**The rise of the online social world**

——Exploring “social” media with the concept of “self”

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**Key points:**

　　This article uses the concept of "self" in philosophical research to explore the transformation of human communication practice by social media. By asking a hypothetical question - "What does it mean to lose your mobile phone?", the article finds that mobile phones have eliminated the binary distinction between virtual and reality since the 1970s, creating an "online social world" that is updated at any time and densely connected, becoming a new scene that dominates human communication practice. In the online social world, the "self" continuously seeks to interact with others on the one hand, and actively manifests itself on the other hand. The root cause is that the "self" is an experience subject that needs to continuously fill in experience to obtain online persistence. However, the interaction between self and others in the online social world is often full of "content" of desire, which undermines the important significance of the "form" of social interaction to human beings.

**Keywords:**

　　Online social world/self/mobile phone/social media

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**Introduction: What does it mean to lose your mobile phone?**

　　On June 30, 1945, the delivery workers of eight major newspapers in New York City launched a strike that lasted more than two weeks, leaving citizens with almost no newspapers to read. Bernard Berelson used this to write a famous article, What 'missing the newspaper' means? ①, which revealed readers' "use and satisfaction" of newspapers. Nowadays, mobile phones have become the basic environment of life, and everyone is immersed in them. It is difficult to have a holistic moment of "losing the mobile phone" to observe its meaning to people. However, precisely because of this, the problem has become more urgent, because in the habit of not noticing, we may have lost the ability to reflect. Only in some accidental moments - such as when the mobile phone is lost, the power is urgent, or the signal is scarce, people passively think about "what it means to lose the mobile phone."

　　There are many common answers to this hypothetical question based on daily experience, such as "missed the call", "missed the news" or "missed friends' updates". This variety of answers shows how deeply mobile phones are embedded in daily life. In addition, there are some rather exaggerated statements on the Internet, such as "losing a mobile phone is like losing the whole world"; ② A friend of the author was unable to use social media for several days. The first thing he did when he got his phone back was to check his "friend circle" and then posted a dynamic, describing his feeling of "feeling like a world away". ③

　　The latter generalization is also relatable to many people, and actually contains important clues to understanding mobile phones and social media. Why does the loss of a mobile phone make people feel like they have lost the "world"? Aren't people without mobile phones living in this world? Does the saying "as if in a different world" mean that there are two different "worlds"? If so, what are the differences between them? What is the significance of each to human beings?

　　This series of questions involves the fundamental issues of mobile phones, communication and human existence. As we all know, mobile phones are a medium that contemporary people cannot live without for a moment; among them, social media online is a common norm - not only can you talk instantly, see other people's dynamics, but you can also know the news in the first place. For this phenomenon, the academic community has probably formed three different explanations: the first is common sense, believing that mobile phones meet various needs, just like citizens reading newspapers. But the social context has long changed, and the degree of involvement of newspapers and mobile phones in life is completely different. The understanding of them should not be limited to the functionalist demand theory. The second is the philosophy of autonomous technology. This theory believes that technology has reversed its relationship with humans. People have become an appendage of technology and have to follow the logical actions of mobile phones. ④ This path tends to be epistemological speculation, which is inspiring but not enough. The third is philosophical ontology, pointing to the "existence" of technology and people, such as Sun Wei's research on WeChat, "WeChat is a mobile scene that you carry with you. Through the repetitive practice of daily life, it continuously constructs places and provides a sense of place in the era of globalization. People realize their existence in the world through multiple node subjects." ⑤This path is based on daily experience and elevates it to existential phenomenology, which helps to explain the overall change in human communication methods caused by mobile phones, but it has not yet explained why people "exist in the world" in a "always online" way.

