that enabled some to come forward as leaders whose speech was listened to over that of others (Foucault 2010: 183-4).

Parrhesia was only possible within a democratic constitution, and free speech defined democracy (Foucault 2010: 155). However, democracy always invoked a struggle for power and hence threatened the existence of true discourse (Foucault 2010: 184). This circular, paradoxical relationship between parrhesia and democracy eventually led to the problematisation of the practice in Athens. While the democratic city was regulated, by definition, by the many, it was unlikely that all, or even the majority, were virtuous, noble truth-tellers who would act in the common interest. As everyone sought to exercise their freedom of speech, ‘ascendancy [was] perverted’ (Foucault 2010: 182) and the differentiation between good and bad speakers became blurred. Parrhesia lost its inherent truth-telling quality; it was no longer a matter of personal traits, morality, integrity, intelligence and devotion, but rather turned into everyone and anyone speaking about anything. The structural conditions of democracy made the emergence of truth-telling ‘difficult, improbable, and dangerous’ (Foucault 2011: 60).

2.3 From democratic freedom to speak to ethical care of self

With the rise of monarchies in the Hellenistic period, an important transformation in the practice of parrhesia took place. Within the new autocratic political context the parrhesiastes was no longer free to speak his truth in public. He became the sovereign's personal advisor (Foucault 2001: 22-3). This rectified the problem that had perverted the practice of parrhesia in democracy, which was that anyone, even the unqualified, spoke out in public. The parrhesiastes still spoke sincerely, truthfully and voluntarily, and selflessly risked being punished for his frank speech, but parrhesia now developed a psychagogical facet (Foucault 2010: 194); rather than constituting a means of
governing the political field of the city directly, the *parrhesiastes* guided the soul of the city's governor (Foucault 2010: 303). The sovereign could be 'persuaded and educated' and '[made] capable of grasping the truth and of conducting himself in conformity with this truth' (Foucault 2011: 61). Hence, his soul was capable of ethical differentiation (Foucault 2011: 61).

The political structure of democracy was not capable of this ethical differentiation. Foucault explained that 'the absence of a place for *ethos* in democracy means that truth has no place and cannot be heard in democracy. But this *êthos* is the bond, the point of connection between truth-telling and governing well' (Foucault 2011: 64). In the new political context, *parrhesia* turned from a form of political advice to a mode of existence. Rather than being uttered when problems arose, it sought to cultivate the sovereign's relation to self, which optimised his government over others (Foucault 2011: 65). In this way, *parrhesia* indirectly still was implicated in political processes. Foucault identified Socrates, who made it his life mission to take care of others and to teach them to take care of themselves, as key figure that embodied this ethical *parrhesia* (2011: 86).

Parrhesiastic advisors were commonly philosophers who saw their lives as ‘a manifestation of the truth’ (Foucault 2010: 343) and truth as a way of life. *Parrhesia* thus became a philosophical approach to managing daily life. It was transformed from a purely political into a primarily philosophical practice. The Cynics took up the Socratic care of self not just as knowledge of the soul, which produced an ontology of the self, but rather as a testing of life itself as the object of care (Foucault 2011: 127-8). For the Cynics, telling truth was a way of life (Foucault 2011: 171) that was unconcealed, independent, straight and sovereign. They commonly lived out these traditional philosophical understandings of what constitutes a true life in dramatised and scandalous ways (Foucault 2011: 251). Diogenes’ militant and shameless existence dedicated to creating an ‘other’ life exemplifies Cynic parrhesiastic practice (Foucault 2011: 242). The Cynics not only endangered their lives 'by telling the
truth, and in order to tell it’, as did political and Socratic ethical parrhesiastes, but ‘by the very way in which [they] live[d]’ (Foucault 2011: 234).

3.0 Translating parrhesia into modern societies: Technology, psychology and the incitement to self-reveal

Foucault suggested that the Cynic mode of existence concerned with telling truth made its way into the Christian pastoral, where it was divested of its philosophical function (2010: 348) and became an obligation in order to be saved (2010: 359). While Foucault was unsure whether parrhesia is possible beyond its Christian adaptation after ‘the Cartesian moment’ (2005: 26), he did suggest that a Cynic mode of being (2011: 181) that saw truth as a way of life reappeared in spiritual movements of the Middle Ages (2011: 182), in sixteenth century philosophy (2010: 349-50), modern (eighteenth century) art (2011: 186-8) and nineteenth century left-wing revolutionary movements (2011: 185). Elsewhere, he suggested that a parrhesiastic mode of truth-telling has ‘disappeared as such’ today and can only be detected in combination with one of the other modalities of veridiction – prophecy, wisdom and/or teaching (2011: 30). Whether on its own or in combination with one of these, truth-telling in a general sense still serves as a mode of subjectivation that affects the relations of individuals to themselves and others, and the way in which they come to manage these relations.

Parrhesia was invoked in ancient Greece as a privilege of freedom performed in the city, as a psychagogical practice exercised in relation to the soul (Foucault 2011: 64) and as a philosophical way of life (Foucault 2010: 343). In the Christian pastoral it was a way of speaking out in a confessional way to manage earthly life and ensure salvation in the afterlife. Today, truth-telling subsists in

40 Foucault conceptualised the Cynic mode of life bound up with exercising truth as a historical category (catégorie historique) with a ‘trans-historical’ character (Foucault 2011: 174). For a more elaborate development of the notion of the translatability of Cynicism into modern society and the possibility of the continuation of parrhesia through the Cynic way of life see Tanke (2002) and Beaulieu (2010).

41 Foucault also reminds us that there are other instantiations of Christianity that developed counter to the pastoral practice of obedience to externally
the context of modern psychologised, rationalised and technologised Western societies where people are encouraged to speak about, and work on, themselves constantly (and publicly) in order to be the best they can be. Milchman and Rosenberg suggest that

we are perhaps witnessing the outcome of that long process that Foucault traced back to Descartes, in which the identification of truth with correct method, the veritable basis of modern science, its separation from the possession of moral qualities, and the excision of parrhesia from the mechanisms of government, can have disastrous consequences for our political life (2005: 351).

By conceptualising parrhesia as a general process of speaking truth which we practise in the context of a sentiment of self-expression and self-fashioning, we can understand it as helping us today, as in ancient Greece, to manage our relations to ourselves and others, and in this way, to effect change.

Speaking truth to manage self and demand change persists today in societies where communication has been virtualised (Rheingold 1993), communities connect globally (Castells 1996; see also Anderson 1983) and the possibility of self-publicising is no longer the preserve of the elites, but rather a mass phenomenon (Beer and Burrows 2007; Fuchs 2008). The constellation of factors developed in earlier parts of this thesis contributes to translating truth-telling into a modern means of managing others and caring for self. These include the psychologised mentality, which views identity as a project to be worked on by talking and confessing, the demand and desire to reveal self to a public audience, which echoes the Cynic approach to truth as a way of life and has cultivated truth-telling as a public activity, and the technologisation of imposed rules including asceticism, the formation of anti-pastoral communities, mysticism, a focus on Scripture and eschatology (see Foucault 2007: 204-214). While the limits of this thesis do not allow for a detailed analysis of the particular involvement of parrhesiastic forms of speech in these Christian counter-conduct movements, it can be noted that they were all concerned with living lives of truth (which commonly rely on an ‘almost ironic exaggeration’ of pastoral values (Foucault 2007: 211) that may be likened to the Cynic dramatisation of traditional philosophical principles), and shaping relations to self, God and thus forming ethical conduct in relation to others. In this way, they too involved parrhesiastic practices as modes of subjectivation and techniques of self-formation.
modern life. SNSs have opened up new public spaces within which a modern form of *parrhesia* can be practised. *Parrhesia* is relevant, practised and fought for today in a political as well as ethical form. The connection between truth and subjectivity that was emphasised by the Cynic way of life has been translated into modern ways of managing political issues, interpersonal relations and understandings of self.

3.1 Technologised parrhesia

SNSs are tools that enable people to shape and voice their truths. As explicated in Chapter 5, humans and technology (along with other entities) circulate in complex assemblages that constantly shape and reshape one another. We need to be careful to be neither overly ‘technologically deterministic’ (Hutchby 2001) or ‘under-socialised’ (Bloomfield et al. 2010), nor entirely ‘social constructivist’ (Hutchby 2001) or ‘over-socialised’ (Bloomfield et al. 2010) in conceptualising the use of SNSs in processes of speaking truth as a means of governing self and others. Modern technologies offer new possibilities for individuals to shape, voice and disseminate their opinions. SNSs have neither caused the translation of *parrhesia* into modern ways of speaking truth as a mode of being, nor are they the outcome of a particular mode of thinking that characterises our times. They present one pertinent example of some of the ways in which we are assembled in virtualised machines in modern techno-social hybrid worlds that shape our understandings of self, relations to others and day-to-day conduct.

