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The Present Continues.

Presence and absence through mediation of television and new media.

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Abstract

The Present Continues is a video installation that explores the concepts of presence and absence through the optics of television. The work motivates us to rethink our existence within popular culture and reflect upon the narratives enclosed inside the screens of televisions. The main interest of the research is presence and absence and how these concepts are mediated through television and new media. The installation invites the audience to approach television as something uncanny rather than comforting and entertaining. The written part adds up to the artwork by looking close into the topic and its mediation through television and new media. The presence can be understood as physical and bodily experience that resonates with television set, smartphone or a laptop. Another perspective on the topic connects with the ideas of alienation and connection, that can be seen as absence and presence in mental and sociological understanding. I inquire into this side of the research through analyzing social media and reality television shows as realms of connection in the modern world. This thesis is an open inquiry into the parallel concepts of presence and absence that are not necessarily confronting each other.

Keywords absence, alienation, art, connection, installation, new media, presence, present, television

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1.Introduction.

1.1. Introducing the topic.

Studying television started a long time ago for me. I grew up in a working class family, where my mother utterly hated television and my father utterly loved it. Having trust in both of my parents I did not take any sides in this matter. I was watching a lot of television like my father, and I had a suspicion towards it like my mother. As I grew up and gained more knowledge in school and university I became more and more critical towards television. Still I never really stopped watching it, I just switched to the Internet as a mediator of television. Today, with a solid academic background and awareness of the socio-political situation in the world I can surely see why one should be critical towards television. But as a matter of fact, I still cannot completely shut myself off it, there are so many signs and symbols in television that are always changing and can be interpreted in many different ways. Television creates a lot of perspective in a mass sense, and it implants many ideas in audiences who are unconscious of them. As a result a multiple narratives and concepts are created.

In the interview with Bernard Stiegler in *Echographies of television* Jacques Derrida said:

“I watch a lot of television, both because it fascinates me - a fascination which I can't even pretend to justify as fascination - but also because I try, at the same time, to analyse this fascination and to know what is going on on the other side. Similarly, when I read the papers, more and more I am teaching myself to understand what might be going on in production: who decides, who chooses what, who selects what, what happens to a television news presenter, with the teleprompter for example. In this story of gazes we were just talking about, what happens to the visor effect on television? What is its future? (For we are only at the beginning of this story of televisual and multidimensional media.) I give myself the alibi of this analysis to appease my conscience with regard to this

*fascination and the time it makes me waste. I spend too much time, I think, watching television, and I reproach myself at the same time, naturally, for not reading enough anymore and for not doing other things. And I also think, at the same time, of the time this makes so many others waste or save. From now on, there is this whole other economy of our time!...”*¹

The fascination mixed with analyse that Derrida experiences is familiar to me. Perhaps some of people consuming television have exactly the same feelings. In this small extract Derrida raised so many questions already - regarding producers, the future, time. And there is no right answers to all of these questions. Society, and therefore its cultures, are constantly changing. My own fascination has helped me to dissect the conceptual ideas and relations behind television, its aesthetics and its audience, who is disconnected in the age of technological connection. The attraction to television aesthetics mixed up with education and critical thinking shifted me to another point of fascination – the fascination of underlying semiotics and its conceptual implications. Television is magnetically attractive and therefore there is a possibility to take it further in terms of ideas.

Television has a massive presence in our life. There is another, almost contrasting, reason why television is an ideal place to talk about absence. With its huge presence in our everyday life television is making *us* not present in everyday life. Television presents a world that happens without ourselves taking a real active role in it. The presence remains in the post-experience when we comment on television in real life and on social media. The practice of interaction on social media expands an idea of being present as well as an illusion of it. Television and new media are keeping us company. We may feel content and less lonely watching television or having it just turned on and being on social media.

The relationships with existing reality are mediated through television and new media therefore the plexus of absence or presence takes place. These medias can serve as a meeting

¹ Derrida, Jacques, and Bernard Stiegler. *Echographies of television: filmed interviews*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002.

point for absence and presence, for alienation and connection. What is present and what is absent? Are we alienated or connected? There will never be a singular answer to these questions as there is no privilege between the opposite terms. My research is an attempt to understand the relationships of presence and absence in the world perpetuated with technologies and popular culture. This thesis is an observant inquiry without any intentions or ambitions to be conclusive. Without taking a moral stand on either side, I want to concentrate on the codependency of presence and absence and to address the ways in which we are constantly interacting with it consciously and subconsciously.

1.2. Introducing the artwork.

The Present Continues exhibition takes place on 20.04.2017 - 04.05.2017 in *Third Space* gallery. See the attachment for artwork documentation.

This artwork *The Present Continues* is an installation, that reinterprets the ideas of a television show and a teleprompter as well as the audience. The project explores the aesthetics of television by re-creating an empty talk-show set with a camera and a teleprompter facing away from the setting. The teleprompter contains a scrolling text that proposes different audience reactions that may occur while watching a television show. There is no show itself, no presenters, no technicians, no cameramen. The idea of what is absent and what is present is taken to the limit. The set is empty. Nothing is happening. But that nothingness is what helps to examine the meanings and implications of the video installation and television as well as the topics of absence and presence and its interdependence.

The experience created by the installation and its absence of familiar things may create an uncanny, even ominous feeling. A feeling which is completely opposite to the usual sense of comfort and entertainment one may get from watching television. The codes of television production are visible, but the absence of the producers and television makers creates a disparity. Another familiar yet always hidden element of television production is a teleprompter, that

allows presenters to flawlessly deliver the text to the audience. In the installation the teleprompter takes an entirely contradictory position. It faces the audience and consists of closed captions of possible reactions towards an entertainment show such as ‘silence’, ‘laughter’, ‘applause’ as well as different sound and emotions that could be interpreted as either belonging to the show or to the audience. Writing the text I used my own titles alongside found ones, combining them I want to create a some kind of narrative of a show that we do not see but can only experience emotionally. The roles and power relationships have changed and now the cues are telling the audience what to do in order to deliver the message to the presenter, who remains as an absent, obscure and yet seemingly dominant figure.