　　This article follows the third path, attempting to use "self" as the narrative subject to explore the overall transformation of social media on human communication practices. The specific questions of the study are: How do mobile phones create a new communication scene? What are the characteristics of this new scene? How does the self engage in communication in the new scene? A further question is, why is the self immersed in this communication practice and cannot extricate itself? What impact does it have on interpersonal relationships? In fact, many studies have involved the relationship between new media and the self. For example, Sherry Turkle's series of studies pointed out that computers were once regarded as "the second self" experience, and many virtual games provided "multiple aspects of the self"; but these terms have gradually become outdated. With the rise of mobile phones online and social media, a new "tethered self" has emerged. ⑥ This series of conceptual names is quite revealing and describes the impact of technology on human self. The other is the numerous studies that use quantitative methods to explore “self-presentation”. For example, Natalya Bazarova & Yoon Hyung Choi extended the five functions of self-disclosure based on traditional society—social identification, self-expression, relationship development, identity clarification, and social control—to social networks, explaining the reasons for various types of self-disclosure on social media. ⑦ These two types of studies provide important clues for understanding social media and the self, but the former tends to describe phenomena, while the latter is still a fragmentary display of psychology within the scope of functionalism.

　　Unlike them, the concept of self in this article is philosophical. It not only focuses on online communication practices, but also tries to explain why people are so immersed in such online communication from an empirical perspective. This involves the philosophy of self-consciousness or the persistence of the self. Objectively speaking, the self is a very complex concept. Early philosophical pursuits focused on the epistemology of the self; subsequently, psychology, sociology, brain science, etc. also touched on the issue of the self. However, in the view of Charles Taylor, psychological issues are mostly related to self-image, which is "a fact about people. They care about their image to meet certain standards guided by society. However, this is not regarded as something essential to human personality." What social science studies is "actually the all-too-human weakness of the words 'self' and image in the daily sense." ⑧ As far as this article is concerned, the self here is a synthesis of ontology, interactionism, and spiritual philosophy, which may be able to slightly avoid Taylor's criticism of psychological self-research-"this sense of self is also insufficient." ⑨

**1. “Online Social World”**

　　"Losing your phone is like losing the whole world." The "world" in this sentence can be replaced by the term "social world." This term comes from the Austrian phenomenologist Alfred Schutz, and refers to the world we live in. "There is a social world, just as we accept it as ordinary people or as we are accustomed to it when doing sociological research." ⑩ The social world is composed of the communication practices of various people. "The concept of the world must be based on the concepts of 'everyone' and 'others'." (11) In addition to the world of predecessors and the world of successors, the social world at the synchronic level is mainly the "surrounding world" and the "common world." The main objects of our communication come from these two. "If we call the others in the surrounding world neighbors and the others in the common world contemporaries, then we can say that I, living with my neighbors, directly experience them and their experiences, but I do not directly grasp the experiences of my contemporaries who live with me." Despite this, we can still "observe and act" on our contemporaries through mediation. (12)

　　The social world, as a scene of human interaction, is not a constant thing. With the rise of the Internet, mobile phones and social media, the social world has gradually differentiated and even moved as a whole, forming a new "online social world" that dominates human interaction and the generation of meaning.

　　Its historical process is as follows. For a long time, human beings mainly lived in a monistic world, and their interactions were regulated by continuous reality, with occasional moments of myth, illusion or dream. What challenged the monistic social world was the birth of the "virtual" scene. As a concept, "the word virtual is ancient and marginal". It has been used in religious contexts since the 15th century and did not acquire its modern meaning until the 1970s. "In its modern form, virtuality is generally related to the rise of computer networks, especially the rise of the Internet." Nelson (Ted Nelson) gave virtuality a key modern meaning, giving it "the two meanings of 'perceptual structure and feeling' and 'relative to reality'"; since the 1970s, the term "artificial reality" has been popular in the computer circle; in the 1980s, Jaron Lanier first proposed the term "virtual reality", referring to "a three-dimensional environment called 'simulation'." (13) In the following decades, computers and the Internet created a new space - which can be called "cyberspace", "cyberspace" or "virtual space", "implying a computer-generated dimension where we move information around and find ways around data. Cyberspace represents a reproduced or artificial world, a world composed of the information generated by our systems and the information we feed back into the systems." (14) This description shows that the social world has since been divided into two parallel parts, one is real and the other is virtual, and there is a clear boundary between the two worlds. People surf, play games and communicate online, and work, shop or live offline, without disturbing each other and running in parallel. The sense of escape from reality brought by virtual space once made humans cheer and cheer, so much so that Jean-Louis Roy said: "There has never been anything in history that can be compared with the birth of the virtual world. It is both a copy of the real world and can overlap with it." As a "reality", the virtual world also creates a new self: "This virtual world is not a copy or projection of the real world, but exists as a special entity... We are no longer just ourselves. From now on, everyone has a new self stored in databases around the world and in the statistical category of terminology, becoming part of the permanent index of human events." (15)