Older parrhesiastic practices have been re-utilised and re-shuffled to form new instantiations of truth-telling as a means of forming ethical and political conduct. The technologisation of modern life in combination with psycho-analyses, rational economic calculations and the demand and desire to reveal self and self-forming processes in public provide the context within which a modern form of parrhesiastic practice is situated. Modern Cartesian ways of thinking conceptualise truth both as knowledge and as a mode of existence. Hence, truth is both constructed and transmitted through modern parrhesiastic practices. Whereas ancient Greek *parrhesia* was a verbal activity (Foucault 2001: 19), the immediate way in which thoughts can be disseminated on the
internet has made it possible for writing to become a parrhesiastic act. SNSs have proliferated the possibility for everyday individuals to make their writing – their truth – public. *Parrhesia* functions in a democratic context and on a global scale today; anyone with internet access has the possibility of addressing a worldwide listenership. However, as in ancient Greece, this democratisation of truth-telling also makes it prone to being abused and problematised.

In the past, truth-telling commonly involved two parties that spoke, listened and reacted to one another face-to-face; the philosopher and the sovereign, the priest and the confessor, the psychoanalyst and the patient (Foucault 2011: 5). Although ancient Greek political *parrhesiastes* addressed the masses with their speech, the technologisation of the practice has eliminated the necessity of direct physical and temporal contact with those addressed by parrhesiastic speech, and made it possible for *parrhesia* to be disseminated to a larger, more dispersed audience. The constant availability of online technologies has reinforced the incitement to tell all about oneself and placed the individual under a public gaze. It has adapted to, and promoted (mutually being shaped by and shaping), the incessant desire and demand to bare oneself in a culture of publicity. The modern confessional mindset that incites individuals to discourse through psy techniques and the rational-economic attitude that guides their behaviour according to cost-benefit calculations (the more exposure of self in public, the more one will be noticed, recognised and known by others), have instituted telling truth about oneself as a way of making oneself visible to others.

Truth-telling has proliferated as a tool for subjectivation in modern society. Some perceive the incessant ways in which SNS-users share minute details about their lives to be narcissistic and conformist. However, becoming assembled with new technologies is opening up new ways of establishing and communicating truth, and interacting with non-human entities that are steeped in ancient historical practices. Competently navigating the modern world requires plugging in to technological devices and finding ways to use them effectively. Speaking truth in assemblage with new technologies shapes the
ways in which people understand themselves and the world they live in. SNSs provide an outlet for truth to be disseminated, as well as a new sphere within which truths and understandings are formed. Circulating with these technologies shapes our experiences of constructing and speaking the truths we hold of the world and the ways in which we employ them to achieve change.

4.0 Parrhesia on a global scale

The internet promises freedom of speech and access to information on a global scale. More people are able to voice their truths, at least in democratised countries, than the small elite of top thinkers and decision-makers who were granted the right to speak parrhesiastically in the past. Technologically mediated parrhesia can connect people from different political, cultural, social and religious contexts. The truths that online parrhesiastes speak have the potential to echo around the globe. This has implications for the ways in which people from different cultures and societies come to understand the world they live in and can imagine different possibilities for their futures. Rather than being subject to externally imposed moral codes, modern individuals seek freedom and liberation as ethical agents.

New technologised forms of speaking truth open up new opportunities for refusing existing norms and shaping counter-cultures. For example, technologisation has brought a means for suppressed minorities to access information and voice truths to individuals in non-democratic parts of the world. Hofheinz (2005) and Rahbani (2010) comment on the way in which the internet provides forums for those who previously had no way of participating in public, never mind global debate, to have a voice (see also Mernissi 2004). People can discuss taboo issues such as sex, domestic violence or the suppression of freedom, and voice their dissatisfaction. Even though government crackdowns and censorship occur, minorities are not backing away from this new opportunity to be heard. Not all blogs and sites are read and noticed equally though. Faris suggests that ‘readership is governed by power laws in the world of Social Media Networks’ (2010: 165), and Watts (2003) highlights that most networks only receive little or no attention; only a small
minority attracts a more extensive readership. Hence, the problematic issue of whose truth gets heard that characterised ancient Greek parrhesiastic practice still is prevalent today.

While access to the internet provides a forum for those excluded from the public sphere to voice their truths, it also contributes to the way in which they construct their understandings of the world. The internet provides them with insights into the more liberal and democratic Western ways of life. This access to an alternative truth may encourage them to question local practices and understandings. Hofheinz describes the internet in the Arab world as a ‘playground for political liberalization’ (2005: 78). He suggests that the socialization that [net-users] experience online, through surfing and choosing as well as through participating in public debate, familiarizes users more than is the case in close-knit traditional communities with the concept that people have different opinions, that one’s own views are not necessarily self-evident to all, that one has to find arguments to justify one’s beliefs, rationalize them, and accept (if grudgingly) that one will not be able to convince everybody (Hofheinz 2005: 95).

Gaining insight into Western liberal ways of life can also have destabilising effects on internet-users in less democratic countries. Hofheinz states that the loss of self-evidence of traditional worldviews and power hierarchies leaves the individual not autonomous, but certainly more exposed and conscious of his individuality, and more distinctly aware of the role of choice in creating social communities, knowledge, and values (2005: 95).

While it may sound as if those from non-democratic parts of the world are looking to the Western world for liberation, it would be wrong to assume that democratic parrhesiastic speech is transplanting Western neo-liberal ideals into the Arab world. On the contrary, while technologically mediated parrhesiastic speech is facilitating the spread of alternative truths that may well be centred around the theme of freedom on a global scale, these truths are applied in culturally, historically, geographically and context-based ways. Suppressed minorities around the world may seek some of the same liberties that their Western counterparts enjoy, specifically freedom of speech, expression and
choice, yet they do not simply imitate and reproduce Western neo-liberal ways of life. They manage their daily lives within the context of their own cultures. The technological mediation of parrhesiastic speech has a part to play in spreading truths and promoting freedom around the globe.

Modern technologisation and globalisation affect the construction and dissemination of truths and the spread of freedom and liberation. Through their circulation with technology, parrhesiastic speakers have access to a wide-reaching and highly informative medium for constructing relations to self and others, and in this way shaping and spreading their truths. Even in non-democratic contexts, people are able to speak out truthfully and to reach a broad global audience with their speech. While more people get to speak, inequalities in who gets heard remain, and perhaps are intensified by the escalating number of online parrhesiastic speakers that exist today, making it almost impossible for all to be heard equally. Whether these practices actually promote social and political change is still a contentious issue. Rahbani (2004) suggests that while women are becoming more involved with technology in the Arab world, particularly by taking on media jobs, dominant discourses of female inferiority remain stable. However, we can see that minority groups in non-democratic countries employ new technologies to access alternative truths, voice their own understandings and beliefs, and fight for their freedom. In this way, they come to shape their relations of self to self and to others and to form their subjectivities as agentic selves as opposed to being subject to externally imposed rules. Speaking truth through new technologies has opened up a new possibility for individuals to free themselves. The examples discussed below will illustrate how at certain historical junctures such possibilities for realising the ongoing human struggle for freedom arise.

Truth and subjectivity are intimately connected in parrhesiastic practices. Two examples of how parrhesiastic speech on SNSs is employed in different geographical locations and political contexts as a means for achieving personal and political change will illustrate that truth-telling still functions as a way for self to relate to self (to care for, yet at the same time bare, self) and to others (to
demand and achieve change). The first example explores the use of Facebook as a daily practice of subjectivation. It shows how a version of the Cynic idea of living a true life by exposing oneself publicly to the point of scandal has been translated into modern Western societies. The second example looks at how SNSs represent tools for speaking out and prompting political change in the Arab Spring uprisings. This will illustrate further how becoming assembled with new technologies provides ways for truth to be spoken and heard, even in restrictive autocratically-ruled societies, and how this modern form of parrhesia is contributing to political change. These examples illustrate that modern individuals around the world are actively engaged in speaking out about themselves and their truths in order to shape their relations to self and others. Thus, political and ethical parrhesia still appear today on a new global scale and have become tied up in technological processes.

