

If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to Instagram it, does it really happen?

Ironically or un-ironically or just funnily (dunno?) I will probably end up spending more time on Instagram this week than I will writing this, although I suppose that could really be declared as something akin to research or method acting. Also, I'm trying to think about how to talk about Instagram without sounding too much like a millennial version of Carrie Bradshaw. But why I am so embarrassed about being read like that? I think it's something to do with not wanting to look overly pretentious or self-obsessed, but to be quite honest I'm 25 and an artist and I love Instagram so it's probs too late to worry about that now.

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Instagram allows us to create fictions around our lives, to present as more prolific, more fun, better looking, better travelled. And I'm jealous of certain people's lives because of Instagram even though I know that they probably do argue with their beautiful boyfriend sometimes or that their skin isn't actually that great at the moment or that they're not really that vegan. And/but sometimes we do see these things in moments of confession but often as a cry for help, a complaint about a train being delayed or the appearance of a new spot - - a small break in the illusion, a 'look we're human too!' - - and this now made even more juicy and fleeting with Instagram stories.

Instagram works with a currency of knowledge and friendship. When we Instagram images of a book we've just bought or seen in a shop for example, we are proclaiming knowledge of something, of not just having seen the book but having read it cover to cover and totally understanding everything in it. When we post an image of a person, e.g. a new art friend or a partner, we are aligning ourselves with them, their beliefs, their reputation, and flaunting this relationship either intentionally or unintentionally. And what is our response to this social capital as viewers of it? We love it of course. We pat each other and ourselves on the back knowing that we've never met this person, that that person has never spoken to that person IRL, or that we've only put that picture up to show that we're cool because we're pals with that other person. Trust me, I have totally caught myself doing that 'look at me doing this thing with this person' in an openly showy offy way, don't worry, I'm reading myself here too.

Jan Verwoert says something similar to this but about IRL in 'The friendship dimension: Against the commodification of social relationships' (<https://www.springerlin.at/en/2011/4/horizont-freundschaft/>) here, "... that moment, making small-talk at an exhibition opening, when someone exclaims at the mention of a high-status name "S/he's a good friend!" and one can only transmit back on the same frequency: "Good for you!" The speed with which relationships are thus defined as capital has painfully little to do with the time that relationships would need to mature."

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* fyi coincidentally currently listening to James O'Brien on LBC who is talking to a 23 yo guy about instagram (and social media in general) and how he feels like it makes us strive too hard for perfection and to be liked which is all because of three decades of neoliberalism- discuss *

As artists we use instagram to display research, as a promotional tool, as a lifestyle blog, as a gallery and/or to archive our non-art existence. We can present our multiple millennial personalities/roles/hats as artist/curator/director/writer/partner/friend/sales assistant/ (// "creative engineer" is a fave title that I recently came across) all in one feed or divide these up, tidy ourselves up into nice little boxes via separate instagrams. Something like one for your normal life, one for your art work, one that you manage at work work, one for your band, one for your puppy, and maybe a few private ones (useful for incognito liking of your own photos or spying on other people). You are your own social media manager and look how productive you are being- fab.

The artists' lifestyle becomes part of their portfolio, by which I mean your life and your work are judged within the same aesthetic framework and so far as followers will like photos of your drawings on instagram, they'll also like photos of your city break to Rotterdam. At this point, a true and honest shout out to those people who have their aesthetic seriously down as well, that 'purity of stream', so beautifully done, a perfect brand identity. And when this is done with images of your own work as well then wow that really does make you look the most prolific. Especially if you post images of the same work over and over - me quoting someone quoting someone else, 'you should post three photos of the same piece of work to make it stick in people's head.' Just like when Beyonce puts up three pictures in a row of the same outfit and you question liking all of them and you look to see who of the people you're following has liked all of them and then you like all three anyway because you'd be lying to yourself if you didn't cos you truly do love every single one (please also note her recent hilarious, weird, cute Christmas insta vid posts)

But who knows, you might put a photo up of a painting from 2015 and even if it's really quite shit if you keep on posting from a solid bank of images and 'doing' social media then you'll still look incredibly on it most of the time, even if it becomes just vaguely apparent that maybe you've not actually made anything new at all since 2015.

With instagram, the more we post the more visible we become (many thanks, algorithms), the more followers and likes, and therefore an exponential increase in url reputation, which in turn leads to more irl invitations to do exhibitions, articles, commissions, residencies. Not always true, I know, but we all know that person/peer who gets all the shows and is also all over instagram and hats off to them for being on their game tbh.

I'm also really interested in instagram residencies; how arts organisations/artist-led groups/galleries invite artists to take over their instagrams for a period of time and to what end. Artists are able to use this platform similarly to their own instagram but with a heightened focus on posting pictures of their own work, other artists' work, or bits of research, things of general interest in relation to their practice. It's a chance for artists to access a new audience, gain new followers themselves. But by occupying someone else's instagram, as I mentioned before, we are by proxy aligning ourselves with them, their values and aesthetic whilst being situated alongside other previous artists-in-residence and their values and their aesthetics.

And from the other side of this the institution/group/gallery/collective is aligning itself with you, the artist, gaining from your reputation whilst acquiring a new audience and new followers. A mutually beneficially promotional tool. Although often without payment if you're part of the 'artist-led' scene often without arts council/other funding; this is free advertising, a gaining of social capital through free labour. (But then again, for example, I'm doing this for free and generously [but I also think it's an interesting thing to write about **is that enough? - discuss**] in the hope that something more financial remunerating will come along at some undefined point in the future I guess.)

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And so again irony irony whilst unconsciously staring at instagram for approx. 12 hours a day as per, I've not actually posted anything (apart from a few stories feat. a new bird feeder, my partner and a cat) for six days because I've been in a New Years Eve hangover hole. But I promise I have actually been doing stuff, i.e. making onion soup, doing a lot of sleeping and watching the new series of Black Mirror, I've just not really taken any photos.

In fact the only photo I took on NYE was of someone's window that had loads of cute Christmas ornaments in it at about half three in the morning. Luckily I do appear in my pal's instagram story twice- once wearing a party hat and what I think was supposed to be a sultry glare and the second time as a shadowy outline gesturing emphatically at the equally shadowy outline of another pal at a party. So at least there was some relatively concrete evidence that I had a great time.

And I have been doing some art stuff as well but that has mainly involved thinking a lot and then feeling the burning sensation of looming future art stuff that I've not yet organised. Then I also have the pressure that I should probably make evident to the world that I have actually spent the first few days of 2018 writing this thing. But now I'm six/seven days deep and still trying to decide whether my first post of this year is going to be the photo of the Christmas ornaments or the poster image for this project. But anyway, I'm not asking for a medal, just letting you know what I've been up to.

22/01/2018

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