The strange feeling may be created already by the name of the work *The Present Continues*, which is a result of a word play based on a grammar tense in English - ‘present continuous’. It indicates the duration and continuation of the present, which can be seen as an oxymoron since the present is only a moment of now therefore the continued present can be considered as the future. The contradiction of two dimensions may push the audience towards being self-conscious of the present moment. But once we become self-aware of the moment the reality around us may seem alienated. If you become conscious of running up the stairs, you may miss a step. If you start being conscious of the laughter during laughing itself, you may suddenly stop laughing. The eerie feeling following these seconds of consciousness may result in distancing yourself. My intentions are to create the feeling of imbalance, that can encourage reflections about absence and presence to occur.

1.3. Introducing the research.

This thesis provides a closer perspective into the ideas of absence/presence and alienation/connection through the optics of television and new media as an extension of television culture.

The text can be divided in two major parts. The first one introduces the concept of presence and absence and develops it regarding the physical side of the issue. I will talk about the mediums and how they contribute to our presence or absence. The second part explores alienation and connection as an emotional side of presence and absence. I will look into reality-television shows and social media as one of the main sources of alienation and connection in modern world.

The research is intentionally open-minded and fragmentary as I prefer to navigate on the surface of either concept. I am interested in looking at technology- and media- infused details of our lives that equally carry both absence and presence and try to understand the effects of them on our lives. With such a broad topic of presence and absence meeting popular culture, it is impossible to reach or to generalize this topic, as each country, community and even each person in the world are on different levels when it comes to consuming television and new media. That said, the research will be focusing predominantly on contemporary western society, who is actively involved in engagement with both.

2. On Presence.

2.1.Presence. Introduction of the concept.

“Presence is what is born, and does not cease being born.

Of it and to it there is birth, and only birth.”²

Jean-Luc Nancy

Being present can be seen as a place in the timeline between ‘past’ and ‘future’ that indicates ‘now’, ‘today’. Aristotle in his *Physics* defined time to be "a number of motion with respect to the before and after", where ‘befores’, ‘afters’ and ‘nows’ accordingly, are in a constant movement.³ Therefore ‘being present’ can mean to be in the moment and to be ‘now’, but here where the difficulties of definition take place. The present deals with time and space regarding the timeline, while presence can be seen as being physically in that time and space of a particular moment. What does it mean to be at the moment? Are we aware of the nowness? The moment of presence is hard to conceive as it tends to be passed-already or yet-to-come. However, there is more depth to the definition of present time, as the borders of ‘now’ can vary depending on the language context when we talk about it. ‘Now’ can refer to a particular minute at a particular place or a day, ‘today’. A whole year can be called ‘now’ comparing to previous years. “Present” is also referred to be our modern world and generation, commonly named ‘nowadays’. Looking at the fluidity of interpretations of the present, presence is omnipresent, it is happening all the time, across time. We cannot escape it. Referring to the epigraph above, for Jean-Luc Nancy presence requires no anticipation for the future. For him truly presence is to be born again and again in the continuum of the present, which implies the notion of being born in the world we do not know. Since the world comes to us as an unknown we are constantly knowing it in the presence being born in the moment that keeps on coming.

² Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The birth to presence*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993

³ Aristotle. “Physics”. *The Internet Classics Archive*. Web Atomic and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Accessed Dec.12th, 2017 <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.html>

It has been a long time since Plato presence was understood not only as a state of now in the timeline but as a realm of the truth and the essence of reality. Plato's cave shows the allegory of that truth. It is absent in the cave because the shadows in the cave are only representations of a reality and truth that are outside the cave.⁴ Amanda Bell wrote in her inquiry of absence and presence :

*“For Plato, the illusion of appearances draws the mind from the contemplation of true being,” where “true being” is the ultimate form of presence (Plato 524). Implicit within his discussion of mimesis or representation is a belief in a “true being” or unmediated, present state of being of representations”.*⁵

That way, true presence for Plato was outside of the cave in direct contact with reality and its truth. Therefore absence was being away from the truth in the cave in the world of representations.

However with *Being and time* Heidegger started to question beyond this relation of presence and absence with truth and reality and was more interested in presence as being and existence of a human, known through the concept of *Dasein*, present-at-hand.⁶ Heidegger explores the linearity of time suggested by Aristotle and attempts to understand the transcendency of being and time, where being is always linked to presence. Heidegger addresses Western tradition of philosophy and pursues a better understanding of time, where present, past and future can be in unity and presence can be also seen through the prism of eternal.⁷ This new approach to the Western thought influenced Derrida and understanding of presence.

Jacques Derrida through the idea of deconstruction has taken a new look on the metaphysics of presence. To Derrida, it is important to rethink two seemingly opposite ideas of presence and absence, where presence is often portrayed as a mediator of truth and absence is

⁴ Plato. “Republic”. *The Internet Classics Archive*. Book VII. Web Atomic and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Accessed Dec. 12th, 2017 <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>

⁵ Bell, Amanda. “Absence/presence”. *The Chicago School of Media Theory*. The University of Chicago. Accessed Jan. 12th, 2017 <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/>

⁶ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996

⁷ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996

linked to representations and simulacrum.⁸ With Derrida's critique towards logocentrism and the privilege of presence over absence, he attempts to look beyond the duality of this phenomenon. While the concepts belong to different poles, there is a tendency to aspire to one more than to another. For Derrida, binaries do not work in term of hierarchy like this because both opposite phenomena talk about truth from a different perspective and depend on each other.⁹ In *Of Grammatology* Derrida introduced the idea of 'trace' that helps to understand the complexity of parallel concepts better. When we talk about presence or speaking we can not escape taking absence or writing into consideration. Trace is the remains of one concept into its opposite. That mark was left in it when we talk about and describe another concept. In this way, when we talk about presence we have a trace of absence in it. It is the presence of absence and vice versa.¹⁰

With the perspective of deconstruction, we shall look at presence and absence as an inseparable phenomenon that cannot be seen in hierarchical opposition but rather in unity that is longing for the meaning together. The truth is always eluding as soon as it is approached too closely since the signs and representations of the truth can never represent themselves accurately. Television and social media seem to engage us with present moment so fully that time flies by often unnoticed, however being absorbed by media can produce an absent presence, as the reality, we are engaging with is only a simulacrum. My aim in the text and in the artwork is to explore the relationships between presence and absence through the mediation and aesthetics of television and new media.