4.1 Modern ethical parrhesia: Speaking truth and baring self on Facebook

Speaking truth today as in the past represents a way of relating to self and managing daily life. In societies that have strong expectations of their citizens with regards to their ethical conduct, parrhesia represents an important strategy to regulate and counter conduct. SNSs provide a tool for modern individuals to explore, express and manage their relation to self in mundane, everyday ways in order to shape their ethical conduct and possibly to challenge existing normative patterns of behaving. The origins of this self-engaging activity on SNSs can be located in ancient ethical/philosophical parrhesia in the Socratic sense of caring for self and its Cynic manifestation of truth as a way of life. Ancient parrhesiastic practices have not simply been transferred into modern ways of life. They have been reassembled in new configurations of conditions, reshaped and reimplanted in new ways. By thinking about how people employ material tools like Facebook (and the internet more generally) in processes of self-formation within the broader social and political contexts they exist in, we can see that telling truth persists as a notion according to which we manage our behaviour and order our lives.
Turkle suggests that ‘we are all cyborgs now’ (2011: 152) as we are becoming more and more inseparable from our electronic devices. She states: ‘always on and (now) always with us, we tend the Net and the Net teaches us to need it’ (Turkle 2011: 154). Maintaining a profile on a SNS like Facebook has become integrated into the everyday lives of many modern individuals in technologised societies. Through status updates, photo postings, location check-ins and the ability to “like” content on other people’s profiles and all around the web, users write themselves into virtual existence, and locate their interactions with others in their assemblages with technology. They are incited to reveal their opinions – their personal truths – as authentically, continuously and openly as possible. Facebook’s Statement of Rights and Responsibilities demands that ‘Facebook users provide their real names and information’ and commit to ‘not provid[ing] any false personal information on Facebook, or creat[ing] an account for anyone other than yourself without permission’, not using Facebook if under the age of 13 or a convicted sex offender and keeping ‘contact information accurate and up-to-date’ (Facebook 2012a). The Facebook Principles state that ‘Facebook promotes openness and transparency by giving individuals greater power to share and connect’ (Facebook 2012b). Users are incited to honesty and transparency in the interest of enhanced communication. While early uses of the internet were hailed for their anonymity and the possibilities for liberation

42 Facebook currently reports over 750 million active users (Facebook 2011). A 2011 study by Pew surveyed 2,255 Americans to reveal that 59 percent of those who used the Internet have used an SNS. On any given day, 15 percent of Facebook users update their status, 22 percent comment on someone else’s post or status, 20 percent comment on another user’s photos, 26 percent “like” another user’s content and 10 percent send another user a private message (Wilcox 2011). See also Ginger’s research on The Facebook Project (2012a) – a site that researched and documented uses and applications of Facebook between 2006 and 2009 (Ginger’s data has not been officially published but can be accessed via The Facebook Project’s website (2012b)). In response to the questions “How does Facebook enter into your everyday life? Is Facebook part of your everyday activity; is it part of your routine?” one respondent (Respondent 5) claimed that:

I got [sic] on it [Facebook] a lot, because I mean there’s a lot of downtime here, so it’s just like there, on my laptop, I’m always logged on. I just use it to talk to my friends at other schools, from here too, posting pictures, looking at other people’s pictures (The Facebook Project 2012b).
it provided (Bargh et al. 2002; Shah 2008; Steiner 1993; Turkle 1995), SNS-use promises freedom of speech and expression under the condition of full revelation. The truths spoken on and through SNSs are parrhesiastic as speakers reveal their identities and accept the possibility of being reprimanded for their free speech.

Facebook-users write status updates about what they are doing, thinking and feeling, and read, and comment on, the posts of others. They speak out sincerely and/or critically in order to support their friends. When browsing other websites, Facebook-users are incited to reveal their interests and thoughts to their network of friends by clicking the “Like” button and commenting on content. Mobile services enable Facebook-users to check-in and post pictures from locations and events they are at throughout their day. They can log into their Facebook accounts from their mobile devices and reveal their exact current location to their network of online contacts. They project their social lives and physical appearance onto the screen for others to see and in this way make their daily life accessible to a public audience. Self-forming practices are publicly displayed, shaping what users reveal and how they understand themselves. Using Facebook becomes a tool through which the inside is revealed and the outside if folded in, in endless mutual processes that involve both human and non-human entities. In this way, self is both bared and cared for through the use of online technologies like Facebook.

4.1.1 Truth-telling as technique of self

As daily practices become assembled with new technologies, new techniques of self open up. While Facebook-users bare themselves to their broad audiences, they simultaneously act as entrepreneurs of self who engage with, and work on, themselves constantly. Facebook thus offers its users the possibility to reveal and communicate their truth, and in this way reflect on and shape their understandings of self. The continual exercise of inscribing self on Facebook has become a way of life imbued with the notion of baring self to others. Speaking truth becomes a means of managing relations of self and revealing this process to others. Facebook-users honour ‘the parrhesiastic pact of the subject with
himself’ (Foucault 2010: 65) – the commitment the speaker makes to the truth s/he believes and to tell this truth publicly – by revealing themselves as authentically and consistently as possible, knowing that they risk ridicule and the invasion of their privacy. They weigh up the costs and benefits of their public self-forming activity.

Of course not all status updates are sincere or true. The paradoxical, circular relationship of democracy and *parrhesia*, which meant that they were the conditions for, yet at the same time threatened the existence of one-another, is still evident today. The structural organisation of democracy impeded the possibility for truth-telling to be effective in ancient Greece (Foucault 2011: 62). Democracy gave everyone the right to voice their beliefs in public. The democratic structure was not capable of differentiating between true and untruthful speech. Free speech no longer promoted political change as speakers endeavoured to flatter others and adhere to the consensus (Foucault 2010: 183). Today, people are encouraged to speak about themselves and reveal their relations to self and others in public. People may feel pressured to say and do what others expect of them. Facebook-users may inscribe themselves in ways that make them fit in with what others are doing, which are not entirely honest revelations of their beliefs and opinions. Alternatively, they may divulge themselves in vulgar and transgressive ways, lying or exaggerating in order to stand out and be noticed. However, the way in which Facebook is set up and marketed encourages users to reveal themselves truthfully and keep their profiles as up-to-date as possible.

Speaking truth on Facebook has become a way of life for modern techno-social hybrids. Facebook-users make ethical differentiations to govern their conduct. They are incited to be honest and truthful in shaping their ethical conduct of their own accord. While untruthful speech may still be voiced, psy techniques, which encourage people to confess, have made it possible for ethical differentiation to work through the individual in modern democratic contexts. Truths get told and disseminated today in multifaceted networks of humans, technologies, psy techniques, perceived expectations, global and local
understandings and discourses of self-revelation and self-improvement. Hence, speaking truth has become a way of life supported and encouraged by the use of online technologies like Facebook.

4.1.2 Truth as a way of life

In modern Western societies, citizens come to govern themselves in accordance with the goals and demands of authorities that incite them to be honest, upright and truthful citizens in the service of living a good life. By employing technologies like Facebook as tools for self-formation, individuals take responsibility for shaping their ethical conduct. Psy techniques and economic rationalities have redirected the role of the parrhesiastic advisor to the individual him/herself. Modern individuals internalise social norms, rules and recommendations in the processes of their self-formation, and unfold them again through their ethical conduct. In this way, speaking truth becomes a way of life through which people shape their ethical conduct in the service of governing themselves.

The Cynic dramatisation and inversion of the notion of the true life resonates in modern technologically mediated parrhesia, which is situated in a culture where self is formed, bared to a mass public audience and shared with a global community in simultaneous processes. New technologies like SNSs are useful tools that facilitate self-disclosure and public revelation of intimate and sometimes scandalous details of peoples’ private lives. The ancient Cynic understanding of the true life as one that was lived in public resurfaces in this new context. The Cynics believed in ‘the shaping, the staging of life in its material and everyday reality under the real gaze of ... the greatest possible number of others’ (Foucault 2011: 253). While traditional philosophy abided by, and reinforced, social norms, ‘Cynicism explode[d] the code of propriety’ (Foucault 2011: 255) by living out all drives and desires unsanctioned in the public eye. Moreover, the Cynic actively sought out humiliating situations in order to become resistant, even indifferent, to the opinions of others and in this way to assert his sovereignty and pride (Foucault 2011: 261-2). Cynic behaviour was scandalous yet always based in the concern with living a life of truth.
Modern SNS-users make their private lives public through their online inscriptions. Some form truths and selves that align with the consensus, others revel in scandalous, non-normative behaviour just as the Cynics prided themselves on their bad reputation. SNS-users speak truth to shape their ethical conduct under the scrutiny of a public audience. Truth and subjectivity are shaped and expressed in reflexive cycles that are influenced by the public mediation of this process. Whether to blend in with public expectations or to stand out and scandalise their behaviour, SNS-users commit to a constant public revelation of their daily self-forming practices. Speaking out on SNSs becomes a tool for self-formation that is based around the notions of truthful speech. Individuals today employ virtual *parrhesia* as a way of living a life of truth in public in the service of governing their relations to self and to others. *Parrhesia* thus represents a technique of self that is connected to a mode of subjectivation concerned with living a truthful life.