　　However, "cyberspace squeezes out physical space." (16) With the popularization of the Internet, virtual space gradually covers more and more social life. People no longer need to meet, read paper news, go to banks or go shopping. These virtual tentacles extend widely to matters that originally belonged to the real world, compressing the offline social world. Meyrowitz (Joshua Meyrowitz) said: "The increasingly homogenized information network formed by electronic media provides individuals with a relatively complete social perspective and a wider field to detect their own destiny." (17) As a result, the social world shifts online, and the interaction between self and others undergoes a huge change accordingly. As Schutz said: "Let us imagine that there is a face-to-face conversation, which is gradually replaced by a telephone conversation, then by letters, and finally by messages conveyed by a third party, etc. From this, we can see the process of gradually shifting from the surrounding world to the common world situation." Schutz further conceptualized this as a change in "contact situation" (18). (19)

　　The rise of mobile phones and social media has dealt the final blow to the binary discourse of virtuality/reality, making it lose its basic explanatory power. As a technology, mobile phones are available anytime and anywhere; at the same time, they are covered with a wide range of functions - the phrase "you can go out with just a mobile phone" can be seen as a clue. As a result, a complex intersection between virtuality and reality has emerged, or more accurately, virtuality has broken the boundary between it and reality and has fully intervened in reality. This situation has intensified, causing the distinction between virtuality and reality to gradually decline, to the point that "the words 'virtual' and 'virtual' are almost losing the last fragments of their historical meaning and starting anew." (20)

　　In this way, the social world has achieved a holistic migration from the real world to the online world. It does not mean that the real world no longer exists, but that people have begun to focus their interactions on the online world, and the online world has become the main scene of life, as described by Sherry Turkle:

　　For much of the past, our everyday language about technology assumed a life that was both on and off the screen, a separate world that could be entered and exited at any time. But some of today's idioms reveal a new position of the subject, such as when I say "I'll be on the phone," which means, "You can reach me, my phone is on, and I will have a (social) presence through my phone." (21)

　　As a result, a new scene of human interaction dominated by mobile phones and social media has emerged. Both "neighbors" in the surrounding world and "contemporaries" in the common world have begun to appear in the online social world. Different from the traditional offline social world, the online social world presents a new rhythm and relationship density.

**2. Update at any time and intensive relationship**

　　The online social world is built on the infrastructure of mobile phones, and users have to follow the overall logic of technology. In terms of time, mobile phones are an instant technology; in terms of space, mobile phones highly condense human life scenes.

　　In the history of the development of modern technology, time compression has always been the core logic. For the media, it is to eliminate any delay in information transmission until true synchronization is achieved. Helga Nowotny traced back: "In today's world, synchronization equipment is set up everywhere. People can transmit, exchange and generate world news, stock market information, financial transactions and TV pictures at any time through communication satellites. These spectacular simultaneous mirrors first appeared at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries." (22) The history of simultaneous technology is clear at a glance. First, the telegraph, then radio, television, telephone, computer, until the mobile phone bridged the last time gap. "Mobile phones are heating up rapidly and drying up the puddles of delayed transmission in the past. Mobile phones have penetrated into our society, and the relationship between directness and media has become a fact today." (23)

