SOLITUDE & SATURATION Webinar Curated by Alexis Vaillant

Malmö Art Academy, via Zoom

January 25 — June 3, 2021

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1. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF 'SOLITUDE & SATURATION'

In our historical moment, to be contemporary might mean to re-learn how to dwell in instability and uncertainty. Now that the notion of progress (or capitalist modernism) seems finally questionable, anything that once was solid is currently in the process of evaporating. Affecting the global human population, the viral pandemic confirms the volatility of what we understood as the stable world. Having deeply modified the context, this crisis calls for new tools for new understandings of new zones of friction. With the Covid-19, we have been digitized by force. What we now call digital confinement might likely be seen as a global process of transition to digital capitalism. In that context both propagated and consumed by the digital, the twin concepts of solitude and saturation are very useful for an understanding of where we stand right now and what might come out of this. A.V.

2. WEBINAR PRESENTATION

For the last twenty years, online life has succeeded in bringing people closer to each other, digitally. The counterpart of this is an unprecedented accumulation of data and digital detritus. It is so big that new issues like less of more, or human / nonhuman, have arisen. Is the digital market now too saturated to stand out, resist digital fatigue, and grip the viewer's attention? A plurality of experts say that digital life will continue to expand people's boundaries and opportunities in the coming decade. According to them, the world to come will produce more help than harm in people's lives. Still, nearly a third think that digital life will be mostly harmful to people's health, mental fitness and happiness. Most say there are solutions. Over the coming years, how will changes in digital life impact people's overall well-being both physically and mentally? For those who are worrying over digital dystopia, a turn back to physical products sounds interesting. Analogically, one can consider that there is too much art being produced. Should this be the case, from which perspective would this be regarded as too much? And in what way would this be linked to the digital saturation?

Saturation is defined as "the state or process that occurs when no more of something can be absorbed, combined with, or added." This definition is suitable for the digital market and production in general. It also speaks about humans and exhaustion. In the present moment, the feeling of saturation is big. We know that the digital realm is enormous. That it is filled with roughly two billion websites. However, as this realm continues to grow, the Internet-viewing audience has plateaued. Billions of people are browsing the Internet daily, and these people do not have the inclination or time to view more digital content. In that respect, no doubt that soon again, less will be more. Following that headlong rush logic, both solitude and saturation now take center stage in the digitized arena. In a world crushed by information overload, relentless self-promotion, digital fatigue, obsession with appearances, fear of invisibility, the twin concepts of 'solitude' and 'saturation' are very useful for an understanding of where we stand right now. And they have the capacity to highlight zones where creative work can be richly developed.

Solitude has always had an ambivalent status. Although the capacity to enjoy being alone can make sociability bearable, those predisposed to solitude are often viewed with suspicion or pity. If, over centuries, the absence of company has been considered in different ways, the ambivalent nature of solitude became a prominent concern in the modern era. Loneliness, which is one of the major paradoxes of our world of hyperpolarization between 1 and the rest, has been increased by the role of new communication technologies and social networks. This phenomenon is the culmination of a long history that begins in Antiquity when, for the intellectuals, humans were either social animals, or lovers of bucolic charms. Later, "It is not good that a man is alone," says the Bible, and yet Judaeo-Christianity extols the solitary life of hermits and monks. In the classical period, the "loners" and "walkers" are opposed to the "honest men" of the Salons, thus extending the alternative from Antiquity above mentioned. In the romantic age, solitude gave respite to citizens living in ever more complex modern societies. While the search for solitude was seen as a symptom of modern life, it was also viewed as a dangerous pathology: a "wow! no thanks!" that could lead to psychological disorder and antisocial behavior, what has been explored by psychoanalysis. This ambivalence is now taking a new dimension. At the dawn of the digital age, solitude has taken on new meanings as physical isolation and intense

digital sociability got interwoven: a paradox that needs to be explored.

Humans are resolutely social animals, they need to establish some intimate bonds with others. Yet, it takes an unprecedented **global pandemic** for us to acknowledge our primordial need for group belonging, as solitude and socialization are both needed. Forced into social isolation, we mourn the loss of this feeling part of the mass. However, loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability, for one reason or another, to find as much intimacy as is desired. Hardly any wonder, then, that it can reach its apotheosis in a crowd.

