Adresse Fossveien 24
         0551 Oslo
         Norge

Telefon (+47) 22 99 55 00

Post   Postboks 6853
         St. Olavs plass
         N-0130

Faktura Postboks 386
         Alnabru
         0614 Oslo

Org.no. 977027233
Giro   8276 0100265

KHIODA
Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo,
Digitalt Arkiv

www.khioda.no
khioda@khio.no

Anton Attal Alexei Jawdokimov
Ice fishing for stories on a sea of information

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Ice fishing for stories on a sea of information

Anton Attal Alexei Jawdokimov   MA essay, Kunstakademiet i Oslo
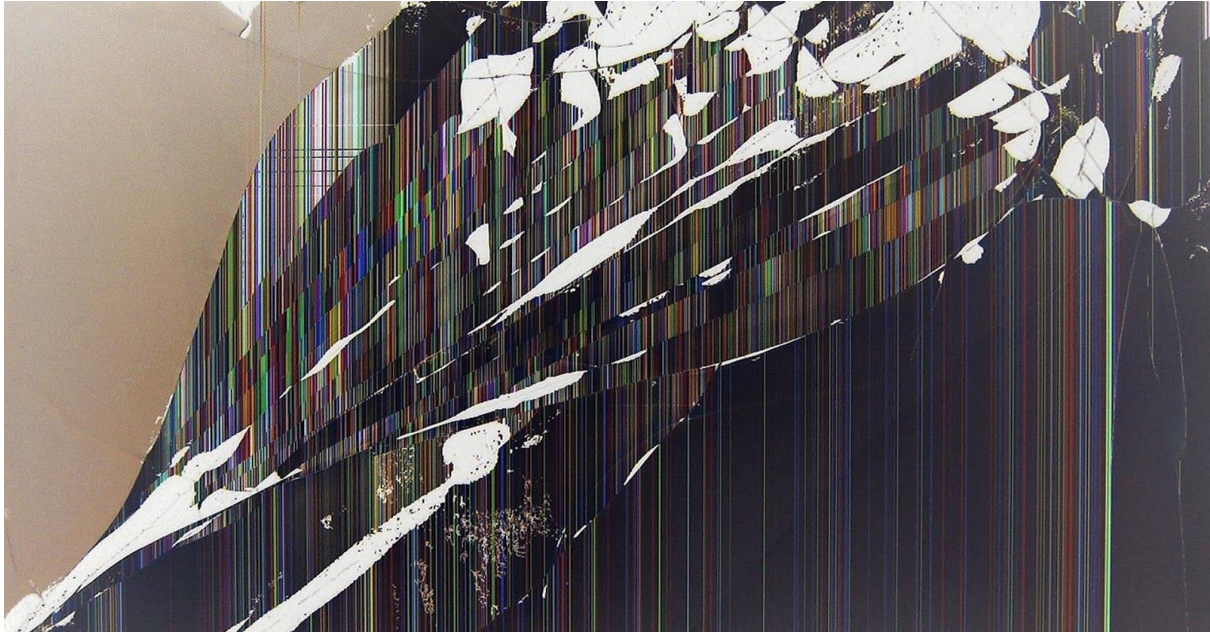
A pre-social media experience

On returning to my hometown over the holidays, I was immediately met with the expected nostalgia that comes with observing one's teenage place of growing up. The haunting feelings that pull one back to one's former days sunk their teeth into my core in a predictable manner - it happens whenever I return here - the place has, embedded within, the essence of lived experience. Around every corner a new memory somehow exudes from the stonework buildings and trees whilst simultaneously emerging in my mind. One particular memory was triggered whilst walking past what used to be the towns art college, which ironically now is the home of The Local History Society. The story begins with my interview. I remember bringing some paintings that my dad had encouraged me to produce simply to provide myself with some money as he's in the decorative art business. With some practice, I was able to reproduce work in his style and fortunately my dad did in fact manage to sell some works, which kept me in pocket after I left secondary school. So anyway, the head of the school, can't remember his name, was this typically stuffy, lets say "arty farty" type, and I literally quivered in his presence, so there we are in his rather decadent office and I bring out some

recent works of mine, expecting at least a positive reaction to my draughtsmanship skills, at which point he fumbles with my sketches and paintings on his desk, and in this unforgettable snobbish tone, looks up at his collection of stuffed animals and mumbles as if almost to himself, but clearly not, "Mmm..chocolate box covers"....

