

BEING IN THE MOMENT

A Psychoanalytic Reading of
Persistent Recording at Events

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Being in the Moment? A Psychoanalytic Reading of Persistent Recording at Events

Concerts, festivals, parties, raves, and clubs are places people go to take a break from the expectations and behavioural norms of everyday life. People attend these events mostly to experience an artistic expression, watch a show in a specially designed environment, socialize with friends and strangers, or simply entertain themselves. These are environments in which people seek a particular form of experience within a confined and carefully designed space and can temporarily be released from many of the constraints of everyday social norms, outside the gaze of wider society.

Before the widespread use of phones with cameras, regular cameras were not allowed in such environments. For the last couple of decades, with almost everybody carrying a phone equipped with a camera and with the rise of image-based social media, an increasing number of attendees have begun recording events for extended periods of time rather than experiencing the show or environment they came to enjoy. This has certain negative effects on the characteristics of the environment and experience that attract people to these events in the first place. This appears to create a social paradox. This paper aims to examine this social paradox through a psychoanalytic approach, drawing mainly on the work of Jacques Lacan, selected concepts from Sigmund Freud later adapted by Lacan, and selected concepts of Donald Winnicott.

In this paper, “events” refers to musical events such as concerts, festivals, parties, raves, and clubs. The emphasis is on events that are intended as immersive experiences requiring the active participation, attitudes, and behaviours of the crowd, and that are designed for attendees to feel unexposed, secluded, relaxed, or primarily focused on what is presented on the stage or in the venue.

What Changed in How Events Are Experienced?

Recently, I came across a social media post by the DJ Cloudy (Claudia Koziolk). In an Instagram post, Cloudy (2026) wrote: “we need to start being more in the moment again! [...] nowadays it feels like half of the crowd spends the entire set with their phones in the air instead of actually experiencing the music. and honestly? It kills the energy. especially when people disrespect no-phone policies just to record stories for social media. I play a lot of events where phones get stickered for a reason, because raves are supposed to feel free. And when people secretly remove the stickers just to film videos anyway, it takes that feeling away from everybody around them too [...] because the best moments of your life are not meant to be watched later in 4k ❤️” (The post is reproduced verbatim; original capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and stylistic features have been retained.) Similar concerns have also been expressed by other artists, audience members, and institutions for years. While some artists and venues have adopted no-phone policies or restrictions on recording, such measures remain relatively uncommon. The reasons for this fall outside the scope of this paper.

A fundamental rationale behind these events is for people to experience the performances of musicians, bands, or DJs and to immerse themselves in the emotions evoked by music, lyrics, and show elements that have often been crafted meticulously down to the second and every beam of light. However, the quality of these experiences can be diminished by the presence of numerous phone screens within sight of the stage.

At the same time, these environments constitute one of the limited social environments in which people can express themselves freely, enjoy a degree of anonymity within a crowd, and be guided primarily by the norms of like-minded individuals rather than those of wider society. Within these environments, people act and dress more casually, become intoxicated, dance

exuberantly, sing out loud, scream and shout. An important part of the atmosphere is sustained through respect for privacy, anonymity, and the unwritten norms of participation.

A significant part of this experience is shaped not only by the performance itself but also by the participation of the attendees. What draws people to these events is the aura that can only be created collectively through the sharing of feelings of euphoria and transcendence.

All of these become more difficult to achieve when a substantial number of people are recording with their phones out. Spending a significant portion of their time recording rather than experiencing what they have come for appears contradictory. At the same time, the widespread presence of phones and recording practices diminishes the experience of others and undermines the atmosphere that these events seek to create. This is the social paradox.

Why Do We Feel the Need to Record at Events?

People have always wanted to keep photos or videos of their memorable moments. They may also wish to share unexpected moments from a show with friends, such as surprise guest appearances or particularly memorable performances. However, a significant portion of contemporary recording appears to function as a form of self-presentation within social media environments. This paper is primarily concerned with recordings that are intended to present individuals as participants in particular events, members of particular cultural scenes, or as individuals living desirable and meaningful experiences.