Somehow, solitude and loneliness are different one from the other. Being lonely is about feeling disconnected from those around you, whether from an interpersonal or universal standpoint. Those who are lonely feel empty and drained. Loneliness is about a state of mind. Solitude, on the other hand, can be restorative and healing. Some individuals—such as surfers, swimmers, artists, and writers-require solitude in order to do what they love. Solitude happens to be vital for them. This is instilling them with a sense of wisdom and creativity, far from the ultimate threat of automation that characterizes the age of "Social Everything." Solitude enriches creative work. Hardly any wonder, then, that it empowers inspiration for change, and life. As Louise Bourgeois, for whom aloneness was the raw material of art, puts it in the late 1930s: "Solitude, a rest from responsibilities, and peace of mind, will do you more good than the atmosphere of the studio and the conversations which, generally speaking, are a waste of time." Solitude is political, while saturation sounds psycho-economic. With the pandemic, both of them have converged, involving

our intimacy. We have been digitized by force, and what we now call confinement—and that generates digital loneliness will likely be seen as a global process of transition to digital capitalism. Digitization is the animating force of everyday like, a technology or a medium in between self-forgetfulness and self-submergence in a tech. That is promoted to us as the future. However, as Hito Steyerl puts it: "Technology is not the answer. Nor is it a solution. It is an open question and urgent problem—which nevertheless needs to be confronted in order to think about the present and free the future from false algorithmic certainties." Co-extensively to that, can algorithms encapsulate solitude too? Digitization is a sociohistorical process that is contributing to the erosion of democracy. The seeds of these developments are paradoxically related to the ideology of digital utopianism that emerged in the late 1960s with the rise of a social model of computing. This has led first to a set of beliefs furthered by the neo-liberal tech ideology in the 1990s, and then to the popularization of networked computing that has generated a social interdependency to the flow, and paved the way to digitized existence and digital saturation.

The webinar on the twin concepts of 'Solitude & Saturation' is dedicated to their joint exploration. On that occasion, exceptional visionary thinkers and artists whose views tackle the 'system of production,' and question the combinations of life forms that emanate from it. In exploring zones where intelligence and instinct are one, what's at stake at their intersection will be critically explored with, as the main backdrop, the experience of art as both a means of engaging in the world, and a tool of knowledge production, or research for criticism, beyond tangible objects, and ultimately for change. This is a great chance to confront groundbreaking voices through which current alienation, emotional sterility, and overcrowded loneliness can be questioned, and ultimately invalidated. Combining lectures and workshops together, and based on specific research methods using text, film, events, and narratives, that webinar will generate a vitalizing laboratory for self-discovery. Experience-oriented, its main articulations lie on case studies and intellectual frameworks that set the scene for a thought provoking reflection on current biopolitics conditions in the arts where social engagement, personal interests, and public intellectual work intersect. Borrowing from various disciplines, such as sociology, exospheric studies, critical theory, histories and practices of art and media, anthropology, literature, as well as urban planning and architecture, both the lectures and workshops will conflate different skills and thoughts that are under pressure in the present, given that both solitude and saturation enrich creative work, making it relevant in a system that plays with ideas of presence and distance, over and under, too little and too much, the seen and the unseen. Along with 5-months exploration, topics like decontextualized contexts, network fatigue, a world of stay-at-home 'nomads,' and twin notions like arbitrariness and indifference, intimacy and overexposure, or AI and surplus will be examined and discussed from diverse cultural materials. Reflecting on the creative, emotional and political consequences of going towards saturation while critically resisting it, the webinar argues that there can be no growth without stagnancy, no movement without inactivity, and no progress without refusal; and may be no fertile solitude without saturation A V