I did in fact receive a place on the foundation course, but there were more exciting things happening in the area at that time. Rave culture had arrived swiftly and silently-*ish,* via a convoy of old London taxi cabs, double decker buses and various other coaches and trucks converted into living spaces, and had made an old layby their impromptu home. This was in fact a community of best described in the politically correct term as new age travellers, but we liked to call them "crusties" for obvious reasons. What happened in the following months we call *the summer of love*, and I can still feel its repercussions to this very day. The thing is, as it would be impossible to recount each and every aspect of the experience, if I could sum it up in one paragraph it would be this: Coming from a hugely diverse field of circumstances and ethnic backgrounds, people gathered to experience what the government termed "sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats".

Moments before the riot police raided this peaceful gathering following the government's criminal justice bill reaction to rave culture link

For the first time in British legal history a musical form has been legally proscribed, of which I find hilarity in its description that describes what mankind has essentially danced to since the dawn of time. Recalling these memories, the style of music also contained for me, by nature of its production method and timeframe of birth, the promise of technology.

Permanent false alarm

The experience I, and all the other raver's had, which has been verbally recounted to each successive generation, has become legend, not in the eyes of the media, but by those who experienced it. In fact, at the time, the press exhibited, what Nietzsche described in *Human all too human* as *"the press as it is now, with its daily expenditure of lungpower on exclaiming, deafening, inciting, shocking - is it anything more than the permanent false alarm that leads ears and senses off in the wrong direction?"[1]* The music may have sounded that way, but I can assure you there was really nothing to be alarmed about, and this joint act of rebellion had to its credit the value of shared experience and connection that transcended the social norms and prejudices of the time. The birth of this style of music, that used to be such an underground thing, hasn't ceased to be dulled and domesticated by the rise of its use in television and advertising and mainstream music for decades.

I find it interesting that the original rave scene was indeed both loud and noisy. It was certainly disturbing for some, as more conservative parts of the nation were gripped in fear of such large gatherings by such a diverse group of youths. Nevertheless, it did seem to accomplish the forming of many communities. By contrast, in today's youth culture, which apparently is so connected with technology, are there real life communities forming? Today's technology also comes loaded with a metaphorical informational '*noise'. S*ome argue this *noise* is having a negative impact. That it is adversely affecting the quality of our inner lives.

To explain what I mean by *noise,* here's one particular abstract definition, from a mental health perspective, in a psychiatry journal: *"Noise" is a term we are using to describe a complex and distressing aspect of the bodily and cognitive experience of many very ill psychiatric patients. By "noise," we mean an internally experienced state of crowding and confusion created by a variety of stimuli, the quantity, intensity and unpredictability of which*

make it difficult for individuals so afflicted to tolerate and organize their experience. Attempts to do so may only add to confusion and psychotic phenomena.''[2] Obviously this relates to very mentally ill patients, but I think it's a good analogy to describe the most negative aspects of current discussions on the threat of technology's effect on our subjectivity.

What is *noise*. baby don't hurt me. don't hurt me. no more.

I would like to reintroduce the metaphor by Nietzsche as mentioned earlier, *'the permanent false alarm'* for the purpose of this text, as *noise*, and all the individual input 'selves' that make up this globally connected mass as the *-signal-* and to clarify this metaphor of internet noise by likening it with this old view of mass media, which Nietzsche wrote in 1882 quote: *''Our age is an agitated one, and precisely for this reason, not an age of passion; it heats itself up continuously, because it feels that it is not warm - basically it is freezing ... In our time it is merely by means of an echo that events acquire their 'greatness' - the echo of the newspaper.''[3]* Are we trying to achieve our own subjectivity through the echo of the internet? And more recently, an idea that's around that has likened the internet to that of an "echo chamber" whereby individuals, with differing realities, become cocooned in information that echoes their own current biases.