2.2. The medium is the message¹¹.

In the work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida looks at writing and speaking through the optics of absence and presence. Plato paired writing with absence, as it is a drift from the logos and

⁸ Skempton, Simon. *Alienation after Derrida*. London: Continuum International, 2010

⁹ Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Accessed Dec.15th, 2016.
https://monoskop.org/images/8/8e/Derrida_Jacques_Of_Grammatology_1998.pdf

¹⁰ Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Accessed Dec.15th, 2016.
https://monoskop.org/images/8/8e/Derrida_Jacques_Of_Grammatology_1998.pdf

¹¹ McLuhan, Marshall. "Medium is the message". In *Media and cultural studies: keywords*, edited by Durham, Meenakshi Gigi, and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2010

truth in spoken word.¹² Spoken word was seen by Plato and structuralists as a carrier of truth and therefore presence. Derrida reinvents this idea, to him even speaking cannot be close to the truth, because the language and the sign of a word can have multiple meanings and get even further away from the presence, therefore it is ambitious to rely on the fact that speaking and writing, and precisely the language in general, contain presence in it.¹³

Marshall McLuhan¹⁴ and Walter Benjamin¹⁵ wrote about changes that lithography and the phonetic alphabet created in society. Before the written world there was the 'acoustic space', where speech was the primal "media". Then the ability of mass printing changed the way society got information. And with the invention of photography, cinema, television and modern technologies the world has adapted to completely different ways of interaction and communication compared even to a hundred years ago. Ears and eyes are mostly engaged in modern information consumption. The speed of information coming at us from the screen or the speakers is much faster than it is from the page of a book.

*"This means one cannot understand reality without understanding cinema, photography, 3D modelling, animation or other forms of moving and still image. The world is imbued with the shrapnel of former images, as well as images edited, photoshopped, cobbled together from spam and scrap. Reality itself is post-produced and scripted, affect rendered as after-effect."*¹⁶

The presence of various technologies in our life have influenced not only our ways to receive information but also to deliver and produce it ourselves. With the Internet and a smartphone, one can have an access and a knowledge to produce and to create basically any

¹² Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Accessed Dec.15th, 2016. https://monoskop.org/images/8/8e/Derrida_Jacques_Of_Grammatology_1998.pdf

¹³ Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Accessed Dec.15th, 2016. https://monoskop.org/images/8/8e/Derrida_Jacques_Of_Grammatology_1998.pdf

¹⁴ McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg galaxy. The making of typographic man*. Canada: Univ. Of Toronto Press, 1962

¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter. "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction". In *Media and cultural studies: keywords*, edited by Durham, Meenakshi Gigi, and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2010

¹⁶ Steyerl, Hito. "Too much world: Is the Internet dead?". *E-flux*, Journal 49 (2013). Accessed March 12th, 2017. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>

audiovisual content that used to be the territory of certain professionals. Portable cameras and mobile connection in our smartphones that integrated into our lives very fast and very recently we started to behave differently compared even to ten years ago. In *The Medium is the message* Marshall McLuhan proposes the idea that the medium¹⁷, television set or a smartphone, contains the message in it. The medium delivers the message to us is by placing us in certain body position and a certain state of engagement regardless of a content. Facebook news feed on a smartphone is a great example of a fast mindless scrolling with your thumb over and over again through the same posts as a ritual because the relevant aspect of checking the news is the act of being connected to the Internet, or at least being in-line with the news, rather than to be truly informed.

The medium of a smartphone is a unprecedented thing, as our gaze is not physically distant anymore - to a painting, a stage, a television set or a computer - it is turned to our palm, and it can happen anywhere at anytime. When a smartphone is a very essential and frequently used object in one's life, one can feel alienated and uncomfortable when the object is missing, When one can get offline in a 'virtual' reality and can get online in a physical reality, we can be absent in the online world and the other way around. As in the case of Internet addiction and dependency on the device, one may have the urge to constantly have online presence to feel satisfaction. The medium becomes inseparable part of our life, therefore it creates an intense feeling of separation when this haptic device is missing. One can feel alienated or incapacitated to participate on apparently higher, newer, wider level of human activities. One may not feel they belong to the present when the device is absent.

With social media, there are new terms that represent 'presence' and 'absence' - 'online' and 'offline' accordingly - and these terms deepen the metaphysics of presence by 'copy-pasting' these concepts to a new, second, 'virtual' reality. We can also speculate that in the Internet's reality our metaphysics of presence-absence might be parallel to us.

¹⁷ McLuhan, Marshall. "Medium is the message". In *Media and cultural studies: keywords*, edited by Durham, Meenakshi Gigi, and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2010

Another thing that has changed our behavior due to using smartphones is the built-in camera. We act differently because we can take a photo of any single thing or event we see. It can proceed to a non-verbal communication if we send the photo to someone. It can be seen as much more present and immediate way to deliver the information. The act of sharing, i.e. sending and delivering, information is happening live and at a very fast pace. That makes the photograph and information in it alive and present in the moment. Instagram, Snapchat, the names of these photo applications underline the fast speed of the visual information. According to Barthes, a photograph contains in it a certain level of relation to the presence of truth, which exists on the photograph as the moment is not happening anymore.¹⁸ Thus Barthes understands photography as an ‘absent presence’, presence that was caught on the image but no longer in the present moment.¹⁹ In reality, especially contemporary Western reality, we as well use a visual image as the closest to truth, as more and more smartphone photographs and videos are used as a legal prove of an event. Yet a photo can be manipulated, especially in the era of digitality, so it can not guarantee a full presence of reality. The world of signs in poststructuralist understanding of a reality can never refer to a certain object but to different signs and meanings. That way manipulated images and videos can be interpreted not as being absent from the essence but as being signifiers for something else. New ways of communication through visuals has contributed to our presence, yet being silent and wordless.

2.3 Distance of the medium.

Further on I will attempt to explore and speculate on the relationship between the medium in question and the idea of presence and absence.

“Hearing is spherical, vision is directional; hearing immerses its subject, vision offers a perspective; sounds come to us, but vision travels to its object; hearing is concerned with interiors, vision is concerned with surfaces; hearing involved physical contact with the outside world, vision requires distance from it; hearing places you inside an event, seeing gives you a

¹⁸ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010

¹⁹ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010

*perspective on the event; hearing tends towards **subjectivity**, vision tends towards **objectivity**;
hearing brings us into the living world, sight moves us toward atrophy and death; hearing is
about affect, vision is about intellect; hearing is a primarily temporal sense, vision is a primarily
spatial sense; hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, while vision removes us from it”*
Jonathan Sterne.²⁰

These words from Jonathan Sterne seem to describe two modes of accessing reality which are completely opposed by the very nature of their respective mediums, they seem to acknowledge that the way we perceive and understand reality is limited by the characteristics of the medium itself. If we evaluate this perspective for a moment we can try to speculate in the relationship of vision and hearing, through light and sound as two opposing parallel between absence and presence.