Alexis Vaillant is a curator, writer, and editor specializing in contemporary art. His work coalesces at the intersection of political realities: where intelligence and instinct are one. Vaillant studied Philosophy and Art History in Paris. His research on 'Contemporary Art Museum as a Concept From 1787 through 1977' and dissertation about 'Robert Smithson and the Domain of Museum' led him to Geneva's then-newly created Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MAMCO) where he worked as Assistant Curator and Head of Publications and Research from 1994-2000. In 2000, he co-founded Toasting Agency in Paris and worked as independent curator and publisher. From 2009-2016, Vaillant worked as Chief Curator at CAPC, Contemporary Art Museum Bordeaux, France. Recently, Vaillant curated the exhibitions: *Mark van Yetter*, Kunsthall Sankt-Gallen (2019), *Hooks & Claws*, Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich (2020), and *Behind Closed Doors* at Almine Rech in Brussels (2020). He is currently working on *Madwize*, a show focusing on contemporary aspects of madness. His forthcoming publications as editor and writer include: *Sylvia Sleigh: Monograph* (JRP/Ringier, 2021); *Marc Camille Chaimowicz The Collected Writings 1971-2021* (Sternberg Press, 2021); *The First Time I got Paid for It* (Sternberg Press, 2022). Alexis Vaillant is based in Lisbon.

3. GUEST SPEAKERS, SCHEDULE

January 27, 10:00 (Atlantic Time) / 16:00 (CET) Mark von Schlegell

Beyond the Paperback Revolution

The lecture traces the modern history of paperback publishing, the paperback revolution and the "trade-paperback counter-revolution", from the POV of the hybrid artist/writer, proposing strategies to escape the double bind (between solitude and saturation) offered to artists and writers by the high capitalist moment.

Mark von Schlegell is a dual Irish and American citizen. He was born in New York and lives in Cologne. He is teaching the writing class "Pure Fiction" in Städelschule. He is the author of the novels *Venusia* (2005), *Mercury Station* (2009), *Ickles, Etc.* (2014), *Sundogz* (2015) published by M.I.T./Semiotext(e), and *New Dystopia* (2011) published by Sternberg Press. *Venusia* was honor's listed for the 2007 James Tiptree, Jr. Prize in science fiction. His experimental fiction and cultural criticism appear regularly in the international art world. Realometer (2009), a collection of literary essays on Poe, Melville and James Tiptree, Jr. is available from Merve Verlag, Berlin in German.

February 3, 11:00 (CET) Maurizio Lazzarato

Capital Hates Everyone

Money, the stock market, price differentials, algorithms, and scientific equations and formulas constitute semiotic "motors" that make capitalism's social and technical machines run, bypassing representation and consciousness to produce social subjections and semiotic enslavements. What types of organization must we construct for a process of subjectivation that would allow us to escape the hold of social subjection and machinic enslavement? Oscillating between the financial capital and the economy of debt, we are living in apocalyptic times. Since the 1970s, Lazzarato writes, capital has entered the logic of war. It has become, by the power conferred on it by financialization, a political force intent on destruction. Lazzarato urges us to reject the illusory consolations of a technology-abetted "new" kind of capitalism at the intersection of solitude and saturation, and choose revolution over fascism.

Maurizio Lazzarato is a sociologist and philosopher living and working in Paris, where he studies immaterial labor, the breakdown of the wage system, Welfare, work, and creativity in the Neoliberal Age, Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity, and "post-socialist" movements. He is the author of *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2012), *Marcel Duchamp and The Refusal of (Artistic) Work* (2014), and *Signs and Machines* (2014) all published by Semiotext(e). *Capital Hates Everyone* will be published by Semiotext(e) in 2021.

February 17, 10:00 (Atlantic time) / 16:00 (CET) Moyra Davey

The Faithful

Davey will speak about the works in her recent survey show at the National Gallery of Canada.

Moyra Davey's work comprises the fields of photography, film, and writing. She is the author of numerous publications including her latest, *Index Cards* (New Directions, 2020), and is the editor of *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* (Seven Stories, 2001). Davey has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at institutions including the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2020); Portikus, Frankfurt/Main (2017); Camden Arts Centre, London (2014); Kunsthalle Basel (2010); and Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2008). Her work is found in major public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Tate Modern in London. She is a 2020 recipient of the John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship.