Let's view the given metaphors of *signal* and *noise* in a somewhat critical postmodernist viewpoint: an analysis of current *noise* reveals aspects of a society demanding of us to show 'ourselves' and to input and display our "personality" the *-signal-*. The demand is masked as a secular activity but has *a spiritual intensity* about it. The individual *-signal-*, endlessly exposed and compared to that of other signals, and through relentless processing in turn, compels us into being producers and consumers of a multiplex of signals i.e *-noise-,* carrying differing communicative roles to meet the demand of our own mass consumption. Regardless of what's left of the original, the signal now becomes *nuanced* and *coloured* by its taking on of its demanded, roleplayed and processed attribute. Without wanting to dive into an anti-cultural-narcissism polemic it could be likened to what Nietzsche describes in 1882 in regards to mass media. It could also be said that this *noise* in society is implicitly deafening with its silence.

Waiting for the ferry in Aker Brygge where we all sat in deafening silence, ironically I shared this on instagram.

If, as an analogy, one can imagine a vocalist recording a vocal track in a studio, one uses closed-faced headphones for this purpose to avoid the *noise* from the headphones spilling into the microphone, and so one can observe the singer, as it appears, singing to *him/herself*. In this way one can observe any member of a hugely broad demographic moderating their uniquely narrow performance, exhibiting this same kind of silent but implicit *noise* that also demands back the participation in this fragmented 'cut and paste' reality,
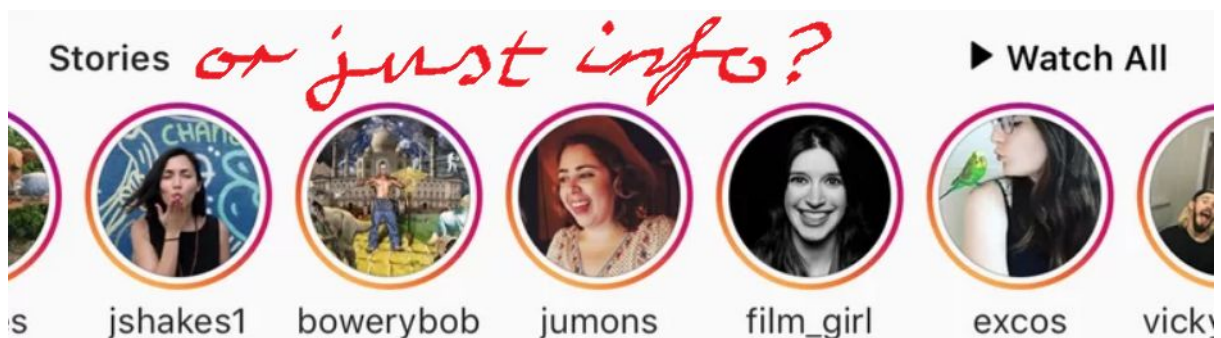
Trust your innSæi

Watching the documentary *InnSæi[4]* (an ancient icelandic term meaning intuition) on netflix, which sets out to uncover the art of connecting within in today's world of distraction, disconnection and stress, the west African author and teacher, Malidoma Patrice Somé gave this bold statement: *"The noise of the external world is muting the sound of the internal world...& therefore our intuition pays the price for it."* The statement triggered me to ponder this deeply, plan a work to investigate *and* write this essay. Starting from the initial pondering, I immediately felt an urge to disagree with the statement, my argument being that we are still evolving, and rapidly, to a more mindful adaptation of technology and its production and consumption of roles. One viewpoint is that this whole phenomena is still in its narcissistic infancy, at least that's my new age and optimistic hope. When we observe a culture so connected and yet *disconnected*, what is, essentially, the missing element?

My own addiction to social media, probably not by any normative standards but certainly by standards of my internal world, is a good place to start my investigation, so what is the nature of my thirst for this '*information*' sharing? Is it a need to belong to a community? You certainly share lots of stories in a community, so what's the difference between hearing these stories in your real world community and, lets say, your instagram or facebook stories feed in your online community? *Something's* different right!? Something definitely is but what?

This question itself was enough to inspire me to make an investigative artwork for my graduation show. I have *loads* of stories, in fact while on a recent academy trip to Paris, you couldn't shut me up for remembering incidents and experiences that never had the privilege of being posted in the mass cloud archive, the only place these still exist is within my very own cloudy memory, and actually, they seem to be very much more secure and comfortable there. Pulling out these stories from their comfort zone, and sharing a moderated selection *all at the same time,* reminiscent of informational noise, might give clues to the nature of a story as told in a traditional way versus current online story sharing. This will be my investigative sound work for our graduation show. Unfortunately I can't tell you how it will effect my 'inner archive' until the work is complete and the show's in progress, but I do feel a little queasy at the prospect, so far I've narrowed down the stories to twenty four and have a framework ~ *a*

whispering painting ~ to present these ideas. The gesture of self moderating and arranging my stories to present in an exhibition context is central to the work.