Vision in our culture is the consecrated sense we primarily favor to understand the world around us, from science to art, from religion to politics, vision has become the essential prism that helps us to understand, communicate, and to live the world first through our eyes. In a physical sense light is also the most reliable mediator to understand the underlying mechanisms of nature in a way that there is no doubt that the images we see represent a certain truth of the reality we encounter. Moreover we tend to find peace when we capture the visually harmonic logic of nature, when its secrets are seemingly revealed through symmetrical structures, through synchronized gears and fractals, at the other hand we do not feel quite at home when nature convey unpredictable mysteries, on transparent, sensible forms that comes in ephemeral, fluid, bodily moments as the ones that sound can bring. Salome Voegelin acknowledges that:

“Seeing always happens in a meta-position, away from the seen, however close. And this distance enables a detach-ment and objectivity that presents itself as truth. Seeing is believing.

The visual “gap” nourishes the idea of structural certainty and the notion that we can

²⁰ Sterne, Jonathan.(ed.)*The Sound Studies Reader*. Quoted from Hudson, Martyn. “What, am I hearing light? Listening through Jean-Luc Nancy”. *Fylkingen HZ Journal*, 19 (2004). Accessed March 2nd, 2017. <http://www.hz-journal.org/n19/hudson.html>

truly understand things, give them names and define ourselves in relation to those names as stable subjects, as identities.”²¹

Vision incites the idea of a clear, finite reality which displays its contours openly for us to see. This physical stability of the phenomena seems to facilitate the precise examination, capture and final appropriation of the phenomena. Can vision, as a predominant force of perception, desensitize us from engaging with what is unpredictable, invisible, shapeless, and ephemeral?

What we learn, what we get from what we hear, smell, touch or see is interpreted through the mechanics in which our culture operates, through the “optics” in which our culture “sees” its world. In this sense Yun-Qi (Isaac) Jiang suggests that ocularcentrism via language and its visual representation is what perpetuates our perspective of our world as a distant, static reality by relating what we see to memorized, standard codes of assimilation, still he will later explain that the fixation of vision, also correlates with our cultural fear of death, of what becomes and what decays.²²

In the realm of sound, the present tense of listening requires for us to be in the present moment, ignoring what we will hear since sound develops over time and can not be frozen and appreciated as a static form, it has to be acquired in the now. Salome Voegelin says that “hearing is full of doubt.” We are constantly with the sound without any distance to determine and realize it, and that causes “the doubt about the heard and us hearing it”.²³

The now in the realm of sound demands uncertainty towards the future, not knowing what we will be listening to. According to Jean Luc Nancy, sound is prone to escape what is known to us. Listening or “understanding” what we hear is always in the borders of meaning, of

²¹Voegelin, Salome. *Listening to noise and silence: Towards a philosophy of sound art*. New York, London: Continuum International, 2010. p.3

²² Jiang, Yun-Qi (Isaac). “Ocularcentrism: Towards a Mastery over Life and Death”. *Gnosis. Journal of philosophy*, 14(1), (2015). Accessed Feb. 24th, 2017. <https://ojs.concordia.ca/index.php/gnosis/article/view/414>

²³Voegelin, Salome. *Listening to noise and silence: Towards a philosophy of sound art*. New York, London: Continuum International, 2010. p.4

what we know.²⁴ Additionally for Nancy and going back to the first of Nancy's quotes that precedes this thesis, "Presence is what is born, and does not cease being born". In this sense, an elementary aspect that meets both presence and listening has to do with us "being" immersed in a new world, in a present that we ignore, that unfolds unpredictably in front of us.

For Nancy's, listening and presence manifest in the idea of birth, for Yun-Qi's language and ocularcentrism correlates with death. If we reflect on these forces with a more perennial perspective, the force of light and vision along with its stable precision confronted to sound and its transitory vagueness we can easily grasp the general idea that both opposites are elemental materials for life to exist and essential forces for them to coexist in a more or less equilibrium.

A crucial change in the relationship between hearing and vision has occurred in 1979 when Walkman by Sony, a portable cassette player with personal headphones, was introduced to the public.²⁵ Since that time and up until now headphones have become a part of our life and carry the ability to change the soundscape around you. It lets us be absorbed in our own world through listening and still to be present in the surrounding world. With the dynamic of eyes and ears being not 'synchronised' there were various surveys about the walkman, whether the contact with reality is lost or are we still human.²⁶ Some commercials for walkman conveyed the messages of progress, change and even evolution. Shuhei Hosokawa writes in *The walkmen effect*:

*"This listener seems to cut the auditory contact with the outer world where he really lives: seeking the perfection of his 'individual' zone of listening, he seeking the perfection of his 'individual' zone of listening...."*²⁷

²⁴ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. New York: Fordham university press, 2007. p. 7

²⁵ Haire, Meaghan. "A brief history of the walkman". *TIME*, (2009). Accessed Feb. 12th, 2017. <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1907884,00.html>

²⁶ Hosokawa, Shuhei. "The walkman effect." *Popular Music*, 4, (1984). p.165-180. Accessed Nov. 16th, 2016. doi:10.1017/S0261143000006218

²⁷ Hosokawa, Shuhei. "The walkman effect." *Popular Music*, 4, (1984). p.165-180. Accessed Nov. 16th, 2016. doi:10.1017/S0261143000006218

“Individual’ zone has expanded now in the direction of vision. Now, with above mentioned headphones and a portable device we can be absorbed both visually and auditorily. Hosokawa suggests to treat it not as a phenomenon of a new relationships with the world, but as “an effect or effect-event in the pragmatic and semantic transformation of the urban.” Both walkman and portable smartphone are sculpting the behaviour in the urban environment.²⁸ However, the win of eye-privilege is coming back pushing the importance of sound away. Social media sets the rules of watching videos with their initial settings, whether on Facebook or Instagram. The playback appears first without sound, suggesting that you can be in the ‘individual’ visual zone anywhere, even in public. Facebook playbacks include closed captions so that listening is also not compulsory, because you can read what is being said. Another layer can be added to it though, the asymmetry of auditory and visual experience occurs. Now you can keep on being in one listening ‘world’ and consume different visual content. The ‘individual’ zone of listening and/or watching are reshaping the concepts of presence and absence.

