Sherry Turkle explains the thesis of her book *Alone Together* as this: "We are confused about when we are alone and when we are together" (329). This is a more nuanced and defendable claim than the frequent lamentation that people are on their phones all the time these days. Turkle's claim is not one about how the most recent technological device no longer allows us to communicate in more personal ways. Actually, it is not about the devices at all. Turkle suggests that while placing networked communication into our pre-networked lives, we have created virtual selves for whom some constraints of the real selves do not apply; it has certain entitlements. For example, she says of the virtual self: "It can absent itself from its physical surround [...], it can experience the physical and virtual in near simultaneity. And it is able to make more time by multitasking" (155). In itself, these entitlements are advantages of the system, and each marks an ability that is denied to a physical self. However, the problem stems from the confusion of the user between the two selves.

Turkle hammers this point home when she agrees that "we have always found ways to escape from ourselves, neither the desire nor the possibility is new with the Internet" (160). However, she claims, the difference that makes the Internet a worthwhile case study to investigate is its capacity to weave together the virtual and the physical, allow a simultaneous access to both; what she calls a "life mix" that is co-constituted by one's life offline and online. Clearly, this capability does not inherently harm its users, but Turkle's findings suggest that users now allow themselves to partition their attention to the fields in a sense of "continual copresence" (161). In turn, the misuse of these technologies transforms the capabilities and advantages of networked communication into social and personal deficiencies. The ability to experience two worlds simultaneously harms our social interactions in physical spheres, as we begin to think of people as "pausable" (161). Similarly, when misused, the ability to communicate instantly and at any time ironically hinders communication because "when media are always there, waiting to be wanted, we lose a sense of choosing to communicate" (163). The ability to be connected to a wider world is transfigured into a feeling of "always feeling behind" (164), or a fear of missing out; "FOMO". Finally, the ability to share with a community triggers an instinct to perceive this community as a crowd, friends as fans, and we inadvertently "treat individuals as a unit" (168).

The main pitfall we must avoid while reading Turkle's findings is to connect the negative consequences of networked communication with a failure that is inherent in the system. The capacities that are native to the system versus the misdoings in its perception are clear in Turkle's analysis. Indeed, this is what pushes us to search for a reformation in design, since design stands between the native system and the user that populates, shapes and ultimately realizes the system. The first set of design choices that are relevant in the user's misuse into a "life mix" is ones regarding notification settings.

If the main gate the connect the physical and virtual worlds is the phone screen, especially in the cases Turkle is concerned with where one "moves into the virtual [world] with fluidity and on the go", then the notification icon is the knock on the gate. In Facebook lingo, it is called the "Red Alert Notification" (4). The Red Alert Notification serves as an indicator to the user that some activity that is relevant to her, presumably even personally addressed to her, just occurred in real time. The alert is likely to create a sense of urgency, especially because it arrives in real time and can trigger the instinctual fear of missing out. Similarly, it is likely to grab the user's attention as a bright red bubble that places itself in the app icon and makes itself readily visible in the user's home screen. Of course, once again, the notification is a capability to alert the user to some relevant activity. However, one must take caution that while serving this purpose, the alert does not induce an anxiety in the user to enter the platform. In other words, the user must have some say in what notifications she gets. These are called notification settings.

When we investigate notification settings of the most popular social media platforms, we encounter many points of deficiency. Facebook's notification algorithm is a prime example (1). Settings regarding app notifications in smart phones are shared between the smart phone settings and the app settings, but phone settings are out of the scope of this thesis. In undetailed terms, smart phones generally have on/off settings for notifications of any specific app, but they do not have any customization ability. Sensibly, more detailed configurations are left to the app settings. However, looking at Facebook's notification settings, we can see that the design lacks many settings that could prevent a user from being confused in the "life-mix" between the virtual and physical worlds.

The main statement of Facebook's notification settings reads: "You can't turn off notifications entirely, but you can choose what you're notified about and how you're notified" (8). This is a reasonable approach, given that users expect to be notified about certain activity, since we have established the ability to be connected in real time as an advantage of networked communication. However, the choice on what/how one will be notified proves to be somewhat of a burden. Using Facebook on the web, the following is the method of altering notifications: "You'll see every notification on Facebook, but you can turn off notifications about specific posts as you view them" (8). This means that Facebook is generally opt-out; the user will get a greedy notification algorithm by default and can change is as he goes through the platform, one by one. Like any opt-out policy, to change the user must have some level of awareness and capability. Furthermore, the requirement that some settings can only be changed individually makes certain changes virtually impossible if the user has become aware of them after some time of using the app. For example, notifications from third party app requests and activity can only be turned off app by app. Currently, I have 132 apps, the only way to turn all of which is to go through 132 clicks (9, photo). Since using the "Continue with Facebook" (10) button on any third-party platform generally puts their app on the list, large numbers such as this should not be rare.

