<p style="text-align:center">The Postmodern Ritual:
Transcript</p>

Intro:

Evan: You're tuned into The Postmodern Ritual: A podcast by Lia, Spencer, Ciara, Jasmine, Alynn, and, me, Evan.

We will be examining the existential implications faced when using social media. Through a series of conversations, we will investigate the individual's personal and public experiences using platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Our involvement as users on these platforms enables us to create and share content, to be "in the hold (Fantasy in the Hold, 91), of the network.

We live in the New Media Age, the Age of Information, the Digital Age, the Age of Memes…

Social media is interlaced in our everyday lives. We use online networks to communicate, connect, and channel ourselves in the ways we choose. An online identity, being an actively constructed presentation of oneself, holds significant social value. Through constructing an online identity, we gain access to a wider scope of social networks. A unique phenomenon of our time is the conception and perception of the online-self. The onset of this digital awareness provides a new set of challenges for the individual, confronting one's existential capacities. The decision to exist online in the face of users, profiles, and algorithms is riddled with existential questions.

Individual meaning is at the forefront of existentialism. Exerting personal freedom allows for an individual to create a meaningful life. Living authentically amidst the absurdity is an isolating pursuit – a waltz, between the self and the social environment.

By participating in the implosive mosaic of social media, we are subconsciously exercising the characteristics of ritual. That is, we perform in the repetitive sequence of actions, gestures and words. Online, consider this as posting, liking, creating and editing.

➢   Mark Zuckerberg - "Was Human" Audio Clip

Evan: Nothing like a good meme.

Personal

Evan: Here with me is Lia, I'm going to ask her a couple questions about the personal relationship we have with social media.

How does personal value relate to social media?

Lia: I think social media means different things to different people; a celebrity, a preteen girl, a twenty something entrepreneur (…)

Evan: Your grandmother?

Lia: (…) and your grandmother, they are all going to have substantially different relationships to it. Our person experience with social media is largely a reflection of the way we approach it. So different generations, upbringings, personalities and social and economic statuses, those will all intersect with

social media at different angles. So when it comes to personal value, we have to look at how each individual uses and perceives it.

Evan: But?

Lia: Yeah that said, I think it is safe to say that a good chunk of people will describe their relation to social media as more of a love/hate relationship. There will be total social media addicts, and those opposed to it altogether; but the rest of us will typically fall somewhere in between the two extremes of the spectrum, which is where we see more of a fluctuation between love and hate. On one hand, social media can be used a form of self expression -- a person's lens to the world, it could act as a mediator between that individual and their social circles. And it has ample potential as a platform for art and DIY culture to flourish.

On the other hand, its dark side can reveal shallow interactions, phony personas and I think, the perpetuation of divisiveness between ideologies. It can be time consuming and even addicting. So I would say the value can vary; between people and within the daily rhythms of the user themselves.

Evan: Is it important to remain true to yourself... online?

Lia: The relationship someone has with themselves offline is mirrored in their online identity. However apparent this may be to the individual, the way in which we communicate to ourselves is projected into the online world. So, in order to remain genuine, it must first emerge from the offline self.

Evan: But how do I know if I'm being true to myself?

Lia: Well, Hannah Arendt would argue the act of thinking is a dialectical process. An inner dialogue of "questioning and answering" (Arendt, 408) where an individual has the ability to actualize truth for themselves. The ability to decide what is right or what is wrong for oneself becomes existentially liberating.

The same applies to an individual's relationship with social media, where their internal dialogue determines how consistent they are with themselves. To thrive in the networks of social media, an individual must be internally harmonious.

If Arendt had been around during the age of social media, she might say that its "better to be at odds with..." the online world "...than to be at odds with the only one you are forced to live together with when you" have signed offline. (Arendt 410)

If the duality of self, "makes thinking a true activity" (Arendt, 408), it is this "soundless dialogue" (Arendt, 414) that manifests into our online presentation. Being signed into social media, is to be signed into existentialism.

Public

Evan: We will be moving from the personal to the public. From this perspective how do we existentially experience social media. In discussion we have Alynn and Jasmine.

Alynn: Paul Gilllin says "Transparency may be the most disruptive and far-reaching innovation to come out of social media."

I think this is interesting because I find that social media can be extremely transparent, but at the same time it can be very deceiving in the sense that, in politics specifically, the truth isn't always present on social media platforms.

Jasmine: Yeah, totally, I mean it seems like a lot of the time, especially in the modern world today, it's hard to distinguish between what's real news and what's quote on quote "fake news."

Even with big stories like the Las Vegas massacre that happened back in October of this year, Facebook was having issues with weeding out fake news through their newsfeed and, you know, this caused a huge problem because now an innocent man's picture was circulating social media with the false accusation that he was behind the shooting.

Alynn: Well, I can't imagine the impact this must have had on this man's life. I mean at what point does the public's truth become an individual's truth? Fake news doesn't require "thinking" ...in Arendt's sense of the word… She describes thinking as a solitary individual activity. When she was writing about Adolf Eichmann and his role in transporting European Jews during the Holocaust, she believed that Eichmann's true crime was his inability to think… That he was non-thinking… And, not to the same extremes, but the same concept can be kind of applied here, where the consequences of other people's unthinking behaviour could have quite possibly led to this man's life being ruined, either through harassment or jail.

Jasmine: It's obviously clear that there are potentially devastating consequences associated with fake news and misinformation in general. At what point does fiction become reality? How can something that is so intangible and so fake have such real consequences on a human being? These are the questions that a lot of people seem to miss or just even forget about when they're surfing the internet because for the most part and for most people, social media outlets like Facebook or Twitter are seen as a pass time.