　　Social media embedded in mobile phones is controlled by the logic of immediacy, and its own design encourages this principle. Social media is full of various "protocols". "A protocol is a set of technical rules, including how it is programmed and how they are dominated or managed by their owners, as well as how to obtain its availability. The management protocol provides a set of instructions that users must be forced to dive into if they want to participate in the interaction through the medium." (24) As a media, instant news on social platforms is no longer surprising. Continuous reports are pushed, forwarded and commented on at the first time, and its process is different from television. "Compared to the programmed TV stream, the Twitter stream is defined as an unrestricted, unedited, instant, short, short-lived live stream of reactions - like real-time opinions and intuitions flowing from a tap." (25) As a social tool, mobile phones have long been proven to be a technology that can "eternally connect", "permanently online" or "instant connectivity" (26). The social platforms that reside on them also have this immediacy.

　　From a human perspective, the immediacy of technology brings the possibility of “anytime” use, that is, the possibility of being free from time and space constraints. “Cyberspace feels like being transported in a frictionless, timeless medium. There is no jumping around because everything is there. If it is not real, it is self-evident, always at your fingertips.” (27) At the same time, the word “anytime” is more in line with the portability of mobile phones as mobile media. Since you can always be online and not restricted by space, you can chat, post updates, like, forward news, comment on others and other interactions at any time. Paul Levinson said: "All new media are so convenient, but posting and reading on Twitter are extremely simple, almost as smooth as speaking, and more subject to impulse, because tweets are silent, others can't hear them, and there is no inhibition on what you want to say." (28) Van Dyke also pointed out: "Connecting people, things and ideas is also the principle behind the controversial like button, which allows users to express their instant thoughts and share them." (29) Therefore, from a temporal perspective, the online social world has become a world that is updated at any time.

　　In terms of space, the traditional social world is dispersed, while the online social world is highly concentrated. Therefore, the density of interpersonal relationships contained in the two is qualitatively different. The offline social world is a space where relationships change less. People mostly interact with acquaintances in life. The number and type of these people will not change much even in their lifetime. "Traditional group relationships are formed based on long-term shared locations and life experiences." (30) In cities, the phenomenon may be different. People's range of activities has expanded, and they may see enough "strangers" every day. At least in a limited physical space, the density of people has increased significantly. However, strangers rarely interact and establish long-term connections. Instead, they are more in a state of "avoiding communication." (31) The emergence of mass media has greatly expanded people's interactions, allowing us to know more of our contemporaries, but these people are often out of reach and do not appear in individuals' daily lives. Different from these scenes, the online social world formed by mobile phones and social media is a space with highly compressed relationships, where all kinds of people gather, including family, friends, familiar friends, work partners, people you meet by chance, people you have never met but know, and complete strangers. These people are concentrated in a mobile phone, gathering from all directions to form a high-density communication space. With the help of technology, people can push news, post comments, chat or present themselves anytime and anywhere, and the result is that the slow, fixed and even static communication in the past has become real-time, intensive and public interaction.

**3. Seeking the Other**

　　Although the new scene of the online social world is formed by the participation of every online individual, it is prior to the individual - "given there in advance", which is a basic fact of sociology. Schutz said: "First of all, it is given as the domain of 'you' and our domain... Furthermore, for the real existence of the 'I' under my meaning, and even for his individual 'experienced by himself', the authenticity of 'you' and the community is given in advance." (32) Therefore, the online social world is a place where individuals cannot escape.