However, even the discerning user might fail to keep up with notification settings due to Facebook's frequent app updates. As Android Central notes: "Facebook likes to do a lot of "opt out" rather than "opt in" changes on its app updates" (2). This forces the discerning user to not only engage in the process of changing notification settings once, but to do it regularly, i.e., every time Facebook updates its app. This is especially a burden given that some of the updates can reasonably be perceived as intrusive: "[T]he Facebook app update has added a new notification -- a persistent "ongoing" notification that lives in your notification pull-down" (3). A notification that does not signify any particular activity and re-appears every time it has been responded to fails to capture the purpose of a notification that we have outlined above. Although this is an extreme example that might have been a bug, the point stands that Facebook frequently updates its app, and often does not document all the changes in the description (5). Estimated around once to twice a week, Facebook updates its app with the same description for every update that does not provide any details into the specific update. It reads (6):

Thanks for using Facebook! To make our app better for you, we bring updates to the App Store regularly. Every update of our Facebook app includes improvements for speed and reliability. As new features become available, we'll highlight those for you in the app.

This is not standard practice, since other apps, even WhatsApp and Messenger that are owned by Facebook Inc detail out the specifics of each update in their update descriptions. In the end, the burden to regularly organize one's settings is left to the user, which is one of the culprits for the "life mix" that Turkle criticizes.

Secondly, Facebook does not have any configurations to pause all, or any, notifications for a time being. [Not finished]

Especially with "push notifications", which are the red alert notifications that appear in the user's device screen when she is not "actively using Facebook", the only configuration is a complete on/off that the user can change from the smart phone settings (6).

[Add Instagram/Snapchat notification settings]

Therefore, opt-out notification settings may push the users to live in the "life-mix" even if the users are not aware of it. We have established that often, our journey in a social media platform begins with our intention to see what the notification is signaling. This is because the icon is not purely informative, but also has an inviting function. Once the user clicks the notification to view it, he although he may view the content of the notification in isolation, it is not difficult to get sucked in the platform without noticing. This is not only true for the virtual world, but the physical world as well. Humans are wired to view the world in circumspection. As an example, we can think of a store that has a "50% discount on selected items" sign on the door. Inside the store, the items on sale are likely proximate to the rest of the items. Any shopper knows that once he enters the store, there is a good chance that his attention will move beyond the items on sale, to be grabbed by an item from new season. Once the customer's initial motivation to check out the sales is overcome, the customer is just like any other who has come to check out the whole store.

When this happens during the user's engagement with the physical world, we *experience* ourselves in the platform instead of in the outside world. Just like when we are watching a movie or reading a book, our experience is not purely determined by where we are located, but where our attention is directed. For example, we can imagine a pedestrian who is checking her phone while walking who does not seem to notice our presence. Therefore, the awareness of the physical environment is heavily reduced when one is engaged with the online world.

In Chapter 3, we will explain that by learning a lesson from Facebook's settings, we can describe what the notification settings of a more discerning app should be like. First of all, the app should allow the user to make more specific changes in push notifications rather than a full on and off switch. To ensure the user still has access to activity that is worth interrupting her offline world without creating a sense of "continuous copresence", the app could at least have a "conservative" configuration that is all opt in, meaning that its default state is no notifications. Since we have deemed it reasonable for the app to be opt-out in all its notification settings, the conservative configuration can be all opt-in to act as a balance.

Furthermore, this allows users that are less willing/able to change specific configurations to turn off all notifications at times without dealing with the smart phone settings separately, and users that are more willing/able can configure their conservative settings to their liking. All the meanwhile, users that do not wish to engage in any notification restrictions can have a similar experience to the current state without being bothered by these more advanced settings. Therefore, the tradeoff between configuration and ease of use is not disturbed, and the user is granted capability to remain offline for a period of time and has a choice in how connected he will be during general use. Finally, the user can be taken to a settings page at the time of signing up to be informed on the default opt-out policies, and to be introduced to the conservative settings, as this is a natural place for initial configuration settings.

In his book *Antisocial Media,* Siva Vaidhyanathan seems to argue that "the problem with Facebook is Facebook" (Vaidhyanathan, 1). However, when one examines his arguments, which are valid and well-put, it is clear that there is nothing inherently problematic in social media, and his polemic is with Facebook's design. Of course, we can generalize Vaidhyanathan's arguments to more social media platforms than just Facebook.