The history of authenticity

On reading Lionel Trilling's 1972 study in the history of ideas, *Sincerity and Authenticity* [5] with Hamlet's famous lines *"This above all: to thine own self be true"* as the central ideal to deconstruct, our enormous drive to observe 'ourselves' can be traced back historically. From the shift of valuing *'sincerity towards others',* which made its appearance with Shakespeare and held its value, although questioned, for four centuries, sincerity made a sharp decline in the mid twentieth century with post fifties radical movements . Sincerity has now shifted to be viewed upon suspiciously, an *'act of simple role play to receive ones end'*, as opposed to a post liberal *'authenticity to self'* which, it seems, is now viewed *and* accepted as a means to an end, although to what *self* is held in question.

We are certainly too quick to make the *'inauthentic'* judgement that now plagues any act of sincerity, *The goal of authenticity being more focused on self reflection than outwardly communicative roleplay.* Hence it seems, in today's online roleplay theatrics, being authentic to self is not cutting it anymore. Our autonomy has gone too far and drowned itself in cynicism. We're suspicious of authenticity as well, in the same manner as how we became, historically suspicious of sincerity.

We lack a more tangible model of the self, and a clear language, as an understandable tool available to talk about a true self other than speculative psychology and esoteric theories. Authenticity is no longer radical or achievable due to role playing *authentically*, and the *-noise-* of the internet has lead us into new territory that lacks the proper language to define ontological questions about the nature of *self*.

We are developing new fragmented personae to meet the needs of our environment, and to quote Trilling's own ironic chicken and egg dilemma, he wrote: "*The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan believes that the development of the 'Je' was advanced by the manufacture of mirrors: again it cannot be decided whether man's belief that he is a 'Je' is the result of the*

Venetian craftsmen's having learned how to make plate-glass or whether the demand for looking-glasses stimulated this technological success."[6]

If the concept itself of an *'authentic self'* is a purely historical concept - as Lionel Trilling points out so accurately - then here we are at the end of the epoque of authenticity, nothing black and white remains of the good and evil, authentic and false self argument. These oppositions are collapsing and simultaneously creating, a vacuum of terminology and an urgent need of a more encompassing term to describe the 'self'. A term that embodies its new wider existence into the technological realm. A term that's hopefully evolved past "selfie".

The nature of water

I would like to share a story that relates to the nature of information, from a man that cites "cut and paste" as a crime against humanity, and rather than cutting and pasting what he has written, I will recount a story told by him that deals with speculative concepts of a connected world (and this was before the internet). He spoke of his experience of water and interconnection while on a rowing boat with his grandparents when he was five. He remembers trailing his hand in the water and observing how the water moved around his fingers, opening on one side and closing on the other, and observing the changing system of relationships where everything was kind of the same, and yet different. This, he said, was so difficult to visualise and express, and just generalising that to the entire universe, that the world is an ever changing system of relationships and structures, struck him as a vast truth. He spoke about how writing is a process of reducing a vast tapestry into a narrow sequence, and that this, in a sense is an illicit and a wrongful compression of what should spread out. The problem, he suggests, is that interconnection, representation and sequentialization, are all similar to the issue of water.[7]

The storyteller

What can be learned and garnered from the oral tradition of storytelling and especially that of Walter Benjamin's gem of an essay *"The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov"[8]* which, rather than a focus on Nikolai Leskov, really gets to the heart and essence of what a 'story' essentially is other than its recounting and telling of information. In his historical analysis, a recovery of the story takes place with some remarkable and subtle insights, and thus the work has had numerous further analysis since its publication in 1936, all bringing out its jewels of wisdom for further polishing.