Technology and bodies reactions towards it operate not only within certain effects on us, they also affect us. If effect is understood as a result caused by some change, affect is understood as an act, that causes the change.²⁹ Simon O’Sullivan writes in his article *The aesthetics of affect* that affect is a present experience, it is “inaccessible to consciousness”. In Sullivan’s exploration of affect, we can see that the experience is always ‘passing’ between future and present and we are exposed to its trace.³⁰ Therefore, we can never consciously grasp a moment of the present we are in and that’s how Sullivan defines affect of art. He refers to Adorno’s idea of art:

“For Adorno, art operates as a utopian blink: it presents the possible through its difference to the existent. Indeed, art, for Adorno, is not really of this world at all < it prefigures and promises a world yet-to-come.”³¹

²⁸ Hosokawa, Shuhei. “The walkman effect.” *Popular Music*, 4, (1984). p.165-180. Accessed Nov. 16th, 2016. doi:10.1017/S0261143000006218

²⁹ Oxford Dictionaries. “Affect or effect: a visual guide”. *Oxford Dictionaries*, (2014). Accessed March 3d, 2017. <http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/04/affect-vs-effect-quick-visual-guide/>

³⁰ O’Sullivan, Simon. “Aesthetics of affect. Thinking art beyond representation”. *Angelaki*, 6 (3) , (2001). Accessed Jan. 20th, 2017. doi: 10.1080/09697250120087987

³¹ O’Sullivan, Simon. “Aesthetics of affect. Thinking art beyond representation”. *Angelaki*, 6 (3) , (2001). Accessed Jan. 20th, 2017. doi: 10.1080/09697250120087987

We experience art in the present moment but we never can reach it. We are exposed to the things that are not here with us right now. Television can be seen through the same perspective of Adorno. We are present watching a television program and connecting to it 'live', nevertheless, it represents a reality we can never grasp. It may affect us but we cannot experience it. The illusion of having information as new as possible may not result in a clear conscious respond since it is just an illusion that gives an idea of a real time. If it would be real time and therefore the present, we would be conscious of it. Going back to Sullivan's text, the unconscious experience of the present is the affect. It is *'the reaction on the body on the level of matter. [...]As such, affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed, they occur on a different, asignifying register'*³²

³² O'Sullivan, Simon. "Aesthetics of affect. Thinking art beyond representation". *Angelaki*, 6 (3) , (2001). Accessed Jan. 20th, 2017. doi: 10.1080/09697250120087987

3. On Alienation.

3.1. Alienation. Introduction of the concept.

Alienation, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, can be “the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved”.³³ Alienation can help to understand absence through our culture, since it has to do with relationships with others. Thus we need to understand absence and therefore alienation through the optics of our society. Karl Marx looked at alienation from a socio-political view. For him it is “the manifestation of the mode of production of capitalist society. Alienation involves a loss of the control, mastery and self-determination of human activity to an external, alien and hostile force.”³⁴ Human activity is labour, the product of which causes a worker to detach. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx states the the product of labor itself is an alien object, and the more time a worker spends with it, the more it takes control of a worker’s life and therefore causes alienation. Marx described alienation as a fault of capitalism, when workers are disconnected from the product and the way they are producing.³⁵

Alienation could be also understood through Derrida’s deconstruction. Although philosopher himself rarely mentions alienation, Simon Skempton in his *Alienation after Derrida* proposes that deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence is a critique of alienation and therefore it is an important element to look into when talking about ‘the present’.³⁶

Self-estrangement is a feeling of disconnection from everything around you including people and things. Sociologist Melvin Seeman researched self-estrangement in his article *On the meaning of Alienation*, where he talked about five psychological concepts associated with

³³ *Oxford Dictionaries*. s.v. “alienation”. Accessed Oct.14th. 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/alienation>

³⁴ Skempton, Simon. *Alienation after Derrida*. London: Continuum International, 2010. p.40

³⁵ Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959. Transcribed by Andy Blunden, 2000. Accessed Feb.17th. 2017. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>

³⁶ Skempton, Simon. *Alienation after Derrida*. London: Continuum International, 2010

alienation. It was powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. All the parts are separated by definition, as it is pointed out by Seeman himself, they all look onto alienation from different angles - power, meaning, social behavior, society, and self.³⁷ I am interested in talking about alienation, connection and therefore presence through the optics of self-estrangement because for me it seems to be primal in our contemporary world when we talk about the relation of oneself to technology and culture. Alienation in connection to the topic of popular media will be seen here as one's desertion from present reality. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht writes in *Production of Presence. What meaning cannot convey*:

“While modern (including contemporary) Western culture can be described as a process of progressive abandonment and forgetting of presence, some of the “special effects” produced today by the most advanced communication technologies may turn out to be instrumental in reawakening a desire for presence. The saturation of such a desire, however, cannot happen through a simple replacement of meaning with presence”.

38

For Marx and in his time, industry was a main driving force in the society, so he understood alienation through it. Today, technology is a main figure through which we can look at alienation. Being exposed to television, Internet and social media one may feel extremely connected with the world and individuals around, nevertheless, as Gumbrecht writes, the resurrection of this desire to be present may lead to alienation again. Therefore, connection further will be used as an opposite state of alienation - relation to the surrounding objects, people and present reality. The level of intensity of one's connection or alienation may vary, still these are permanent concepts that I will look into during the analysis of reality-show television and social medias in this chapter.

³⁷ Seeman, Melvin. “On the meaning of alienation”. *American Sociological Review*, 24(6), (1959). Washington DC: American Sociological Association, pp.783-791. Accessed Feb.18th, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2088565>

³⁸ Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *Production of presence. What meaning cannot convey*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007.p.xv

3.2. Reality-show as a realm of alienation and connection.

Reality shows on television as a genre are a good example of a cultural phenomenon that deals with alienation and connection. From the content point of view, the shows are filled with people trying to connect and gain recognition, whether it is an emotional or a social one. *Big Brother* is the quintessence of that idea. The reality-show was first aired in 1999 in the Netherlands and was brought to the U.S.A. in 2000. The show is still running in 54 countries.³⁹ The program shows a group of people living in one house without access to the outside world. Each week the contestants vote to eliminate one participant out until one person is left, who will be considered the winner. There is no specific competition or rules to play by in this tv-show. We are observing people isolated from society and under 24/7 surveillance. Isolation and surveillance create social tension which is the main point of the interest in the show. In order to win the game, you need just to stay in the house and not be voted out of it. Therefore the main premise is to be good at connecting with other contestants in the show, so they do not want to eliminate you. That way it is possible to keep the presence on the tv-screen. We as viewers have a chance to see how a human relationship can develop in certain situations and between certain, often incompatible, people.