Vaidhyanathan recognizes that in Facebook, there is a difficulty to distinguish between different types of content (5). Whether it is a news article, a friend's vacation photos, or a post announcing a loved one's death, all posts have the same basic structure: A description of the event type, a text, an optional visual component (a photo or a video), and the engagement bar (which includes the options: like, share, comment). This invariant structure that is encouraged also by the main form of engagement that is "scrolling through" (5) the feed creates a confusing whirlwind of posts for the spectator. This fact generalizes to Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter as well. Instagram switches the placement of the visual component and the text; Snapchat works with clicks instead of scrolls, and Twitter emphasizes the text more. However, besides small differences, the invariant structure is the same in all of these platforms.

It is a fact of educational psychology that we find it easier to make sense of information when we also have a context for that information, as opposed to a piece of information that is given out of context. If it is a goal to retain the information we received during a visit to social media or have an overall understanding of our experience that we keep after the visit, we would need to group relevant posts together. This thesis will not present evidence that users of Facebook have this kind of a goal. Indeed, perhaps users do not want to seriously engage with the platform, but to use it as a distraction without much regard for a longer-term consequence. However, given the claim that social media's potential exceeds its current main use of pure entertainment and distraction, the grouping of the posts (or lack thereof) and the resulting confusion of the user throughout a visit to the platform is a possible culprit.

Furthermore, sponsored ads closely mimic regular posts in the feed. In Facebook, sponsored content has the same three sections, with the only difference being a "sponsored" sub-text. To blend in with regular posts, ads often use videos or news articles that do not make it clear from the initial engagement that they are sponsored content. For example, this body-building app presents itself as a regular engagement page with a video and a survey for its users, which reveals itself to be an ad at the end of the survey (12). Similarly, Instagram's ads are photos posted in the same style, except with a clickable caption, and Snapchat stories include sponsored videos that often begin as a regular story and then reveal themselves to be ads.

This is a useful marketing strategy, since a good number of people have a negative gut reaction to ads, and therefore are more likely to retain information if they first do not recognize it as sponsored. Indeed, a recent Stanford University study observed that "more than 80 percent [of participating students] believed a native ad, identified with the words 'sponsored content,' was a real news story" (13). Along with the confusion induced in the user due to the invariant structure of the posts, the indistinguishability of the sponsored content from regular content is prone to creating a distrust in the user, since she may have the experience of engaging with a post that she believes is "genuine", only to find out that it was an ad. Once again, this is a sensible strategy for advertisers, and it makes sense for social media platforms to take advantage of it. However, if we are looking for reasons why the larger benefits early thinkers have theorized about mass communication are not being realized, we have a candidate here.

The invariant structure affects the way social media is used both by the posters and the "lurkers" (a word Internet culture uses to mean spectator). Since the less and more significant types of content are identical in structure, it encourages the lurkers to pay little attention to any given post. Given that the pure entertainment, personally intimate and politically significant are mashed together in a complete similarity that requires active attention to separate, the lurker ends up glancing through the feed, only stopping for the posts that catch her eye. Most of the time, the posts that catch her eye are the more sensationalists ones -- the posts that use a flashy picture or a radical word. However, the attention granted even to these posts cannot be too long, because due to the scrolling-feed, the next post already makes itself visible while the user takes a look at the current post. Therefore, even if she chooses to engage, she is likely to click one of the reaction buttons (like, share, other emoticons), or write a short comment. In the end, leaving the platform, it is difficult for the user to come away with having retained any of the information she has observed. As Vaidhyanathan puts it a bit harshly: "On Facebook babies and puppies run in the same column as serious personal appeals for financial help with medical care, advertisements for and against political candidates, bogus claims against science, and appeals to racism and violence" (17).

The invariant structure has a similar trivializing effect on how the poster's use the platform. Since posters are lurkers are not separate groups but the same individuals at different times, the poster is acutely aware of how lurkers scroll through the feed. Therefore, if he wants to be read and engaged with, which we can reasonably assume a poster of a social media platform does, he has to create one of the posts that catch the lurkers' eyes. As previously mentioned, these are the more sensationalist posts that include a portion that is outrageous, unfamiliar, or in some way extreme, so that it jumps out of the rest of the feed with innumerable posts. The lurkers' behavior encourages the posters' behavior, and vice versa, so that in the end, a vicious cycle of lack of attention and reflection from users is sustained.

In *On the Internet,* Hubert Dreyfus warns us against another result of the same design decision to organize the platform without regard to the relation between proximate posts: *leveling* (75). Due to the disregarding of the content of each post, the user cannot help but view all posts with the same mentality; she automatically equalizes them in value. During a scroll through, it takes conscious work for a user to identify what group any post belongs to, so she must view them on the same grounds. Then, since the post that is not significant (say, the puppy photo) cannot elevated to the status of significant, the opposite happens; all posts are viewed from a place of "detached reflection" (72). In Dreyfus' terminology, this is a type of virtual nihilism in which no matter how essential the content of a post is, it cannot move the user to engage in a way that demands work. In other words, the posts are not likely to push the users to take through-the-platform action, since the ones that have that capability are drowned by the ones that only demand an in-platform engagement. In his words: "Nothing is too trivial to be included. Nothing is important that it demands a special place" (On the Internet, 79).