　　In this ever-changing world, the contact situations between the self and others have changed dramatically, but the principle of interaction has not changed. The self still needs others to be generated. "To live in the world is to live with others and to live for others. Our daily actions are all directed towards others." (33) Not just others in the individual sense, "we must also be members of a community, a community of attitudes that controls everyone's attitudes, otherwise we cannot be ourselves. We must have common attitudes, otherwise we cannot enjoy rights." Furthermore, when the community expands to a scope that is difficult for us to directly reach - such as the country and the world, we need the help of journalism. "The extreme importance of the media used by journalism is obvious at a glance, because it reports various situations, enabling people to understand the attitudes and experiences of others." (34)

　　In terms of the media's change in the objects of communication, "the other" has become "the mediated generalized other". This concept comes from the media situation in the 1990s described by Merowitz, "including standards, values ​​and beliefs from outside the traditional group scene, so it presents a new concept that people can use to observe their own behavior and identity. The new mediated generalized other bypasses face-to-face communication in the family and community and is shared by millions of other people." (35) Today, the "mediated generalized other" is densely gathered in the online social world, and its experience is updated at any time, becoming the main object of self-communication.

　　From an ontological perspective, "the self is a subject, and the subject is composed of the ability to experience. He must experience a certain experience in order to exist." (36) George Mead also said: "The self, as a self that can become its own object, is essentially a social structure and is produced by social experience"; and social experience is the product of interaction, "the individual experiences his self itself, not directly, but from the specific perspective of other members of the same social group, or from the general perspective of the entire social group to which he belongs." (37)

　　In the past, these experiences mainly took place in the offline social world, or in the world divided into reality and virtuality; now, the main experiences have shifted to the online social world, a place of experience that is updated in real time and formed by different others. At present, if a person does not want to lose or just maintain a low level of self-awareness, then he must continue to seek others in the online social world. This phenomenon has led to "perpetual contact" (38), constantly refreshing and paying attention to various behaviors of others.

　　Academics have many different explanations for these behaviors of being online all the time and observing other people's dynamics. For example, Van Dyke pointed out: "For young people, it is society that pushes them to stay connected. Because if they are not on Facebook, it means that they are not invited to parties and are not updated on events. In short, it means that they are probably disconnected from attractive and dynamic public life." (39) Peter Vorderer and others use "online vigilance" as the psychological characteristic of being permanently online. This psychological state includes three aspects: prominence, responsiveness, and monitoring. Among them, "prominence is that we pay attention to the online environment anytime and anywhere"; "responsiveness is the degree of immediate response to the dynamics of mobile phone reality and online communication"; "monitoring is the continuous observation of the digital environment of one's own cognition." (40) These studies explain the need for online from a psychological perspective, but if we look further, these psychological states involve existential problems, that is, the self is afraid of losing a continuous experience ability.

　　Nowadays, if a person does not want to lose or just maintain a lower sense of self, then he must constantly seek others in the online social world. This phenomenon results in "perpetual contact", constant refreshing and attention to other behaviors.

　　Barry Dainton pointed out that "we are essentially a series of persistent experiential abilities"; "the self is something that exists in time." (41) It requires a continuous experience, "the subject of experience is also a single, uninterrupted potential. The potential that runs through the entire maglev track extends along space, while the potential that constitutes a continuous subject extends along time, and once activated, it produces (a certain type of) experience." Applying this epistemology to the online social world is an activated and continuous state of self, which needs to constantly seek the experience of others. "For you and me, our attention to our own conscious experience changes with each mutual connection." (42) And "thoughts and emotions will not weaken only if they are regularly updated." (43) Because the self's need for experience is mutual, the online social world is constantly updated. "As long as our stream of consciousness keeps flowing, it is impossible to think that we no longer exist, no matter what other changes we may have. As long as you continue to have experience, you will continue to exist." (44)

**4. Manifesting Yourself**

　　There is another side to the "self", which is the desire to manifest itself, a state that almost every self-conscious person must go through.