The show executive producer of last 15 seasons of the U.S. *Big Brother* compares it to high school, because social relationships direct participants lives.⁴⁰ It does not matter who you are outside of the show house in terms of career or hobbies, but what matters is your social

³⁹ *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia.* s.v. Big Brother (franchise). Accessed Jan.12th, 2017
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Brother_\(franchise\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Brother_(franchise))

⁴⁰ Wieselmann, Jason. "Why "Big Brother" Has Remained TV's Most Addictive Reality Show". *Buzzfeed. Entertainment*, (2014). Accessed Dec 15th, 2016.
https://www.buzzfeed.com/jarettwieselmann/why-big-brother-has-remained-tvs-most-addictive-reality-show?utm_term=.gp70QKYM0#.viywGM2bw

position and how you interact within this little community here and now. This makes the contestants extremely present in this moment without any life distractions. They are fully absorbed by the social game that is going on. The assignments and news are brought to participants only through the voice of a producer, who is the ‘big brother’ on the show.

The name of this reality-show comes from George Orwell novel *1984* where the society is under pervasive surveillance of Big Brother.⁴¹ The reality show puts the idea of oppressive surveillance in its title implying on the fact that surveillance of the inhabitants is in the focus. Alongside with the figure of a producer of the show we are the ‘big brother’ too. We are watching the house as if from above, we demand entertainment and serving our desires and expectations that we have when getting to the program. On the contrary, the show is controlling us and making us serve our time and attention. If Orwell’s citizens were reminded of ‘Big brother watching you’, we are reminded to watch *Big Brother* every week. The power relationships are obscure when it comes to entertainment. Who is in control? The audience or the producers?

Reality shows, as well as the news and interview shows, deal with the representation of society and people. We feel connected to the life that is going on the screen, but at the same time, there is an alienation and a certain level of desensitization. Reality shows talk about different reality in the form of entertainment. We sit at home and watch from the safe distance of our home, the reality seems to be close but not real enough to hit us with the realization of our current moment. The filmmakers Christoph Schlingensiefel and Paul Poet made a video art project based on parodying Big Brother tv-show *Foreigners out! Schlingensiefels Container* in 2001. The project had a container with asylum seekers living in it in Vienna. The inside of the container, the life of the immigrants, was broadcasted on Austrian TV and on the outside of the container. The Austrian citizen had to vote ‘contestants’ out, the same way it happens on *Big Brother*, except they were invited to eliminate least favorite participant out of the country. The project sums up well the criticism of xenophobia through the famous television concept. It focuses on

⁴¹ Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. UK: Penguin UK, 2006

social relationships and experiments with a reality of human behavior. In real life, it is not as simple to eliminate people out life. Social interactions and connections in the world are much more complex than in television cultivated reality, which makes it not that easy to exclude people we do not like from our lives. As underlined by Schlingensief, it is happening towards immigrants by political votes. The analogy is clear, and unfortunately, the existence of *Big Brother* has not caused meaningful reflection or empathy to the situation of refugees in the modern world. Refugees are being alienated by us. The reality in reality-television represents alienated reality, a reality that is different from the one we live in, dystopian or utopian, a reality that is may yet-to-come. This reality occupies time in our current reality. The potential it has to teach us about social interaction is being lost for the sake of entertainment.

In the field of psychology, many studies have been made on people who watch reality tv shows. The reasons for them watching the shows may vary as there is such a multiple numbers of subgenres of reality shows making it difficult to research the topic inclusively. The reasons may go beyond voyeurism or an interest in the subject. Watching various reality-shows may also help to gain more information and experience about the world.⁴² It can be connected to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, where learning about life comes from observing other people's behavior.⁴³ That means that reality television has a very powerful tool to implement ideas and knowledge about the world and human behavior, and it can dangerously affect the way we see people based on gender or race. Although it works that well because contestants on the screen are very relatable. They are not celebrities but common people, and that gives the feeling to the viewer that they could potentially be on the show as well.⁴⁴ This creates a stronger bond between television audience and the participants of the show, because they are one in the same . The cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross proposes the idea that the longer we spend time within television world, the higher the chances of us to believe in social reality portrayed on television. In case of excessive television watching, one may adopt the perspective of the world portrayed on the screen. One may start behaving according to that

⁴² Vitelli, Romeo. "Is there a 'Snooky Effect'?" Psychology Today, (2013). Accessed Nov 2nd, 2016. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201310/is-there-snooki-effect>

⁴³ Bandura, Albert. *Social Learning Theory*. Stanford, CA: General Learning Corporation, 1971

⁴⁴ Andrejevic, Mark. *Reality TV: the work of being watched*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. p.95-117

perspective in the world that is more diverse than television constructed reality.⁴⁵ As a result, the disconnection from present reality may occur and the borders of what is real (as for authentic) and what is not are likely to be blurred and mixed up. One gets back to seeing the world after clashing with the media, therefore one gets back to recognizing the presence through having the experience of absence.