### 4.2 Modern political parrhesia: Truth-telling and the Arab Spring

Just as ancient Greek parrhesiastic practice bridged politics and philosophy, so is telling truth on Facebook recuperable with a modern political sentiment. Hence, speaking truth on SNSs is not only a means of forming, governing and revealing self, but these processes also become effective in the demand and desire for political change. Political parrhesia in today’s techno-social realities involves the use of new technologies and the transparent nature of modern life. Beaulieu (2010: 145) notes that what Foucault endorsed in his investigation of political *parrhesia* was not the tolerant democracy where everyone can speak, but a provocative and transformative truth-telling (Foucault 2010: 36-7). The potential for *parrhesia* to demand and effect change makes the analysis of the role of truth-telling in modern politics highly relevant. The civil and political uprisings occurring in North Africa and the Middle East since late 2010, known as the Arab Spring revolutions, are one potent example of the contemporary applicability of technologised truth-telling to politics.

In late 2010, latent tensions caused by unemployment, lack of freedom and
undemocratic leadership in Tunisia escalated, prompting a civil uprising. Thousands of protestors collected on the streets to rise up against their oppressive government. Within a month of the revolutions’ commencement, President Ben Ali resigned and fled the country. The success of the Tunisian uprisings triggered protests in other countries in the region. The Egyptian government was overthrown in January 2011. In Syria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and others, protests are ongoing at the time of writing. Civilians are rising up, taking charge of their parrhesiastic abilities, speaking out freely, loudly and sincerely, and putting their lives at risk for the future of their countries and their people. A mode of subjectivity based on the desire to reveal oneself and one’s truths, and in this way to be free, has been translated from its origins in Cynicism into modern lifestyles. In this way, modern individuals employ SNSs as tools for speaking out about themselves and their values and beliefs to demand change, liberation and democracy.

4.2.1 Tunisia

Tunisian activists used SNSs to shape and voice their truthful opinions and have an input into the immediate revolutionary action going on. Lina Ben Mhenni used Facebook and her blog to post photos and videos of protests and government crackdowns in Tunisia. She asserts that ‘there [were] no journalists doing this. And moreover, the official media started to tell lies about what was happening’ (cited in Giglio 2011a). Ben Mhenni used SNSs to disseminate truth which she felt was not being communicated accurately. Ali, another Tunisian activist, similarly collected photos and videos throughout the uprising and posted them on Facebook and Twitter, not only in order to inform others of what was happening, but also in order ‘to feel free – and to say what [he] believe[d]’ (cited in Giglio 2011a). Many Tunisians openly condemned the policies and actions of their government. Hundreds used the Facebook group ‘The people of Tunisia are setting themselves on fire Mr. President’ to speak out and organise real life demonstrations in protest of their government (Kirkpatrick 2011). The Tunisian government reportedly hacked several political protest pages on Facebook and deleted content from them (Madrigal 2011), indicating that it felt threatened by its peoples’ criticism.
Tunisian online *parrhesiastes* were willing to take the risk of punishment from their autocratic governments in the fight for what they believed in; their truth. Ali stated: ‘Yes, I’m worried about being prosecuted by authorities… But I’m ready to sacrifice’ (cited in Giglio 2011a). He spoke out freely and knowingly risked punishment. Ben Mhenni asserted on her blog: ‘You can censor; You can hack; But you can’t stop us from writing !!!!’ (2011). She believed that blogging under her real name rather than a pseudonym set a good example, and showed that she was not afraid of the consequences her speech could have. By speaking out she sought to improve the social and political conditions for others in her country (Giglio 2011a). Her speech was motivated by a sense of duty, yet voiced voluntarily. Ben Mhenni’s and Ali’s feats to speak out and spread their truths in order to effect social and political change represent some very particular examples of how Tunisian activists became assembled with new technologies to question, problematise and refuse existing ways of governing, and to imagine new ways of being, by speaking out sincerely and courageously. A form of *parrhesia* is still employed as a political and ethical tool for provoking change.

### 4.2.2 Egypt

In Egypt, similar parrhesiastic activity occurred. Political activists used social media as early as 2008 to organise demonstrations in what became known as the April 6th Youth Movement (Kligman 2011). Growing discontent with undemocratic social and political conditions led to a civil uprising in January 2011. One activist, Asmaa Mahfouz, took to Facebook to ‘demand the rights of the people’ and call for support in demonstrations (Mahfouz 2011). In videos posted on Facebook she spoke out for herself and her people. She mobilised masses to come together in Tahrir Square in the crucial uprisings in late January 2011. She had the courage to disseminate her truthful, sincere speech in a service to her fellow people while risking severe punishment from her corrupt government.

Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian who worked as a Google executive in Dubai at the time, also used SNSs to speak out and promote change in his country. He created
the Facebook page ‘We are all Khaled Said’\textsuperscript{43}, which sought to encourage Egyptians not to accept the political corruption and social constraints they were living under (Logan 2011). He called upon his fellow citizens to have the courage to speak out, rise up and demand change (Giglio 2011b). Ghonim’s Facebook page was one of the main tools for organising the demonstrations that started the revolt in Egypt on January 25, 2011 (Giglio 2011b). Ghonim’s parrhesiastic activity led to his detainment by Egyptian authorities. He was released upon the overthrow of the government. Ghonim claimed that he used Facebook ‘to reveal the truth that government is trying to hide’ and to get people to ‘know their rights’ (cited in Giglio 2011b). Like Khaled Said and Asmaa Mahfouz, Ghonim employed social media to disseminate truth to the public in order to achieve political action; his speech was critical of authorities, he risked being (and was) punished, and spoke out of a sense of duty to his country and fellow people. Mahfouz and Ghonim provide further examples of the complex circulation between humans, technologies, political discourses, power structures and ways of speaking truth that make \textit{parrhesia} practised and effective today in the context of political counter-conduct.

\textbf{4.2.3 Parrhesia and freedom}

Foucault defined the \textit{parrhesiastes} as a freely-speaking individual not tied down to certain structures and fixtures of what can and cannot be said. He stated:

\textit{Parrhesia} only exists when there is freedom in the enunciation of the truth, freedom of the act by which the subject says the truth, and freedom also of the pact by which the subject speaking binds himself to the statement and enunciation of the truth (Foucault 2010: 66).

He suggested that binding oneself to the truth is the highest exercise of freedom (2010: 67), and that freedom is the precondition for speaking truth. While the concrete political outcomes of the Arab Spring protests in Egypt and Tunisia (as

\textsuperscript{43} Khaled Said was a young Egyptian beaten to death by police for his courage to speak truth in a video he posted online that revealed police corruption in Egypt (Logan 2011). For Said, his parrhesiastic activity ended fatefuly. Ghonim created the group on Facebook to honour Said’s courageous act and to voice his discontent with the social and political conditions in Egypt.
well as in other countries like Libya, Syria, Yemen, etc.) are still unclear\textsuperscript{44}, the self-forming activity of speaking truth surfaced as a way of life, as well as as a political tool for change in these countries. A mindset based on conceptions of revealing self as a means to forming an understanding of self and being free enabled people to speak parrhesiastically and take charge of the ways in which they were being governed. Online technologies provided tools through which people were able to publicise their free speech and disseminate it globally. A short series of interviews performed by the BBC with Egyptians waiting to cast their votes at polling stations on December 14, 2011, revealed that people were hopeful for a change for a better future. Those being interviewed generally suggested that previous elections under the corrupt Mubarak regime were characterised by fear and terror, whereas now they feel a sense of empowerment, freedom and democracy (BBC News 2011b). Current developments render the situation in Egypt still complicated and unresolved, yet Mursi’s bold action to counter the demands of the armed forces itself represents an indicator of parrhesiastic activity in the service of political improvement.