Another thing I want to touch on, just to kind of relate it all back, is the topic of racism... as an example, a video that was surfacing a while back of one of Donald Trump's campaigns that was supposedly inciting hatred against people of colour, and you know, there was video flashbacks of police beatings and racist behaviour from back in the day, very powerful stuff and it portrayed Trump in a bad light. But it turned out that it was an edited video that was kind of made to seem more hateful than his actual speech was. I couldn't help but think of how this would have helped him gain and lose supporters… Specifically, gaining more prejudiced followers who now believe that Trump is on their side, it's like adding more fuel to the fire.

Alynn: Yeah, I hear you, I mean it's creating this echo chamber where hate supports hate. Imagine being in a room full of people who *only* share the same beliefs as you. It leaves no room for open-mindedness and no room for change. And this can happen when the people on your social media platforms share the same views as you... in this sense, your opinions are constantly being reinforced.

And just to bring this back, I do want to explore the other side of Paul Gillin's quote…

As I mentioned earlier, social media can also be extremely transparent if we're looking at movements that started on these platforms. For example, Twitter led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement when George Zimmerman was found not guilty for the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. It's obviously no doubt that Black Lives Matter had an impact on social and political issues surrounding police brutality involving African American citizens. Another social movement that was sparked on social media is known as #MeToo. A famous celebrity spoke up and encouraged women to use the hashtag (#MeToo) as a way to show that they have been impacted by sexual assault.

Jasmine: So, these are just a couple of examples of the positive impact that social media can have on society. Not only does it give us a voice, but it also allows us to share our truths and to become unified in our experiences. In the past, these issues have been kind of just swept under the rug and shrugged off but now that we have such a powerful and accessible tool which is available to almost everyone, injustice is finally being addressed.

Alynn: When we're able to examine the injustice within our world, we are able to bring about much-needed change.

We hope this discussion can bring to light the issues surrounding politics, and social media, especially when it comes to transparency and truth.

Philosophical:

Evan: Our interactions within social media has existential implications both personal and public. To further our understanding with these existential ties, we will hear from Ciara.

Ciara: To what degree do these external factors of social media affect our view of ourselves and reality?

We see other people on social media websites, posting photos of themselves or posing in the photos. Some of these photographs are of models, or of movie stars, or some of them of our friends. I think that all of these affect the view of ourselves and reality. This is because when we see these photos of other people, depending on what the photo looks like and the subject of the photo, it can definitely alter our perspective of what we think.

It all depends on how we use social media, how we choose to use it. Some people show off pictures of themselves and some people share photos of their cats; people who want attention will use social media to get this attention by sharing the photos that they know will accumulate some sort of response. It's not so much how social media is affecting our behaviour, but how people use social media that really makes the difference here.

I think that most of us know what's going on – we're not oblivious to anything here. We know that social media has the ability to affect us, if that's what we choose to use it for. Some people post pictures of themselves because they love that feeling they get when people like or comment on that picture, and maybe that gives them a source of confidence in themselves. Other people post pictures of their pets or their experiences or their travels, simply for the fun of sharing the photo with their friends, or even just

for their own amusement. I think that social media posts can reinforce our view of ourselves; if what we're looking for is that positive, or even that negative energy, fueling our own positive or negative opinions of ourselves.

Are we posting because of our own free will, just because we can, or are people posting because we want or even any sort of response from other people – any sort of confirmation. Are we posting just because we want to or are we posting because there's something we need to get out of this attention from other people? I think that we have the freedom, we have the free will, we have the ability to think for ourselves, we have the ability to come up with our opinions based on our own perspective about our selves and our own reality. Social media does greatly influence those opinions that we have.

Evan: Up next, we will be hearing from Spencer who will be discussing the existential notion of free will in relation to social media.

Spencer: I recently read a great book called *Behave* which is written by Dr. Robert Sapolsky. It was one of those books that really changes your perspective and allows you to open your mind to something that was previously "un-tapped".

The main theme in the book is the notion that our behaviour is directly correlated with our biology and external factors. In respect to our audio project, my focus has been on the external factors -- specifically social media.

Every day we see cliché's coming to life in the sense that someone was born into a certain situation, and their future actions have been somewhat predictable based on that situation. I think almost everyone here can think of some anecdotal evidence to support this theory. We all know someone that was brought up a certain way or that had different experiences than ourselves and it appears that this has led to a deviation between our behaviour and theirs.

So, what about social media? For many of us it has a significant influence on our lives. According to WorldStream, in 2017 75% of male internet users and 83% of female internet users are on Facebook. This is further exacerbated in North America in which 63% of the population has a Facebook account compared to the global average of 23%.

As we become more obsessed with social media it is likely that it will continue to influence our actions and our behaviour. The scary part in my opinion; to what degree do these external factors influence our perspective of ourselves and our reality?

I believe that the connection with others through social media platforms has the ability to change our perspective of both ourselves and our reality. This is exemplified by the existence of various echo chambers created on social media platforms as well as positive or negative reinforcement received by our actions online. Take a picture this way and you get a like, take a picture that way and someone will say a negative comment. At what point does this begin to bleed into our everyday lives, disconnected from social media? At what point does this "appropriate behaviour" enforced online begin to change our behaviour in day-to-day interactions with others? Also, are we conscience of these adjustments to our behaviour? If not, is this limiting the degree to which free-will plays a role in our decision making?

The key question that has been on my mind based on this information is *do we put our concept of free-will at risk by increasing our connection to these exogenous factors – such as social media*?

Conclusion:

Evan: Social media has found its way into our lives. Redefining our social atmosphere, it is in this air that existentialism breathes, now we all partake in the post-modern ritual.

FIN