　　According to Hegel, the development of human "self-consciousness" is divided into three stages: desire, recognition and universal self-consciousness. Desire means that "self-consciousness can only be sure of its own existence by negating its other", (45), that is, to regard the other as nothing. However, there is a paradox in the self-consciousness of desire, "self-consciousness can only be satisfied in another self-consciousness". (46) This pushes self-consciousness into the stage of recognition, "the other exists for him, and it also exists for the other, and each party completes the pure abstract process of self-existence through its own actions and through the actions of the other party". (47) However, "mutual recognition requires universal self-consciousness... I must regard myself as a rational being, independent of my particular desires, and able to act based on principles that are universally valid for all selves", (48) in order to achieve the highest ability of the human mind.

　　Observing the interactions in the online social world with the concepts of desire, recognition and universal self, we can find that the self in the online social world has been hovering between desire and recognition. Online, people's expression of self is either an "internal mood" or "external action and enjoyment". (49) Mead also has a similar statement: "There are various ways to realize the self. Because it is a social self, it is a self realized in relationships with others. It must be recognized by others to have the value we want to attribute to it. In a sense, it realizes itself by virtue of its advantages over others, just as it recognizes its disadvantages when compared with others." (50) Back to the empirical world, Goffman (Erving Goffman) has long revealed the role-playing and impression management that people carry out in their daily self-presentation. "When an individual plays a role, he implicitly requires the observer to take the impression established in front of them seriously. He requires them to believe that the person they see actually has the qualities he seems to have, and that what he does will have the kind of results that are self-evidently required to be suitable for it." (51)

　　Although the contact situation is very different, the phenomenon that Goffman discovered in face-to-face communication is more prominent in the online social world. Moreover, the self-presentation in the online social world avoids the instant performance in face-to-face contact and becomes more relaxed, thus accommodating more control strategies. "Compared with other mass media, social networking sites - especially Facebook - provide a stage for individual users to build their own image and promote this image beyond their circle of friends." (52) These control strategies have been deeply rooted in people's minds. Taking WeChat as an example, its phenomena include "carefully considering and repeatedly revising each circle of friends, expecting likes and quick replies, considering the consequences of posting in the circle of friends in advance, and carefully selecting the photos to be posted." (53) Research has found that this "communication through status updates is more self-oriented because the discloser seeks to express and verify himself rather than connect with others." (54) Although every action seems to be directed at the other, "I speak to you for a reason, perhaps to evoke a special attitude in you, or simply to explain something to you. Therefore, every act of telling has a purpose and motivation that can be confirmed in some way", (55) and its ultimate goal is the inner desire of the self. Van Dyke points out:

　　In the online environment, people want to show who they are. They gain benefits from identity construction through sharing fragments of information, because the disclosure of personal information is closely related to personal popularity. Psychological research experts Christofi, Muise and Demarais believe that: identity is a social product, created not only by what you share, but also by what others share about you... The most popular people are those who are most actively involved in their identity construction. (56)

　　However, the self must move towards the stage of recognition. When an individual continuously presents himself on a social networking site, he must also accept the self-presentation of another individual. "When another self-conscious being has the following image of me, that is, I am a self-conscious being like him, and I also realize that he also has this image, I get the "recognition" of this person. Therefore, in order to gain recognition, I must also recognize the other. On this issue, we can see that there is also a certain mutuality, equality, and even identity between my desires and interests." (57) This principle well explains the phenomenon of the continuous renewal of the online social world. In other words, every self is the other in the eyes of others, and every self-presentation appears in the eyes of many others, which is easy to obtain a kind of public satisfaction. However, this interdependence also causes instinctive social comparison. "Looking at the various wonderful scenes constantly refreshed on the homepage, Facebook will largely make people feel more dissatisfied with their own lives... This tone of inferiority makes everyone desperately want to create and show their own wonderful scenes to attract the attention of others, thereby further aggravating this vicious cycle within the collective." (58)