Dreyfus cites Kierkegaard as denouncing the press because it makes all information immediately available to everyone. Doing so, it deprives the reader of any notion of what is more local, more relevant, and what is not. Thus, the reader is reduced to the lowest common denominator in which he can make sense of all of the information. However, this common denominator, by absolute inclusion, becomes infinitesimal. Therefore, the reader's grounds are absolutely abstract, such that he "[cannot have] an essential engagement in anything" (76).

If we are just in identifying a through-the-platform potential in social media, Dreyfus makes the case that the levelling of content is a barrier in realizing this potential. However, to claim that social media posts must only be used for content that expects action outside of the platform, while achieving one of the goals, takes away from what the platform has now. First of all, it is not clear how moderating the entire content of any social media platform is possible, and second of all, it is not clear that we would want to refuse the entertainment use that social media has.

As it will be laid down in Chapter 3, moderation of posts is not necessary to get ahead of levelling. Instead, grouping of content by subject matter will be recommended. The example of Reddit will be used as a platform that neither denies its users any particular use case, but also allows the content to be separated so that users that wish to use the platform to move beyond the platform are also not denied.

A similar levelling issue stems from most platforms' lack of a capability to differentiate between user groups. Whereas our physical lives are governed by different sets of norms and rules depending on the social circle we are in at a given moment, social media platforms by default conflate all circles into one home feed, and only some of them allow for a different grouping at all. Therefore, we cannot dictate how we would like to interact with a certain group of people; we must cater to the entire mass following. One way to show the inadequacies of having to target all of one's following in each post is using Sartre's explanation of an extreme anxiety that comes from the feeling of being watched by an unknown other.

Social media platforms are designed in a way to encourage the dissipation and visibility of one's material. When the user posts, the tendency (and perhaps the purpose) of the platform is not to keep the post private but make it available to the public. Even though there are a few options for the user to target a specific group of people in the post, they are not made to be the primary use case scenarios of the platform. For example, Facebook allows for the user to create a group for "best friends" and target a post towards this individual group, but the default is still to make the post public to all of one's connections. Similarly, Instagram allows the user to make his profile 'private' such that he has to approve every user that gets access to the profile, but the default setting is that all profiles are open to the public. Furthermore, both platforms have a "suggested friends" bar that appears in the middle of the feeds of both. Thus, the user is continuously encouraged to make connections with new people. Finally, there is no option to keep a post unshared; any given post the poster posts can be shared by any of its recipient, making it virtually impossible for the poster to get a hang on the users her post will reach. One way in which we can see that this has bothered some users through the evolution of the concept of a "Finsta", a secondary account that the user only tells her closest connections and feels free to use the platform in a more unfiltered way.

Using Sartre's concept, the poster who is not comfortable with the potential audience of her content experiences a peculiar anxiety of being watched by the Other. The Other is a particular individual that observes her judgingly. Recognizing the presence of the Other, the poster can no longer be herself, because she does not experience herself as a subject: "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (Being and Nothingness, 392). Even if the individual is not correct about her being watched by the foreign Other, the mere appearance of being watched causes the loss of subjectivity. Furthermore, The Other is not merely a revelatory power; it changes the subject's being: "All of a sudden, I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside of myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (403). Thus, the subject loses her subject-hood, and becomes an object of her own experience (408). No longer a master of her own self, the user experience what Sartre calls an existential anxiety.

Once again, it is not native to the concept of social media that the poster must feel such an anxiety. The user experiences the look of the Other only when she feels that there is a possibility of another stranger user, for whom the post was not intended, seeing her post. To be fair, the age of the Internet holds that any information that is documented might forever remain on the Internet, but there are ways in which a social media platform could alleviate this anxiety.

In chapter 3, it will be argued that similar to the possibility of separating content by subject, the platform can create a distinction between mass following vs following by group. Making "following by group" -- or navigating the social media platform in the framework of different groups -- can fix the problem of the gaze and the alienation and mistrust it creates. Synthesizing the issues caused by the lack of a grouping by subject and grouping by circle, it will be argued that different levels of significance and intimacy should be separated by design. As Vaidhyanathan explains: "Different forms of friendship have distinct layers and values embedded in them and operate by different norms" (47). Therefore, the conflation of different layers causes a reduction to lowest common denominator, a denial of strong forms of engagement, and an anxiety caused by the possibility of invasion of one's intimacy. By having concretely separated communities with differentiated and explicit norms to which each post is "tagged", the user can choose to view them in mixture or in curation.