To understand why such forms of self-presentation may become appealing, Lacan's concept of the "Mirror Stage" provides a useful starting point. According to Lacan, with the infant's first recognition of her self-image in the mirror, after a confusion, the child becomes fascinated with this image and gradually comes to recognize it as her own reflection. The infant begins to understand that her body has a complete form and starts to identify with this whole

image in the mirror. For Lacan, the child builds her self-perception, her ego, based on this image. The ego is formed through the properties of this complete and coherent image (Homer, 2005). Lacan argues that the ego is based on an illusory image, which is ultimately a misrecognition, and which will “structure the infant's entire mental development” (Lacan, 1977, p. 4). This mirror image can be understood as what Lacan conceptualizes as the “Ideal-I”, his translation of Freud’s Ideal Ego (Lacan, 1977, p. 7). Homer summarizes this as “These imaginary processes form the ego and are repeated and reinforced by the subject in his/her relationship with the external world. The imaginary, therefore, is not a developmental phase - it is not something that one goes through and grows out of - but remains at the core of our experience” (Homer, 2005, p. 34)

Drawing on Hegel's Master–Slave dialectic, which argues that self-consciousness depends upon recognition by another (Homer, 2005), Lacan similarly suggests that the formation of the ego depends upon recognition through the mirror image, where the self is first objectified through identification with the other before language later restores its position as a subject within the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977). The image of ourselves is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other becomes the constitutive and sustaining element of ourselves. As Homer (2005) notes, we are dependent on the other's gaze as the guarantor of our own existence. This dependence is closely tied to a desire for recognition, since subjects seek affirmation through the other.

The misrecognition produced through the mirror image, which Lacan calls “*méconnaissance*”, bears some resemblance to Winnicott's concept of the “False Self”. Lacan’s mirror image functions on a more ontological level; the person is not aware of the illusory image and misrecognition, although it continues to shape the person throughout life and leaves them in a constant need for self-recognition through the other’s gaze. In Winnicott’s False Self,

depending on the severity of the condition, the person may be aware of the False Self to some degree. Winnicott classifies the False Self in terms of its severity. This paper will focus on the degrees defined as “towards health” and “in health” by Winnicott (Winnicott, 1965, p. 143).

Winnicott defines the False Self as a process developed by the infant to adapt to the environment. When the not-good-enough mother does not implement the infant's omnipotence, repeatedly fails to meet the infant's gesture, and substitutes her own gestures instead, the earliest stages of the False Self emerge. Through this process, the child may grow to resemble the dominant and socially accepted figures around them (Winnicott, 1965). In adulthood, the False Self functions as “the polite and mannered social attitude”, which is the appearance of a person that he believes to be socially accepted and appreciated, having the “gain being the place in society which can never be attained or maintained by the True Self alone”. Winnicott further defines the False Self as “closely bound up with the capacity of the individual to live in an area that is intermediate between the dream and the reality, that which is called the cultural life” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 150).

Bringing these concepts together, individuals may construct idealized images of themselves, resembling what Lacan describes through the mirror image and what Freud conceptualizes as the Ideal Ego. The socially adapted and publicly presented version of this idealized image bears important similarities to what Winnicott describes as the False Self. Lacan, drawing from Hegel, suggests that people seek the continuous recognition of this image by others. As Mitchell and Black (2016) note, the self is generally a social creation, constructed out of reflections of the perspectives of others. Individuals strive to be characters they are not, with various intense needs in relation to other characters who, being social creations themselves, also are not. Social media provides an ideal environment for the continuation of this “imaginary

servitude” (Lacan, 1977, p. 7), allowing individuals to continuously present carefully selected images of themselves. For those who value presenting themselves as participants in particular events, members of particular cultural scenes, or as living desirable experiences, the urge to record and share may at times outweigh the desire to fully experience the event itself.

From this perspective, the social paradox outlined above may be understood in psychoanalytic terms. This paper argues that beneath this social paradox lie two contradictory psychoanalytic mechanisms, which will be examined in the following sections. To understand the dynamics underlying both mechanisms, it is first necessary to turn to another concept of Lacan “Name-of-the-Father”.

How Do We Internalize Social Expectations?

Having examined why individuals may feel the need to record experiences for future sharing rather than be in the present moment, we can now turn to the process of internalizing social norms to explore the contradictory dynamics underlying both mechanisms of this paradox.

Drawing on a key concept of Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan interprets the Oedipus complex as the primary structure that defines symbolic and unconscious relations, including those found in relationships and marriage. The Oedipus complex represents a triangular structure that breaks the binary relationship established between the mother and child in the imaginary. Lacan calls this third position the “Name-of-the-Father”, which does not necessarily refer to the real father but to a symbolic position that the child perceives as the location of the mother’s desire. This is a position of authority and the symbolic law that intervenes to prohibit the child’s sexual desire for the mother. For Lacan, the Name-of-the-father embodies the socio-symbolic law and the internalization of this paternal metaphor creates the superego (Homer, 2005). In a broader sense this is the internalization of social norms and expectations.