4.2.4 Political parrhesia and technology

While Tunisian and Egyptian activists spoke out as individual parrhesiastes, in assemblage with SNSs their sincere, truthful, risky, critical, dutiful speech reached people beyond spatio-temporal boundaries. They could disseminate their views more quickly to a much larger listenership than without the

\textsuperscript{44} The first free elections in Tunisia held on October 24 2011, voted in the Islamist party Ennahdha who promised to rule Tunisia democratically and fairly (Aljazeera 2011). In Egypt, things are still messy. After President Mubarak’s resignation in February 2011 the military took over rule. Although parliamentary elections in January 2012 voted in the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, it only held legislative powers until presidential elections were held in June 2012 (The New York Times 2012). On June 30, 2012 the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohammed Mursi was finally sworn in as new President of Egypt after a previous failed attempt at democratic elections. Yet by July 8, claims that the second election too was rigged returned the country to political instability. Mursi was ordered to dissolve the existing government yet resisted these calls, creating tension with the armed forces alongside which he was meant to rule (The Associated Press 2012). At the time of writing the issue has not been resolved.
technology. Papic and Noonan (2011) comment on the way in which ‘social media broaden the exposure and increase [the] speed’ at which information can be shared. SNSs made it easier for individual activists to accumulate a following for their cause and to organise public demonstrations. Ghonim’s Facebook group attracted close to 400,000 followers (Giglio 2011b). Rosen (cited in Helft 2010) suggests that ‘Facebook has more power in determining who can speak and who can be heard around the globe than any Supreme Court justice, any king or any president’. This suggests that people around the world are taking hold of their parrhesiastic abilities to speak out for freedom and demand change, and in this way come to govern themselves and shape the social and political structures that govern them. Ghonim (cited in Smith, H. 2011) maintains that ‘without Facebook, without Twitter, without Google, without YouTube, [the revolution in Egypt] would have never happened’. While we have to be careful not to overstate the effect of technology in the development of the uprisings, we can see that being assembled with new technologies opened up new possibilities for action that allow individuals today to govern themselves and others.

4.3 Governing self and others through parrhesiastic speech

A modern mode of subjectivity that is concerned with working on, baring and freeing self by speaking truth has reinvigorated parrhesia as an ethical and political practice on a global scale. In the context of the psychologised, rationalised, transparent techno-social hybridity of modern democratic societies, people are incited to talk about themselves to shape their ethical conduct in accordance with external forms of being governed. Speaking truth today as in the past is thus part of processes of subjectivation. Exploring the daily use of Facebook reveals that modern self-forming activity is executed in public. People become their own parrhesiastic advisors by revealing their truths on SNSs like Facebook, where they fold in, and unfold again, this engagement with themselves and others. SNS-use is thus one example of a modern self-forming activity that is connected to notions of speaking truth. This mode of governing self in the pursuit of freedom and improvement has implications also for the government of others. The use of SNSs to disseminate truth in the
political struggles in Tunisia and Egypt exemplifies how parrhesiastic speech still is employed as a way of shaping the external, political realities of the lives of individuals and their fellow citizens. Parrhesia as a way of life, a life of speaking truth in the service of shaping good ethical conduct, still functions today as a mode of subjectivation.

4.3.1 Parrhesia as a mode of being

The political parrhesia that emerged in ancient Greece was generally limited to an elite, male section of the public. Its paradoxical relationship with democracy enabled some, like Pericles, to come forward as leaders whose speech was listened to over that of others (Foucault 2010: 183-4). As parrhesia developed a psychagogical facet in Hellenistic Greece, it became a philosophical means of governing the soul to act ethically. An intellectual elite of philosophers, including Socrates, came to guide the soul of the governor and in this way shape the political landscape (Foucault 2011: 86). Today, a more general public mass is able to speak parrhesiastically. Those who have access to the internet are able to make their truths public. While not everyone gets heard evenly, today more people around the globe see it as their right and ability to speak truth as a means of shaping, revealing and governing themselves and their ethical conduct, and in this way also having a say in the political realities of their daily lives. The Cynics activated the iteration of parrhesia as a mode of being and sought to make it more relevant to everyday life and available to everyone (Foucault 2011: 239), however in a dramatised and scandalous way (Foucault 2011: 251). This is mirrored today in transgressive expressions of selfhood on SNSs. In assemblage with new technologies like SNSs, modern individuals bare the processes of self-formation and self-development in public. The relation between truth and subjectivity is still prevalent and shows that parrhesia still is used as a political and ethical tool for change.

5.0 Conclusion – SNSs as global public arenas for the dissemination of truth

The truth-subjectivity nexus that Foucault identified in his historical study of parrhesia can be applied to modern times. Exploring the use of Facebook in everyday life, and the involvement of SNSs in the Arab Spring uprisings, reveals
that *parrhesia* has become a global practice of self. The conception that one constantly should confess, reveal and better oneself and present these processes, and the subjectivities they shape, to public audiences, shapes modern parrhesiastic practice. SNSs represent new public arenas within which the possibility to tell truth has been massified and democratised. They are also new spaces within which truths circulate and are taken up in culturally and politically specific ways. This is not to suggest that individuals today are becoming more democratic or politically engaged or more moral and righteous through their involvement with technology. Rather, being assembled with SNSs opens up new, and more varied, opportunities for people to voice and spread their truths in more and more transparent ways. As a daily practice of inscribing self on sites like Facebook, truthful, self-revelatory speech has become a way for the modern entrepreneur-of-self to work on and simultaneously bare him/herself. In the Arab Spring, technologically-mediated parrhesiastic speech challenged power and effected change on a social and political scale. In this way, *parrhesia* still serves as a tool for managing relations of self to self and to others.

Against the backdrop of modern techno-social hybrid worlds, in which individuals talk about themselves publicly as a means of shaping understandings of self and relations to others, truth-telling remains a paradoxical notion. When thoughts are made public without adequate deliberation, free speech can become problematic, offensive and dangerous. Truth is often laid bare in transgressive ways, as a means of drawing attention to oneself while incurring the risk of being ridiculed or reprimanded for overly (and overtly) private revelations of self. The massification of the possibility to make individual beliefs public inevitably also leads to untruthful speech being voiced, just as it did in ancient Athens. When there are more people speaking, the chance for untrue, consensual speech to surface increases. However, the possibility for good parrhesiastic speech also grows. The structural set up of SNSs like Facebook (in line with the confessional, entrepreneurial, self-revelatory mindset of modern societies) incites users to be honest and authentic in their presentation of self. Hence, parrhesiastic speech is encouraged and invited. While not everyone will use SNSs as a form of telling truth to manage
relations of self to self and to others, and in this way to bring about change, SNSs
do represent a tool and site favourable to a parrhesiastic form of expression.

*parrhesia* is a notion which links up the political and the ethical in that it
involves managing personal conduct and interpersonal relations and
challenging power to provoke change. While we cannot simply pick up the
ancient Greek version of *parrhesia* that Foucault described, place it down in
modern culture and re-experience it in the same way, we can see that elements
of the ancient practice have subsisted throughout history. It has undergone
transformations and has been reshaped to fit numerous different contexts. Yet,
the correlation between the problematisation of truth and processes of
subjectivation is still relevant and applicable today. *Parrhesia* has flourished in
modern society and been adopted into other political contexts and locations. Its
ability to adapt when it becomes problematised, and be reincarnated in new
forms, makes the practice ever more powerful and relevant. The fact that we
can still detect it today evidences the importance of speaking truth for
successful government of self and others.
CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSION

1.0 Introduction
This thesis has illuminated how selves are formed in ongoing processes of reflexivity and in complex assemblages with a multitude of actants, techniques, discourses, relations and norms. Specific examples revealed that these processes provide possibilities for, and problematisations of, subjectivation that individuals have to manage and that govern how they shape their everyday conduct. Using a Foucaultian theoretical and methodological approach can make people become aware of some of the intricacies of the often taken-for-granted ways in which they relate to themselves and others and thus open up possibilities for imagining new ways of becoming selves. It is important to emphasise, as this thesis has done, that there is no one way of being self that can be studied and theorised. By folding in and unfolding experiences, norms, injunctions and relations, people navigate the complexities of their lives and shape their actions particular to the context and content of the situations they find themselves in. Analysing these processes and relations can provide insights into how things are done at present, and enable tentative, momentary observations to be made about how society functions at a particular time.

Mundane practices, like using SNSs, represent ways for people to engage with themselves and others in order to form understandings of how to act. Thus, SNS-use is a tool for self-formation. Historical conditions and current social, cultural, political and legal contexts, to certain extents, regulate ways in which people can imagine their selfhood and guide their ethical conduct. Three very particular factors seem to play together in contemporary techno-social hybrid societies, which shape, but do not determine, how people understand themselves. Firstly, modern Western societies are characterised by a psychologisation and rationalisation of everyday life, which affects, and is affected by, how people behave. Furthermore, people today feel incited to make their private lives publicly transparent. Finally, modern technologies promote and enable ways of doing this by providing tools for sharing information with others and in this way relating to them and to oneself. Selves are thus
simultaneously formed and performed in the public eye today. While new technologies extend and reformulate ways of becoming selves, we also need to consider their historical roots, which can be traced back to age-old practices of self-formation. In this way, we can come to appreciate the cultural and temporal specificity, as well as the historical backgrounds, of processes of subjectivation in contemporary society.