One I would like to take out of the gembag for this essay, is the insight into a stories ability to give counsel and wisdom, *and perhaps relevant to the internet*, when it is delivered in what Walter Benjamin writes *"the realm of human speech"*. Why this is so, benjamin elucidates clearly in his text. Benjamin also writes that a "real" story has a rooting in a *"time and a place"* and has a *"narrative amplitude"*. I hypothesise there is an obscured and deeper need in society today that shadows our addiction to receiving the fragmented 'stories' *et al* that we receive in online social circles. The thirst or *impulse* for online story sharing, now endemic in our youth culture, is quite possibly in part due to the stories advertisement of being a *story*, but in reality, fulfills only part of the promise that stories fulfilled in our ancestral past. The taking on of experience and making it our own, thereby embracing its inherent and passed along counsel and wisdom.

Walter Benjamin writes: *"But instead of breeding local concern, information, with its self-evidence and instantaneity, had begun to isolate readers in time and space. They stopped listening and sharing; they began "receiving" the news."[9]* Certainly a clue to *noises* destructive impact on *signal* and hypothetically, its primal whispers of alienation, as it seems 'stories' being shared online are simply being shared in a purely informational way, devoid of their human and ineffable essence. It could be argued *au contraire* in which although fragmented, they are at least born of the free expression to be consumed for their enjoyability alone and therefore do indeed contain snippets of wisdom and counsel, a form of real storytelling. Believing in a technological ability to convey an elemental humanity, and our technological environment as some kind of natural world, *extended mind,* changes the

outlook considerably. So the clue here then is experience, and its economy and validity that is in question. Do we value our own and other peoples online experiences?

Perhaps the economy of experience can gain ground by way of a shift of awareness in nurturing *signals* inherent quality of being able to filter the *noise*. The terms of how to filter the noise *-itself-* ignite the fireworks display of moral revision and the fiery global debates that we all observe. From this though, we could evolve to a clarity of radical authenticity, as a *means to* rather than a *means to an end*. Radical authenticity could return to us the ability of taking on counsel and wisdom. The danger is that nothing neutralizes boredom, it turns out, like piles and piles of information. Passing around our experiences like useless information isn't helping in its economy and we *need* boredom to be truly creative.

"Boredom," Walter Benjamin writes, *"is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience."*[10] - but alas, we seem to then immediately share that experience in a purely *informational* and *disposable* way, which then neutralizes the boredom, and thus the hatching of quality experience eggs, let alone any imbibement of the stories inherent wisdom of which to make our own and pass on.

The eternal motorway of information

I would like to share an experience I had In Tokyo a long time ago. I had travelled to Japan on a pilgrimage to a buddhist temple that sits at the foothills of mount Fuji, and after having spent many days at the temple, it was time to leave and visit Tokyo. I had the good fortune of being put in touch with a cool guy, Ken, that ran a hostel smack bang in the middle of Shibuya in the heart of Tokyo, which houses two of the busiest railway stations in the world. So I arrive at Kens' and immediately we hit it off. He loved my English accent and he had many amusing stories to share. His hostel consisted of a large apartment (for Tokyo) with many rooms, each housing individual erected camping tents! It was a cool concept and there were backpackers from the U.S.A, Australia and Germany also staying there. At the end of the night, I thought it would be nice to go out on his balcony to smoke a cigarette, Ken and the others had now gone to sleep, so I crept out onto this tiny balcony that revealed our location. Right in front of me at about the same height, is this unbelievably large flyover motorway with untold lanes of traffic on each side - and the cars and lorries and coaches and

the motorbikes roared past endlessly. Because on the other side of the flyover there are also large towering buildings, the sound of the roaring traffic bounced back and forth in an escalating, thrilling and tremendous manner. It nearly knocked me off my feet and I had to sit down on a makeshift stool and envelop myself in Ken's rather fine silk dressing gown. Whilst I sat there in contemplative bliss of my amazing trip so far, the thought suddenly dawned on me - if those cars represent energy in the universe, imagine that it just *never* stops - right then, (and I blame the intensity of sound that went with that thought), an ineffable comprehension of eternity struck me to my very core. That moment, that feeling, something that my mind still doesn't understand, is still with me in another sense; the sense of feeling a concept through the vibrations of sound.

A picture I took while working at Hovefestivalen, I asked her later what she was experiencing, but she told me she just didn't have the words.

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That's me in the green hoody on the right, experiencing concepts through sound as mobile phones weren't yet on the scene. House and Techno was though:)