First Mechanism; Two Fathers

For Lacan, the relationship between the superego and law is ambivalent. Since the law emerges through the prohibition of incest, it inherently entails the desire to break and transgress the law (Homer, 2005). Lacan expresses this in Seminar XX as “The superego is the imperative of jouissance - Enjoy!” (Lacan, as cited in Homer, 2005, p. 58)

This contradiction within the superego, the structure that commands compliance with social norms and symbolic law, simultaneously urges subjects to bend the rules for the purpose of enjoyment. This dilemma provides a psychoanalytic framework for understanding the first mechanism of the social paradox discussed here. On the one hand, people are there to enjoy and temporarily escape the norms of everyday life; on the other hand, they are recording images for sharing to gain social recognition.

This dilemma can already be found in Freud’s work, which was later reformulated by Lacan. Freud’s work can be read as presenting two paternal figures. The first is the Oedipal father, who transmits the law to the child and is himself subject to that law. The second is the Primal Father of *Totem and Taboo*, who possesses absolute power, claims exclusive rights over women, wealth, and the horde, and remains outside the law. In Lacanian terms, these figures can be understood as two distinct functions: one representing symbolic law and prohibition, the other the superego’s demand for jouissance and enjoyment beyond the law. (Homer, 2005).

Second Mechanism; The Gaze of the Other

To analyze the social paradox addressed in this paper through a second psychoanalytical mechanism, it is necessary to turn to Lacan’s theory of the gaze. Lacan makes a clear distinction between seeing and the gaze. People are always “beings that are looked at”, looked at from all sides. The subject thus finds itself in the position of an object for the Other’s gaze. The gaze is

directed from the object toward the subject (Homer, 2017); yet it cannot itself be seen and remains excluded from our field of vision (Quinet, 1995). As discussed earlier, the subject's relation to the Other is structured by a desire for recognition. Drawing on Lacan's theory of the gaze, Quinet (1995) highlights that feeling oneself subjected to the gaze can produce not only desire but also anxiety.

Events provide a temporary space in which the expectations associated with everyday social roles are loosened. The norms of everyday society are replaced by those of a more like-minded community and the norms operating within an event often differ from those of daily life. This can reduce some of the anxiety associated with being subjected to the gaze of the Other.

On the other hand, recording an event for sharing reflects a need to manage how one appears to the gaze of the Other through social media. Thus, people attend events partly to escape the anxieties associated with the gaze of the Other. Yet the same gaze also generates a desire for recognition. Through recording and sharing, participants attempt to secure this recognition. As a result, attention shifts from the immediate experience of the event to the construction of an image for others. The very mechanism from which participants seek temporary relief reappears within the event itself.

Conclusion

Although the widespread recording of events may initially appear to be a minor issue, it has become a growing concern for frequent attendees who attach significant meaning to live music events, which continue to serve as important sites of emotional release, self expression, and social interaction for many young people. The significance of this phenomenon becomes even more apparent when we consider how similar practices increasingly shape our experiences of museums, exhibitions, tourist attractions, holidays, and even intimate moments such as family

gatherings and celebrations. This paper has examined what appears to be a contradictory behaviour among people attending events. Drawing on Lacan, Freud, and Winnicott, this paper has argued that the paradox of extensively recording live events can be understood through psychoanalytic mechanisms that are deeply linked to our relationship to ourselves and to society, operating at both conscious and unconscious levels.

This social paradox overlaps with two psychoanalytic mechanisms characterized by ambivalence in Lacanian theory. In the first mechanism, people attend these events to temporarily escape or transgress everyday social norms in pursuit of enjoyment, but rather than enjoying this liminality, they spend time aligning themselves with social expectations at the expense of the very experience that brought them there in the first place. In the second mechanism, people attempt to escape the social norms imposed through the gaze of others, yet remain unable to avoid investing effort in controlling what that gaze will see in the future, at precisely the moment when they have the opportunity to enjoy themselves away from it.

These contradictions suggest that the widespread recording of our experiences is not simply a matter of technology or changing cultural habits, but is deeply connected to the ways in which desire, recognition, and identity are negotiated in contemporary social life.

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