Foucault’s extensive work on the genealogy of ethical conduct provides a useful theoretical framework from which to consider how people shape and govern their conduct in modern times. Seeing SNS-use as one particular self-forming activity that individuals engage in today, conceptualises these sites as more than just media for communication. An ANT-based understanding of how assemblages of humans and non-humans affect and shape one another, accounts for the technological nature of modern self-forming activity. Combining these concepts and understandings has provided this thesis with a unique way of addressing modern processes of self-formation. It has applied a Foucaultian genealogical, historicising and problematising approach and some of the key aspects of ANT to approach the theoretical analysis of how people relate to and conduct themselves in modern times. In this way, this thesis enhances a growing body of empirical sociological research on SNS-use, as well as social theoretical literature on identity and self.

Exploring the continual processes of folding the outside in, and again unfolding the inside to the exterior world, that shape the ways in which people form their actions in, and understandings of, the complex worlds they are trying to navigate, sidesteps the limitations of many accounts of selfhood that seek to define who or what self is. Thinking about SNS-use in terms of the possibilities for self-formation it presents to its users is an exploratory endeavour that provides provisional and time- and culture-specific insights. This thesis has uncovered some of the historical roots of the practice in order to reveal that SNS-use is not just a newly developed technology, but stems from older techniques of self. Analysing SNSs as tools for subjectivation provides a new example of how people shape themselves today. Following promising leads that
may bear insights into how people relate to themselves and others has established new connections between themes, without claiming to diagnose our times or produce a generalisable theory about what the modern self is. Accounting for historical roots does not establish a complete history of self-formation, but it explores historical fragments that provide interesting insights to illuminate some of the complexities of how things are done at present. By acknowledging the contingent and provisional nature of the practices, norms and laws that govern our day-to-day lives, and the role the activities and relations we engage in play in shaping our selves, we can become more conscious of how we conduct ourselves and perhaps challenge some of the taken-for-granted notions that we allow ourselves to be governed by.

2.0 Existing work on SNSs and subjectivity

A rapidly growing (largely empirical) body of sociological research on SNS indicates that there is an interest in understanding the ways in which people use these sites and what this means for modern society. Existing research generally conceptualises SNSs as new tools through which people can communicate and interact with one another and share information on a global scale. It largely explores the demographics of users in relation to the different types of services. These studies have produced rich data on types of SNSs and SNS-users. They commonly suggest that biographical factors such as age, gender, race, geographical context and/or personality-type and intentions of individual users account for differences in site-use. Some more specific studies deliberate how SNS-use reconfigures notions like intimacy, privacy and sociality in modern society. Those who hail SNSs as empowering, liberating and equalising tools (Shah 2008; Zhao 2008) suggest that they are producing a generation of individuals that is more engaged, socially-aware, tolerant, globally-oriented, culturally-sensitive and respectful of the environment (Buckingham 2008; Khor and Marsh 2006). Those who perceive them to be alienating, narcissistic and self-revelatory virtual technologies (Buffardi and Campbell 2008; Mendelson and Papacharissi 2011) propose that they contribute to a society characterised by anomie, antisocial behaviour (Turkle
2011; Wilson and Peterson 2002), surveillance (van Mannen 2010) and the erosion of privacy (Schrock 2009).

These studies tend to make normative assertions about how SNS-use affects society and social interaction. They judge and make truth claims about the causes and effects of ways in which people engage with modern technologies and sometimes suggest solutions for the problems they identify, or claim that SNSs themselves are the solution to problems within our society. They conceptualise SNSs as tools for communicating and expressing identity, rendering self a pre-existing social reality that is replicated in the online realm. Even those who suggest that identity is somehow affected by its expression on SNSs (either enhancing or corrupting it) fail to address how using SNSs is one particular practice that shapes very context-specific understandings of selfhood that change and shift constantly.

This a priori conceptualisation of selfhood echoes through the majority of theoretical work on subjectivity. Most theorists conceive of self as a reality that exists, providing variations of reasonings that assert that this entity is stable and able to effect social change, or affected by structural shifts. They propose definitions of self that render it predictable and consistent. The self is seen as the host of a person’s essential qualities, views and behaviours that are to a greater or lesser degree unwavering. Even social constructivist views that acknowledge that people’s interactions with others in different social contexts alter how people express their selfhood at different times, leave the self as a pre-existing (even if differently articulated) entity unquestioned. They determine patterns in how people react to external factors but do not consider how this renders the concept of self as something tangible and real redundant. Dominant ways of conceptualising selfhood seek to account for the role individuals play within greater social processes and to establish a grand narrative that explains what the self is.

What this thesis has tried to highlight is that “self” itself is a fabricated entity that is highly adjustable, fragile and socially and historically contingent. It has
emphasised that we cannot preserve an idealised, eternal self in aspic, we can merely analyse the processes through which it is formed, reformed and understood in different contexts. The way to go about this provisional and experimental endeavour is to find examples of how people engage with themselves and others in day-to-day life, and to explore what this can tell us about some of the understandings, conventions and possibilities that govern their conduct. In this thesis, SNS-use has been considered as one such example. Exploring SNSs as techniques of self has revealed that modern individuals exist in psychologised, rationalised, technologised and publicly-lived contexts in which they flow in and out of various networks, or assemblages, that shape and reshape their self-formation. By looking at the ways in which people use SNSs it has been asserted that people today make their self-forming activity publicly transparent and in this way come to care for, and bare, themselves in simultaneous processes.

3.0 Addressing the research objectives

3.1 SNSs as technological tools for self-formation

Thinking differently about SNSs and self involves acknowledging that these sites are more than media that allow people to communicate with one another and express themselves. This thesis makes an original contribution to existing work on SNSs by conceptualising SNSs as tools for self-formation. This approach opens up new avenues for exploring SNS-use, and draws new connections between important sociological themes that have not been conceptualised in this way before. It provides a more critical way of engaging with SNSs and the ways in which people use them that yields insights into how selves are formed in the context of modern societies. Engaging with the processes that shape possibilities for individuals to become selves by relating to themselves and others, and thus establishing guidelines along which to orient their ethical conduct, sidesteps the impossibility of trying to define what “the self” is. Thinking about SNS-use as one such process of self-formation uncovers some of the historical contingencies and daily practices involved in shaping the modern ethical injunction for individuals to problematise, work on and maximise themselves.
Foucault explored how relations of power, norms and truths, and moral and ethical guidelines are established. Rather than claiming that these concepts prescribe actions, he saw them as formative and contingent. His genealogical line of inquiry shows how historicising particular techniques that govern the conduct of individuals is a useful tool for understanding current practices of self-formation. Foucault's genealogy of ethics established how people come to accept certain rules that guide their conduct (the mode of subjectivation) and apply them to their ethical substance through specific techniques and practices (the self-forming activities), all in the service of an overarching aim or goal (the telos). Foucault suggested that this structure according to which people shape their actions does not change, only the relations that people have to themselves – their ethics – do (1997a: 266). This thesis has applied Foucault's framework for thinking about ethical conduct in the past to contemporary society in order to consider some of the ways in which people govern their conduct today.

Foucault problematised and historicised taken-for-granted practices and understandings. He engaged critically with what others accept as normative and looked to historical occurrences to find clues about how things are done at present, and to illuminate that they have not just come out of nowhere, or always been the same. By uncovering some of the key moments in history when old practices became challenged and were no longer accepted as the normative ways of doing things, Foucault explored the problematising moments when the relations between knowledge, power and ethics shift, and new practices are established and become accepted. Foucault thus established exploring the past as a tool for gaining insights into how present practices and understandings were shaped. He investigated problematic moments and problematised the practices that get taken for granted as normative in order to explore the shifting relations of individuals to themselves and others that generate ways of governing conduct and constituting self. Foucault’s historical and problematising accounts did not aim to evaluate whether old or new practices are more effective or to suggest ways of solving problems. He proposed ways of thinking critically about these processes through which problems arise, and are
addressed, in society and how these notions thus become accepted as normative behaviours.

This thesis has taken up Foucault’s theories and methods and applied them to new empirical examples. It has conceptualised SNSs as self-forming tools. The technological character of SNS-use as a technique of self highlights the interrelation between human and non-human actants in shaping daily conduct in modern techno-social hybrid realities. ANT is particularly useful in accounting for this hybridity. Combining Foucault’s and ANTs approaches provides a strong theoretical basis from which to analyse modern processes of self-formation. By doing so this thesis makes a novel contribution to existing theoretical work on self in general, and to particular studies on identity and the internet and SNSs. Were Foucault alive today, he may have found it interesting himself to study SNS-use as a new example of how people relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct in contemporary society. Developing Foucault’s genealogy of ethics into a theoretical framework for thinking about SNSs as tools for people to establish guidelines for their conduct in contemporary society provides new insights into these technologies.