March 3, 11:00 (CET) Pablo Larios

Network Fatigue Revisited

The 2010s saw enormous changes in how art was viewed, amid image-sharing platforms and social imperatives toward haptic connection and digital 'sharing'. At the start of 2021, the world looks very different. Expanding on his idea of 'network fatigue', Larios asks how we can make, show and talk about art in an uncertain present.

Pablo Larios Pablo Larios is a writer and editor. He currently works at the Gropius Bau in Berlin and was for many years Senior Editor of *frieze*. With artist Ed Atkins, he runs Plea, a press for experimental fiction and poetry.

March 17, 11:00 (Atlantic Time) / 17:00 (CET) Amalia Ulman

Sordid Scandal

Sordid Scandal is a new video essay and performance by artist Amalia Ulman. In the form of a PowerPoint presentation, the work combines personal and family confessions with colonial histories. Expect a darkly comic exploration of identity and artistic persona. How much does fiction shape the real? How is an artist's identity formed? Following the screening of *Sordid Scandal*, Amalia Ulman will entertain a Q&A session.

Amalia Ulman is an Argentinian/Spanish artist and filmmaker based in New York. Ulman's work blurs the distinction between herself and the object of study, often creating humorous, gentle deceptions, while exploring class imitation and the relationship between consumerism and identity. Always pushing the boundaries of performance, her fictional narratives often take place in unexpected platforms.

April 7, 10:00 (Atlantic Time) / 16:00 (CET) Mark Wasiuta

Detox USA: Contamination and Confinement

Architectural research has the capacity to trick or redirect the dominant disciplinary apparatus, to make it falter or hesitate, and to produce solidarities and effect transformations. Faced with this paradox—of the impossibility of planning for the future but also the desire to script it—architecture tends to make claims in the form of 'ought to.' Based on a project he has called Detox USA, Mark Wasiuta's lecture looks at architecture at the intersection of pollution and drug rehabilitation.

Mark Wasiuta is Lecturer in Architecture at Columbia GSAPP and Co-Director of the Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture program. Wasiuta is recipient of recent grants from the Asian Cultural Council, NYSCA, and the Graham Foundation, where he is currently an inaugural Graham Foundation Fellow. His research exhibition practice focuses on archives and under-examined projects of the postwar period. His research is focused on the turn to theories of environment and environmental design in postwar architecture. He has worked extensively on the history of Los Angeles' air, its pollution and other contaminants. He is co-author and co-editor of *Rifat Chadirj: Building Index, Dan Graham's New Jersey*, and author of numerous articles. His upcoming publications include *The Archival Exhibition: A Decade of Research at the Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery* and *Documentary Remains*.

April 21, 10:00 (Atlantic Time) / 16:00 (CET) Michael E. Smith

Post-saturation Solitude

Michael E. Smith strips everyday objects down to their most minimal state, highlighting a tension between a culture of abundance and the rapid loss of reserves. Originating from the discarded elements of our society, they bear with them the accumulated traces of human experience, evoking simultaneously their future and their loss at the intersection of intelligence and instinct.

Michael E. Smith's sculptures strip everyday objects down to their most minimal state. In his constructions, Smith employs materials both natural and manmade, highlighting a tension between a culture of abundance and the rapid loss of reserves. Organizing the installation of his sculptures and videos around existing architectural features, Smith builds an emotional tenor throughout the spaces of his exhibitions. Tied to their sources, the works reveal the social and economic factors involved in their making. Originating from the discarded elements of our society, they bear with them the accumulated traces of human experience, evoking simultaneously their future and their loss. Michael E. Smith lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions that include: Secession Wien 2020, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018, SMAK, Ghent, 2017, Kunstverein Hannover, 2015, De Appel, Amsterdam, 2015, Sculpture Center, Queens, 2015, La Triennale di Milano, Milan, 2014, Power Station, Dallas, 2014, CAPC musée d'art contemporain Bordeaux, 2013 and Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis, 2011. Smith is included in the 58th Venice Biennale and participated in the 2012 Whitney Biennial.

May 5, 11:00 (CET) Kirsty Bell

Window as Limit

Through art historical and literary examples, this lecture will examine the evidence of the window as a conceptual hinge; a pivot between the isolated self and the socio-political, economic and gendered complexities of 'being in the world.'