　　Therefore, when the self-presentation function of social media easily gives the self the ability to be at the center of the network, this feeling of being "at the center" is always short-lived and can be replaced at any time. Therefore, the satisfaction of self-realization comes and goes quickly. "Desire is always destructive in its object of satisfaction. Its content is selfish, and satisfaction only occurs to the individual (it is fleeting). In the act of satisfaction, it itself generates "desire". (59) In this cycle, it is difficult to obtain real and lasting satisfaction, because "the most serious flaw of this self-centered "social" concept is that none of us (at least only some individuals) can always be at the center of the network and always hear only praise. No one can always play God. Most of the time, people can only be angels revolving around gods." (60)

**5. Social impairment**

　　As mentioned above, seeking others and self-presentation constitute important communication practices in the online social world, presenting different situations from those in the traditional social world. The online social world is constantly updated and relationships converge, allowing the self to easily seek others - people of all types from all directions, whose experiences always seem fresh, diverse and changing at any time, thus continuously supplying "raw materials" to the self's persistence; at the same time, self-presentation in the online social world avoids the improvisation of face-to-face communication, develops a more elaborate control strategy, and because it faces multiple others at the same time, it is easy to occupy the center of the communication network, so even if it is short-lived, the self can obtain satisfaction at a certain moment and generate expectations for the next time.

　　Why can't people leave the online social world? The reason is related to the survival of the self. For humans, the self is so important that Mead said: "Man can become an object of himself. His behavior makes him a product of evolution that is higher than other lower animals. Fundamentally, it is this social fact that distinguishes him from lower animals." (61) As a subject of experience, the self needs uninterrupted experience to maintain its existence, because "if we lose consciousness, we will not be aware of anything. Since the self is awareness, losing consciousness is fatal to such a self." (62) Since mobile phones have caused an overall transformation of the social world, offline communication practices can no longer meet the survival of the self.

　　However, the self in the online social world is not ideal, but in a transient, fragmented state that cycles between desire and recognition. In the traditional social world, individuals actually interact with each other constantly, and people's self-consciousness is generated from this. "The interweaving and mutual basis of the gaze of the consciousness of 'you', and the blicking in it, seem to be carried out in mirrors reflecting each other, and the self becomes an image thrown back. This is the special feature of social relations in the surrounding world." (63) When the contact situation turns to the online social world, it is conceivable that the number and speed of self-images thrown back are exponentially increasing, which is dizzying. Moreover, the self on social media, because it erases the background of common life and is more subject to control strategies, deviates too much from the real and complete self. It is at best a profile of the self, "only those that we hope to reveal in our hearts... The substitute self does not have the weaknesses and fragility of our real body. The substitute self can never represent us. The more we mistake the virtual body (cyberbody) for ourselves, the more the machine distorts us to adapt to the substitute we use." (64) Therefore, these thrown-back substitute selves can no longer be combined into the familiar, complete and real self, nor can they reach the self with universal consciousness regulated by reason in spiritual philosophy.

　　Then turn from self to relationship. In the online social world, self-centered social interaction lacks meaning because it is full of desire. According to Georg Simmel's theory, the meaning of social interaction lies in "form" rather than "content": "People come together for various reasons and interact with each other. This form of gathering can acquire its own life, separated from any connection with the content. It exists for its own purpose and spreads because of its own charm." (65) Specifically, the ideal relationship of human beings does not require various intensive "self" presentations, but lies in the form of interaction itself. Cheng Boqing's interpretation of Simmel's social thought is quite inspiring, as quoted below:

　　Social interaction presents a unique sociological structure, that is, any attributes of social participants that are not related to the gathering cannot be brought into the social circle. Individual wealth, social status, knowledge, reputation and special talents cannot be used as bargaining chips in social interaction. "At best, they can only be invisible subtle differences that penetrate into the artificial structure of social interaction." Not only do these objective factors attached to personality need to be excluded from social interaction, but also personal characteristics that are purely deep in personality, such as character, mood, and destiny, cannot be brought into social interaction. Unscrupulously showing personal depression, frustration, excitement and passion, that is, revealing the darkness and light deep in one's heart, will appear to be inappropriate and not flexible. Because this kind of self-confession destroys the interactive norms that dominate social interaction, it will lead social interaction to a form of social interaction determined by content, that is, focusing on personal value feelings. (66)