Our identification with the one on the screen or in the book is understandable because identifying is the first thing we experience since the moment we see ourselves in the mirror and place this alien identity back onto ourselves.⁴⁶ As Bruce Baugh writes in *Let's get lost: From the Death of the Author to the Disappearance of the Reader* the reader/viewer experiences 'shock of recognition', there is a misidentification that takes place. The audience may relate not to similar qualities of one's character with themselves but to the imaginary ones, that portray a 'better' or a 'frightening' version of them.⁴⁷

3.3. Social media as a realm of alienation and connection.

Reality shows have a direct connection to the modern life of social media. After reality television, it became acceptable to share personal information with everyone, to have a public diary of your feelings, in other words. Now we are not only watching other people sharing something, we are participating as well. Social media, as a continuation of reality television's diary room, has evolved to be a one big 'diary' where the whole dynamics is based on exchanging opinions and emotions. But what social media may be missing is the fictional setting of reality show. There are live-broadcasting modes of sharing emerging on the Internet lately that probably will evolve to be a more common phenomena. I would like to focus more on the idea of social media as a commentary on real life, which at the same time makes it part of our real

⁴⁵ Gerbner, George and Larry Gross. "Living with television: The violence profile". *Journal of Communication*, Vol 26(2), (1976), 172-199. Accessed Feb.1st, 2017. Doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x

⁴⁶ Baugh, Bruce."Let's Get Lost: From the Death of the Author to the Disappearance of the Reader". *Symposium*, 10, (2006), 223-232. Accessed March 26th, 2017 <http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/symposium/items/show/153>

⁴⁷ Baugh, Bruce."Let's Get Lost: From the Death of the Author to the Disappearance of the Reader". *Symposium*, 10, (2006), 223-232. Accessed March 26th, 2017 <http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/symposium/items/show/153>

life. At some extent it *is* real life, because in modern dynamics in order to belong to the world you have to be on social media. It verifies you.

Social media and its ‘diarism’ of life have influenced reality and seemed to substitute it at some extent, so the presence of the moment is not easily recognised. When a diary overshadows the life it talks about, it may result in a dissonance. We are witnessing now ‘the age of disconnection’ while being extremely connected via technology. We are always online and always producing the digital documentary content commenting on the life outside of technology, but since we are fastforwarding in the digital virtual world we have no reality left to comment on. We are trapped in the vicious circle where we spend too much time on social media talking about ‘reality’ that we are missing out on real life and on being present and it leads us to produce a big amount of content that often exists for the sake of producing and afterwards being affirmed.

Social media’s personal posts can be understood as Plato’s shadows, yet this representation is often treated as a ‘true being’. Social media profiles represent us and often demand from us some extent of responsibility towards our Internet profiles. Like in Rene Magritte’s famous painting *The treachery of images (This is not a pipe)*⁴⁸, the image is never the same as the real object, just as our Internet profiles can never be the true us, as they are usually assumed to be. Thus the diary and representation world of social media creates its own reality. It is not ‘absent presence’ in the words of Barthes, since there is often a different side of presence captured, that works as presence only when posted to the Internet. Therefore, as ‘online’ becomes a new presence with its own rules and relation towards reality, where reality is used as a ground where new meanings are built. Can we refer to it as a ‘present absence’ then? Where absence of the meaning of the occasion through the medium of photography and new media finds its presence online. The world of social media is younger than 15 years. It is developing very fast and constantly on the border between absence and presence and often referred to as virtual and ‘not-real’, however absence is equally important when talking about social media and

⁴⁸ Magritte, Rene. *The treachery of images (This is not a pipe)*. 1948. Los Angeles County Museum of Art

can't be seen destructive. Being perpetually shifting between presence and absence, social media is also embedding alienation and connection.

The amount of information broadcasted and published online is enormous. On top of digesting that large volume of data we need to sift through the huge assortment of it we are faced with. One day Facebook can be celebrating the Star Wars release and the other day it is filled with the sorrow for the Paris attacks. The traffic of entertainment mixed with shocking news is so fast that we may not be quick enough to react with a right amount of empathy and comprehension to the data. There seems to be a detachment towards received information because it is not classified and separated, it is a big flow that seems to hit us and turn the world streaming online into entertainment.

In 2016 we were witnessing terrible graphic images and videos broadcasted live from bombing Aleppo. The world was watching from their screens how the lives and realities of others are being destroyed. The goodbye videos, the videos of attacks, dying children - all streaming and circling in the feed to affect us. Did it affect us? Does more blood on the little kid help to raise donations? Does the live stream help to be more empathetic? Susan Sontag talks about war images in her book *Regarding the pain of others*:

"To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism. It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment. . . . It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. But it is absurd to identify the world with those zones in the well-off countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people's pain . . . consumers of news, who know nothing at first hand about war and massive injustice and terror. There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronizing reality."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003

We are desensitized with mediated reality. It gives the impression of connecting to the reality on the screen, but it makes us neither more sensible nor sensitive. While the developed Western world is alienated and almost addicted to an everyday dose of the world falling apart, the rest is in pain. We live in the time when the images from war do not come afterwards but stream live from the tragedy. We see the faces, the names, the accounts of the victims. The war becomes hyperreal yet in the virtual world. What stays within the computer screen and causes the dose of horror and empathy, disappears with turning off the screen. Facebook is a medium of spectacle not by the images itself, but as Guy Debord wrote, ‘... it [spectacle] is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.’⁵⁰ A number of views, likes, comments, shares have become a spectacle. The usual practice of watching images and videos online includes reading the comments and glancing at the view count. The image comes in the package with a commentary on it. The comments section gets equal attention and at the same time, it is meant to bring people together and make us interact and connect.

Other problems occur because the Internet does not have absolute authority or an ever watching eye that monitors people’s actions on the Internet, the social interactions often get out of hand turning into bullying and teasing.⁵¹ The anonymity of the Internet world may let the fears and traumas of a dissatisfied spectator out to inflict harm on others, the anonymity gives you a license to inflict pain on others whereas in real life you would not do it. The Internet allows relationships with others that we do not happen to have in real life. It gives a privilege to misbehave without a risk of a personal contact.

3.4. Gogglebox as a meeting point of reality-show and social media.

“Everyone loves watching TV and talking about TV,” she says. “But the show isn’t really about TV. The show is about people’s lives, their relationships,

⁵⁰ Debord, Guy. *Society of Spectacle*. Detroit: Black&Red and Radical America, 1970. p.2 Accessed march 21st, 2017 https://monoskop.org/File:Debord_Guy_Society_of_the_Spectacle_1970.pdf

⁵¹ Lovink, Geert and Sabine Niederer. *Video Vortex reader. Responses to YouTube*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008

their living rooms and the way children and parents talk about TV."⁵²

Talking about commenting on things, there is a perfect example of reality-tv show that brings up the issues of the supposed one-way relationship of traditional media to the viewer. It is *Gogglebox*, that aired in United Kingdom in 2013.⁵³ British reality TV-show that main idea is watching people in their living rooms watching TV. They react to it and discuss it with their family members and friends right in front of us. What seems like a very absurd idea - to watch other people watch television - the show became very successful. If we look at it closer, we can see that we are watching the same immediate reactions and discussions to all TV programs and news as we see them on the Internet in a form of tweets, comments, forums, etc. The show is successful because we can relate to it, because we interact with television in the same way when watching it in the company of others. The show mirrors us and we are mirroring the show right in the moment - watching how people are watching tv while watching tv. It is a reality check. It is a television's slap to the Internet. It is an entertainment. It is a reminder, that the reaction to the news and tv-shows is always there.