### 3.2 Summary of findings

#### 3.2.1 Modern ethical conduct

The main research objective of this thesis was to investigate the ways in which modern individuals relate to themselves and others in the service of shaping their ethical conduct and governing themselves. Applying Foucault’s historical account of the genealogy of ethics to contemporary society, and analysing SNS-use as one example through which we can conceptualise modern self-forming practices, revealed that people today fold in dominant discourses and normative expectations through psychologised techniques that translate these external goals and demands of others into individual aspirations. People respond to quantitatively expressed incitements to be their best, maximise their productivity and to enjoy these practices as an end in themselves. They are told how much to weigh, how much money they should make, and how many friends they should have on Facebook in order to be normal and live a satisfied life.
Psychological and rational-economic techniques make people govern themselves by becoming governable at a distance without the use of force.

There is an existing social theoretical body of work that has explored extensively how modern neo-liberal states establish social order and coherence by inciting individuals to act in line with governmental objectives of their own accord (see e.g. Burchell et al. 1991; Dean 1999; 2007; Foucault 2008; Rose 1998; 1999a; 2006). This has not however been brought into connection with how these practices are increasingly becoming technologically mediated and performed in the public sphere. One subsidiary research objective of this thesis sought to understand the public way in which modern practices of self-formation are executed and the role technologies play in these processes. Sociological work has looked at the blurring of boundaries between public and private and the infiltration of technology into daily life. This thesis has pioneered a way of bringing these factors into connection in meaningful ways in order to assert that modern individuals establish ways of shaping and governing their conduct by caring for, and baring, themselves in simultaneous processes.

SNS-use provided one example through which to explore this connection of factors. Analysing how people engage with SNSs revealed that the confessional mindset of modern society has proliferated an attitude of sharing intimate details about oneself with an expanding and increasingly more anonymous public audience. It showed that individuals today weigh up the costs and benefits of this public exposure. Hence, the incitement to become publicly transparent comes to shape the ways in which people relate to themselves and others and establish guidelines according to which they judge how they should act. This thesis found that people turn their self-forming activity into a public act. Folding in the outside and unfolding it to the external world become simultaneous, public processes.

An important point this study has highlighted is that the use of modern technologies facilitates and further promotes this public presentation of self.
However, it is important not to assign too much agency to these technologies. ANT illustrates how human and non-human actants circulate in complex networks in which they come to shape one another. It shows how technology delegates human conduct without being technologically deterministic. SNSs provide tools and spaces for people to speak out about themselves and their beliefs, seek help and advice and demand change. In this way, they represent ways for modern individuals to engage with themselves and others and shape their ethical conduct away from more formal institutions that provided guidance in the past, such as schools, Churches and the psychoanalyst's practice. People use technologies to govern themselves of their own accord in alignment with the demands and expectation of others. They disclose the processes through which they form understandings of themselves to public audiences through the use of technologised practices of self-formation.

3.2.2 SNSs-use as self-forming activity

The third research objective of this thesis was to conceptualise SNSs as particular tools for forming relations of self to self and to others. SNS-use provided a useful way of exemplifying the theoretical study of practices of governing and constructing guidelines for ethical conduct in modern society. It was used both as a case study for establishing that there is an interplay between the psy/rational mindset of modern practices of governing, the incitement to public transparency and the techno-social hybridity of modern life, and as an example to make evident this interconnection.

SNSs provide a new way for people to engage with themselves and thus work on their relations to self and others. Being incited to talk about themselves and their problems in order to improve themselves, people use these sites to expose and express themselves to a public audience. This public self-exposure shapes the ways in which people come to understand and relate to themselves and form relations with others. This study has highlighted how revealing day-to-day conduct in status updates and live photo-postings from events, and “liking” content all around the web, produces an inscription of the SNS-user and his/her conduct. This shows how modern individuals engage with themselves through
the use of these new technologies and at the same time make themselves visible in the public eye. SNSs are tools for them to manage their daily conduct and ensure that they are acting in accordance with the ethical guidelines and moral codes that govern them.

Exploring SNS-use in this study uncovered that users are expected to portray themselves honestly and authentically on these sites. It was found that these norms are sometimes adhered to and sometimes transgressed. Thinking about these compliances and transgressions in terms of the three factors this thesis connects innovatively led to the assertion that generally, modern entrepreneurs of self seek to be their best and act in accordance with the goals and guidelines that they have internalised as their own. However, the freedom of using these sites as self-governing tools also opens up ways of resisting and subverting established norms and guidelines. By speaking out about themselves and their beliefs through these sites, modern individuals have achieved social and political change and demanded freedom and justice, as became evident in the Arab Spring uprisings. Others have employed them in transgressive ways to explore and express unconventional behaviour, shock others and/or stand out from the crowd. It is important to acknowledge the nuanced ways in which the engagement with these sites provides possibilities for shaping subjectivities that in some cases conform to existing norms and expectations, yet in other instances in fact problematise and reinvent them. Acknowledging this nuance is a unique way of conceptualising SNSs without dichotomising between online and offline spaces or seeking to make generalisations about their merits and dangers, as so many existing studies tend to do.

What this thesis has established is that SNSs represent tools which people use to manage the complexities they are faced with in their daily lives and to make sense of the world they live in. They do this through mundane, and sometimes unintentional, processes of engaging with themselves and others and going about their daily conduct. As a technological tool, the internet provides the affordance for users to reach much greater audiences and transgress spatio-temporal limitations in the simultaneous processes in which they shape and
reveal themselves. SNSs are techniques for self-formation in technologised modern society. They are tools through which people form understandings of self and make their self-formation a publicly transparent activity.

3.2.3 The historical examples

Foucault's historical analyses showed that people have used particular techniques of self in the past to form relations to themselves and others. While these practices are all culturally and historically specific, there are continuities and discontinuities between them and modern self-forming activities. The fourth research objective of this thesis sought to historicise examples of practices of self-formation in order to show how they have been translated, relocated and reactivated in modern society. The case studies of SNS-use as self-writing and parrhesiastic practice revealed that SNSs are ethical and political tools for change. Thinking about the historical roots of modern self-forming practices was not sought out as a means of diagnosing what is better or worse about modern times, of finding solutions to contemporary problems, or of suggesting we should return to older ways of doing things. Instead it sought to highlight that modern norms, values, discourses, power relations and techniques of governing reconfigure old practices and reinstate them in new ways. As Foucault showed us, looking to the past can provide clues about how the kinds of practices, processes and problematisations that shape how people manage their lives today were established and accepted as normative. This thesis has applied this approach to SNSs to enhance current conceptualisations of these sites with a historical and theoretical background.

Foucault explored how writing and parrhesia constituted self-forming activities employed by the ancient Greeks and Stoics as part of their work of self on self. He conceptualised them as philosophical, as well as political, tools through which the ancient Greeks established relations of self to self and to others, and in this way managed their own pleasures and roles in society as public figures. In the context of modern psychologised, publicly-mediated and technologised Western societies, these self-forming techniques are available to a much greater mass of the population. Anyone with internet access and skills can use SNSs to
inscribe, confess and speak out about themselves and their desires and demands. While this can lead to problems of transgression, ill-considered speech and the invasion of privacy, no matter how people engage with these sites they represents ways for them to relate to themselves and others, manage their understandings of the world and governing their conduct.

Thinking about the historical contingencies that have come to shape how people use SNSs shows that they are not simply technologies for communication and self-presentation but, moreover, tools for forming understandings of self. This insight makes a novel contribution to existing work in the field. It illuminates that the confessional psychologised attitude of modern individuals and the demand and desire for people to make their lives into enterprises have translated and reconfigured older self-forming practices. Today, people feel incited to talk about themselves in order to improve themselves and to do this in publicly transparent ways. SNSs provide affordances and encouragement to users to make the ways in which they relate to themselves and others visible to public audiences. The interrelation between the psy/rationalisation, public transparency and technologisation of modern life has contributed to translating, relocating and reactivating ancient self-forming activities in modern society. This thesis has provided a case study of how people relate to themselves and others in assemblage with these concepts today that produces a strong theoretical framework from which to consider SNSs as tools for self-formation.

3.3 Reinvigorating the care of self
Modern Cartesian epistemologies separate knowledge as a rational endeavour from the care of self. Truth is seen as universal and discernable through study and exploration. This current framework of thinking differs from that of the Ancient Greeks, who conceptualised truth as a guideline for life that was personally constructed through lengthy activities of engaging with self, others and the world around them. Ancient Greek self-forming activities thus do not work in the same way today as they did thousands of years ago. However, the psychologisation of modern life and Western notions of governing individuals at a distance somewhat reappropriate the responsibility of shaping conduct to the
individual him/herself. While external norms and discourses guide people’s behaviour and establish what is true, modern individuals still relate to themselves and others to navigate the complexities of modern life and form understandings of self in reflexive processes.