　　According to Simmel’s narrative, interactions on social media are mainly self-centered and carry various contents. The nature of this relationship deviates from the meaning of social interaction itself. Perhaps Simmel’s standard is too high, but we often feel bored when using social media from experience. “If happiness lies more in exploring a kind of interpersonal relationship that is not so self-centered and not just for the purpose of pleasure, rather than what a society dominated by individualism provides, then Facebook and similar social networking platforms are not a good way to improve happiness.” (67) In other words, the principle of social media is exactly the opposite of the way to happiness. The root cause is that it violates the original appearance of social interaction.

　　Allen Wood pointed out: "If we want to continue to gain this self-certainty, we must change our goals and desires. More specifically, what we need is a self-awareness that recognizes others but does not return recognition." (68) Can we implement this principle in the online social world? It is not very optimistic, because technology has given the self, the subject of desire, a huge living space, and "sharing, becoming friends and liking have become powerful ideological concepts, with an influence beyond Facebook, applicable to every corner of culture, and affecting all aspects of sociality." (69) Therefore, such a call may only have ethical significance.

　　Finally, let’s make another assumption: “What does it mean to lose a mobile phone?” In summary, losing a mobile phone means losing an online social world that is updated at any time and has dense relationships, and thus losing the persistence of the self; but at the same time, the self that survives in the online social world deviates further from the true color of the self and undermines the meaning of social interaction.

　　Notes:

　　①Berelson, B. (1949). What "Missing the Newspaper" Means. In Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (eds.), Communications Research 1948-1949 (pp.111-129). New York: Harper & Brothers.

　　②Fei Fei Jiang: “Losing your phone is like losing the whole world”, https://www.jianshu.com/p/fa8ca24b2333, June 5, 2019.

　　③This update was posted on April 26, 2019. The original text is: "My phone has been down for five days, and I can only communicate through WeChat Mac. Then I realized that it has truly returned to the original meaning of 'instant messaging tool'. When I just opened the Moments, it felt like a lifetime ago, and I sighed at what time it is now." Taken from the author's Moments.

　　④For related discussions on autonomous technology, see Wenner, Autonomous Technology: Uncontrolled Technology as a Political Theme, translated by Yang Haiyan, Peking University Press, 2014.

　　⑤Sun Wei: “WeChat: Chinese people’s “existence in the world””, Academic Monthly, No. 12, 2015.

　　⑥Turkle, S. (2008). Always-On/Always-on-You: The Tethered Self. In James Katz (eds.), Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies (pp.121-137). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

　　⑦Bazarova,N.& Yoon Hyung Choi(2014).Self-Discourse in Social Media:Extending the Functional Approach to Disclosure Motivations and Characteristics on Social Network Sites.Journal of Communication,64(4),635-657.

　　⑧Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity, p. 45, translated by Han Zhen et al., Yilin Press, 2001.

　　⑨ Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity, p. 45, translated by Han Zhen et al., Yilin Press, 2001.

　　⑩ Schutz: The Meaning Construction of the Social World, page 125, translated by You Congqi, Commercial Press, 2012 edition.

　　(11) Schutz, The Meaning of the Social World, p. 11, translated by You Congqi, Commercial Press, 2012.

　　(12) Schutz, The Meaning of the Social World, p. 186, translated by You Congqi, Commercial Press, 2012.

　　(13) All quotations in this paragraph are from: Michael Erlhoff and Tim Marshall, eds., Dictionary of Design, pp. 404-407, translated by Zhang Minmin, Shen Shixian and Wang Jinqi, Huazhong University of Science and Technology Press, 2016.

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　　(18) Schutz, The Meaning of the Social World, p. 228, translated by You Congqi, Commercial Press, 2012.

　　(19) Schutz, The Meaning of the Social World, p. 228, translated by You Congqi, Commercial Press, 2012.

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