Some people watching reality-shows may gain a second-hand emotion of success and accomplishment that they do not have in their own lives. It can be easier to watch someone accomplish a goal by winning a competition, rather than go and "win a little competition" that we have in life. We experiencing it through substitution and then we feel good about ourselves and keep postponing 'winning' in our lives. This idea can spread far and beyond popular culture and why we are consuming it in a huge dose, to substitute something from our life and therefore find a connection with ourselves by different means. But *Gogglebox* as I already said, is about the action that we are doing at the same moment. So we are not getting passive experience, we are watching what we are doing at the same moment. We are finally watching not what we could be doing, but what we are actually are doing. It is not a show about rich life, romance, success or talent that we may lack, it is the reality show. It is the present.

⁵² Jodelka, Filipa. "Gogglebox: why watching people watching TV never gets old". *The Guardian*, (2015). Accessed Jan 5th, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/sep/11/gogglebox-everyones-favourite-show>

⁵³ *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia.* s.v. "Gogglebox". Accessed Jan.20th, 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gogglebox>

We got used to the Internet being that ‘living room’, where we share our ideas with everyone. We throw it to the window of a laptop and anyone can see it. And *Gogglebox* reflects on us being part of close relationships that are behind closed doors and not exposed to the world of the web. It is striking how it is reality shows that initially made us eager to share any significant and insignificant part of our life with everyone. Reality shows expanded the limit of privacy or possibly destroyed it completely. The Internet adopted the reality-show stars behavior very well. As the Internet was emerging about the same time as reality-shows, we quickly learnt that the Internet is the exact place where we can now expose ourselves. The Internet and social media also allows us to have a similar visual effect - we tell about ourselves not only with words, but with photos and videos too. Copying television has never been easier. Returning to *Gogglebox*, the show gets us back to private lives where sharing your opinions with your loved ones is enough. The idea has almost vanished, when the concept of ‘Netflix and chill’⁵⁴ is an euphemism for having a casual sex, where *Netflix* is a television substitute for many young people and ‘chill’ can mean “to spend relaxed time”. It seems that there are less young people who believe that watching a program with someone is a nice relaxed time. We are binge watching shows alone at home consuming many episodes per night.⁵⁵ *Gogglebox* amazingly reminds us the beauty of a present moment and that watching television together could be a point of connection.

Being on the other side of *Big Brother*- an epitome of reality-show - *Gogglebox* is quintessential in the conversation about the audience experience. It takes the mentioned idea of recognition and identification to another level. Rather than the possibility of being on the show we face the actuality, because we are what we see. *Gogglebox* has shaken the common thoughts about television’s audience in the era of rising Internet use.. With the misbelief that the Internet is an alternative version of television where there is freedom and authenticity of experience, there is the same problem occurring. Now we tend to believe to the content produced for the

⁵⁴ Rickett, Oscar. “How ‘Netflix and chill’ became code for casual sex”. *The Guardian*, (2015). Accessed March 12th, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/shortcuts/2015/sep/29/how-netflix-and-chill-became-code-for-casual-sex>

⁵⁵ *Wikipedia*. *The Free Encyclopedia*. s.v. “Binge-watching”. Accessed Feb.20th, 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binge-watching>

Internet. The data is adjusted and chosen specially for us according to our online histories that creates an illusion of only necessary and relevant information. However, in the light of 2016 and the U.S. president election it became evident to see how the Internet is controlling the spectator. The terms 'bubble' and 'echo chamber' appeared to describe the phenomenon, when your social media newsfeed is circulating the same ideas that reflect the viewer's beliefs and opinions.⁵⁶ There is no exposure to other perspective and that may create a misconception of the world. The idea of truth is deconstructed.

Gogglebox is an example of complete engagement and connection with the television screen. It is about presence and the experience of watching. From the other hand, absence is equally crucial for the show, as *Gogglebox* embraces it by excluding the essence and usual structure of reality-show and its audience experience. As a result we see a successful product of entertainment that uses absence and presence as a driving force for creating entertainment.

⁵⁶ Martin, Alan. "The web's 'echo chamber' leaves us none the wiser". *WIRED UK*. Accessed March 15th, 2017. <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/online-stubbornness>

4. A final start.

As the natural opposite of any start there must be an end, nevertheless this particular culmination refers to another result in a way that there will be not any real conclusion without starting this process again. Therefore I must consider this conclusion not as an ultimate arrival point, but more as a space for suspension, waiting to be incarnated again into struggle between two very vital and necessary forces, presence/absence. Rather than making a case for either of these positions, mediums, or concepts for absence and presence, my interest lays on the willingness to learn from the influence they might have on each other, in our lives, and how we can understand our perception through the study of these two opposite poles. Talking about the future of television and new media, this text might have shed some light on the influence of social media and our immediate environment, that we can reflect on.

In the course of this text we have explored the concepts of absence and presence through different, sometimes spontaneous ideas. The bodily and mental presence and absence are perpetuating our lives. Consumption of television and new media through various devices is an inalienable element when talking about the two concepts. The two concepts become one and with a closer look in the course of my research should be treated as parallel rather than opposite ones. From this perspective on presence and absence mediated through television and new media we can more easily envision the risks of its influence on our eye-biased culture.

Both the text and the artwork are an inquiry into the phenomenon of presence which cannot be fully understood without the idea of absence. *The Present Continues* video installation invites the audience to rethink and reflect on the present moment and the presence of popular culture industry by making the key elements of entertainment absent. Being placed in the context

of art allows a distant look on the subject as well, that you may not have during the intimate contact with television or new media.

The thesis text as an academic research can be seen as a contrast to the artwork, although the both are in parallel exploring into the same thing. As the artwork wants to be open to the interpretations and triggering new ideas, I wish the text to stay open and unclosed to encourage the discussion on presence and absence to continue beyond the words. As for my personal continuation with the topic, I wish to go on with the interest in the topic of presence and absence in the sociological context. While the installation is focusing primarily on the television, I wish to expand my interest and research to the world of new media too.

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