Exploring SNS-use as one such activity in this thesis has revealed that using SNSs to speak out about oneself and one's conduct, make public one's thoughts and actions, and receive feedback from others on them, is a means of caring for self in the service of governing conduct and shaping self. It allows people to make the ethical differentiations necessary for discerning good from bad speech and come to see truth as a way of life. This leads them to make their engagement with self publicly transparent. This thesis has established that today, selves are formed and form themselves in simultaneous processes of knowing, caring for and baring themselves. People shape, relate to and reveal themselves in ongoing circular processes. It is thus suggested that the care of self has been reinvigorated and brought into connection with new tools, techniques, relations and knowledges in new assemblages that form modern understandings of self.

4.0 Contribution to knowledge

Thinking about processes of self-formation and the development of guidelines for ethical conduct can bear insights into some of the complexities of modern life. Yet, constant problematisations that shift and change the dynamics between power relations, knowledges and norms, make trying to diagnose the spirit of a time an unfruitful objective. Similarly, seeking to define a general characterisation of what the modern self is disregards that the concept of self itself is an ephemeral, socially-constructed notion. What we can do is consider how these understandings of selfhood become established and problematised by exploring some of the contingent historical processes and day-to-day practices through which people relate to themselves and others. This may alert us to patterns and problems in the concepts and conducts that we take for granted as normative.
SNS-use is becoming more and more embedded in the mundane realities of modern techno-social hybrid lives. It is seen generally as a new means of communicating and sharing information. This thesis revealed that SNSs also represent tools for self-formation. Conceptualising them in this way contributes new insights to a field of research concerned with understanding the role SNSs play in modern society, as well as to social theoretical considerations of the integration of self in society. Bringing these two domains into dialogue establishes new connections between themes and approaches that have not been connected before, and illuminates a more nuanced understanding of the circulation of self, society and the internet that acknowledges the role of self-to-self and self-to-other relations in shaping modern subjectivities.

4.1 Dominant understandings of self

Most sociologists seek to account for social change and human behaviour in terms of the structures that shape them. They commonly make value judgements and normative assertions about these changes and actions, and try to explain them in terms of a grand narrative approach. They establish that society moves through some evolutionary process, which can be documented and explained. Self is seen as part of this process, sometimes more involved in causing change, sometimes less, however usually to a greater or lesser degree predictable and consistent. They thus consider the self as an a priori entity that, even if it can be affected and shaped by modern processes, has a concrete existence that can be explained and theorised. A Foucaultian approach to selfhood sidesteps the task of defining what the self is in favour of exploring processes of self-formation. Engaging with specific practices and historical examples can provide clues about how discourses of true and false, relations of power, and understandings of self, are formed and shaped at different points in history.

This thesis has applied Foucault’s approach to the use of SNSs in order explore how people today relate to themselves and others in the service of governing their conduct. This revealed that selves are formed in public processes in the context of psychologised and rational-economic techno-social hybrid societies.
Rather than trying to characterise what the self that exists within these contexts is, this thesis explored how notions of selfhood are formed, performed and reformed in ongoing relations of reflexivity of self with self and others. It has been suggested that modern technologised processes of self-formation have historical roots as well as contemporary specificities. People today care for, know and show themselves in simultaneous public processes. They are generally not aware that they are forming understandings of self through the matter-of-fact ways in which they use SNSs on a day-to-day basis. This highlights that many self-forming practices are integrated into everyday, taken-for-granted conduct, and that we need to make conscious efforts to unearth them in order to understand their effects. Studies like the one conducted in this thesis establish critical, historically-aware problematisations of how things are done at present to make us aware of how they may be changed in the future.

4.2 Current research on SNSs
Exploring SNSs as tools for self-formation is a new way of conceptualising them that has not been recognised in current literature. While there are studies that establish that people can show, explore, or even shape, their identity on SNSs, they generally leave the self as an existing reality unquestioned and ignore the affordances that constitute SNSs as tools for self-formation. This leaves the role of SNSs in shaping modern relations of self to self and to others, and establishing ethical guidelines to live by, underexplored. This thesis has sought to highlight that beyond being tools for sharing information and communicating with one another, SNSs provide possibilities for subjectivation.

Most current research on SNSs proceeds to judge whether the use of SNSs has positive or negative effects for sociality, intimacy and privacy in modern society. Proceeding to make value judgements diverts from exploring the ways in which people use these sites to navigate their relations to self and others, to manage their privacy and their public appearances, and to guide their social conduct. By exploring the historical contingencies that have shaped SNS-use as a practice of self-formation in terms of the continuation and reconfiguration of self-writing and parrhesia, highlights that SNSs are not just completely new technological
inventions that came out of nowhere but rather have been shaped and re-shaped through their circulation with different times, knowledges and relations. This thesis has acknowledged that technology plays an important role in translating and transforming older practices of self-formation, however does not determine human behaviour. SNSs provide possibilities for action that individuals can take up but can also reformulate. The complex assemblages of humans with non-human actants, discourses and techniques of governing shape social action in ever-changing processes.

5.0 Limitations

This study is limited in that it only looks at two particular ancient self-forming activities, namely self-writing and parrhesia, and locates them in some specific online sites. Thinking about how SNS-use is a way of relating to self in the service of establishing ethical guidelines to live by disregards those who do not use SNSs, whether out of choice or necessity. It would be interesting for future research to explore how non-participation in SNS-use affects the construction of subjectivities. While non-users are sure to employ other techniques of self to form understandings of themselves, they may not do so in the same ways. Rapid advancements in technology develop new and more sophisticated tools that provide new possibilities for subjectivation. The development of artificial intelligence agents expands the roles technologies play in the mediation of modern life (see e.g. Mavridis 2011). Technology is appropriating more and more human conduct and in this way opening up new possibilities for individuals to engage with themselves and shape their subjectivities that have not been conceptualised in this thesis. However, the approach used here to think about the use of technologies in modern techno-social hybrid societies can be applied to future studies on these novel developments.

Conceptualising the genealogy of contemporary ethics is limited by its provisional and tentative nature. It is difficult to suggest patterns about a time and culture that we are ourselves still engaged in. Foucault made only cautious assertions about what he thought the ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, self-forming activity and telos of modern society are. Rather, he looked back at
ancient societies and analysed them from a distance. In this way, he was able to claim more conclusively what the patterns and practices were that guided the ethical conduct of individuals at those historical times. Taking Foucault’s four categories for thinking about ethical conduct in the past, and applying them to modern times, is a useful tool for conceptualising current processes of self-formation and guidelines for governing self and being governed. However, the assertions such an approach makes may be quickly overthrown as societies develop and are problematised, demanding that we constantly reflect and rethink how selves are formed and what this can tell us about modern society.

6.0 Conclusion and reflection

This thesis employed and explored empirical examples of practices of self-formation in order to try to understand some of the ways in which people become selves today. It established that the interplay of three factors impacts on modern processes of self-formation but does not define them. The first is the psychologisation of modern life, which leads people to confess and talk about themselves in order to improve and perfect themselves. This is bound up with the demand and desire people feel today to reveal details of their private lives to a public audience. This makes modern processes of shaping self simultaneously into transparent public performances. The technologisation of day-to-day actions and interactions facilitates and encourages this notion of public transparency. It also has massified practices of self-formation and contributed to the reinvigoration of the care of self alongside knowing and showing self. The use of SNSs represents one particular activity that individuals engage in to manage themselves and the complexities of the world they live in. This thesis has analysed how people engage with these sites in order to gain insights into how individuals understand themselves in contemporary societies.

Foucault’s work provides a useful tool for contemporary thinkers to analyse the ways in which people relate to themselves and others in the service of establishing guidelines for governing their conduct. This thesis has applied Foucault’s methodological approach and his extensive historical investigations to novel examples as a way of drawing new connections between themes that
have been explored in current social theoretical literature and to establish new ideas about how we can come to understand ourselves. This opened up ways of becoming more aware of the daily practices, discourses and power relations that we are involved in and may take for granted. It encourages us to think consciously about how our daily practices affect our relations to self and to others. Applying Foucault's tools enables us to approach research questions in critical and problematising ways that do not take anything for granted.

While this analysis can only provide provisional, time- and context-specific insights into how we can connect themes in new ways and think differently about some of the specific regimes of practices that we are engaged in in our day-to-day lives, becoming conscious of them enables us to engage with them more critically. Our understandings may be overthrown as new problematisations and possibilities arise, and we may need to adapt our understandings of the conditions and possibilities for action that are open to us. However, becoming conscious of the contingency of what we do, and appropriating ways of thinking about them critically, gives us the opportunity of becoming more active in shaping our own conduct and resisting normative ways of being if need be. It has been the purpose of this thesis to make readers aware of these processes and possibilities and to enhance current work on the use of SNSs and the conceptualisation of self in modern societies.

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