Kirsty Bell is an author and art critic living in Berlin. Author of *The Artist's House. From Workplace to Artwork* (Sternberg Press, 2013), her forthcoming publication *Her Berlin* will be published by Fitzcarraldo Editions in 2021. She is a contributing editor of *frieze*, a regular contributor to many other publications, and has also published numerous monographic essays for exhibition catalogues. She has lectured widely in European institutions and has been an Advisor at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam since 2015.

May 19, 10:00 (Atlantic Time) / 16:00 (CET) Leslie Thornton

Of Necessity I Become an Instrument

In 1983 Thornton began filming a project entitled Peggy and Fred in Hell. Like feral beings raised by TV, two young children are the sole survivors of an unnamed apocalypse. Over the course of 30-plus years, the work was filmed and released as a series of episodes, spanning many changes in culture and technology between the 1980's and the present. Thornton will screen excerpts and discuss the premise for the project, which includes an AI entity programmed to study human emotion.

Leslie Thornton has been working with video and digital media since the 1980s. One of the first artists to bridge the boundaries between cinema and video, the career of Thornton straddles structural filmmaking and the feminist avant-garde, with more recent video and installation work that incorporates new technologies. Her works have been presented at Rodeo Gallery, London, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Tate Modern, London, the Whitney Biennial, New York, and documenta 12, Kassel.

June 2, 10:00 (Pacific Time) / 19:00 (CET) Frances Stark

An invitation to escape from the relentless tyranny of Now that keeps us hooked to the irresistible fruit of American Empire

"I couldn't draw to save my life...It's not like, oh, I had the talent so I pursued art," says Frances Stark. From selfexamination —sustained meditation on what she's reading, making, consuming, doing— come her reflections on literature, music, architecture, art, sex, domesticity, labor, pleasure, pedagogy, and class. Autobiography is her primary mode of expression. And solitude is never far away from that. Based on the necessity that artists can find compromise between public and private, or political and personal, not as a curse but a source of inspiration, productivity, and passion, Frances Stark's presentation will focus on the moment when solitude as immediate and sincere coding system intersects with the nowhere of digital real-time saturation.

Frances Stark lives and works in Los Angeles. She holds an MFA from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, and a BA in Humanities from San Francisco State University. Her videos, drawings, performances, and other works have been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2016-2017), the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2015-2016), the Art Institute of Chicago, (2015); Hayward Gallery, London (2014); the Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf (2013); Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2012); MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2011); Performa 11, New York (2011); Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA (2011); the MIT List Center for Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA (2010) a.o. Her work is included in the collections of the MoMA, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, SFMoMA, San Francisco, Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles, the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, and others.

4. WORKSHOP SESSIONS w/ Alexis Vaillant

January 25, 11:00 (CET), 1h Presentation

January 29, 10:00 (CET), 2h Fiction and the Political

February 10, 10:00 (CET), 2h Making Intimacy Public

February 24, 10:00 (CET), 2h Fatigue 2.0

March 10, 10:00 (CET), 2h Oversaturated Exposure

March 24, 10:00 (CET), 2h Stay-at-home 'nomads'

April 14, 10:00 (CET), 2h Value & Labor

April 28, 10:00 (CET), 2h Indoor / Outdoor Mechanisms

May 12, 10:00 (CET), 2h AI & Surplus

May 26, 10:00 (CET), 2h Designing the Self

June 3, 11:00 (CET), 1h Conclusion

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Rather than attempting to be a comprehensive bibliography on the twin concepts of 'Solitude & Saturation' (which would be virtually impossible), this bibliography is based on the observation that anthropological, philosophical, poetic, and economic inquiries often share common concerns, and challenges, despite the critical, and methodological differences in the fields from which they have emerged. Following this, the bibliography below provides a themed cross-section of the breadth and vitality of a literary, scientific, and conceptual milieu where multiple strands of work intersect even as they are frequently regarded as belonging to separate disciplinary discourses. This bibliography will be entertained, commented, and experienced alongside the webinar on 'Solitude & Saturation.'

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TOWARDS SATURATION

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