(The Secret Writer)

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Abstract

This essay reflects a particular method and way of working that I employ when undertaking artistic research. My artworks are rooted and develop from the situation I find myself in as an artist, the very context I exhibit the work within. I do this by trying to understand this position, both on the micro and macro scale. As an artist currently studying at—and subsequently exhibiting in relation to—Konstfack, I base my research with the physical manifestation of the school. An imposing building that was part of a huge headquarters and factory site for the telecommunication company, Ericsson, in south Stockholm.

The title of my essay is from the translation of a unique German cipher machine, the Geheimschreiber, made known to me through enquiry into this site. Throughout the Second World War the German army used this machine to send highly encrypted military messages across Swedish telephone cables. Following one of the greatest accomplishments in the history of cryptography, a Swedish mathematician broke this German code and subsequently assisted in designing a deciphering machine on behalf of the Swedish Intelligence branch. This device, known as the App, was secretly developed and manufactured by Ericsson, possibly where I now study.

In exploring the theme of secrets, this essay originates from an underpinning desire and subject of my work to reveal what is concealed or overlooked. Through researching and writing this essay I attempt to have a better understanding on the notion of secrets, in both the private and public realms. Introducing the artistic process and situation I am working from, I explore the central role that secrets play within society. In order to understand secrecy today I introduce the intertwined and associated contemporary debates of privacy, (both private and public) and transparency through such subjects as Google’s new privacy policy, mobile phone hacking, WikiLeaks and offshore banking.
Why I do what I do

I undertook a Masters course in art to better understand my particular method of working and to see if I could define and articulate, why I do what I do. It seems I have shaped an artistic practice centred on revealing what is not usually visible. Each opportunity to produce new work often begins with a sustained period of observation on site if possible and/or a more general enquiry into the context I will ultimately exhibit within. Random and interesting realities, discussions and knowledge absorbed from this research generate a distinct network of associations. These are framed by the physical setting of new artwork and the general, prescribed framework —such as the premise of the show, curatorial aspects and institutional framework. However, the actual engagement with the artwork within these contexts is of the utmost importance to me. I have an underlying awareness of the implied neutrality of spaces for art display and the very presentation of art including the apparatus of an art exhibition or event. For example: the significance of the artworks title, its material description and the press release or descriptive text that usually supplements it and even elects how it should be comprehended.

I believe art only exists with the viewer, or for a better word, the participant. I don’t wish to describe and over-theorise a specific subject or my artwork to be an illustration of a set of ideas, but to instigate a set of relations in the participant’s mind—that might or might not—arrive at the same area I find myself. One approach I often enlist is to leave space for this to happen through a ‘visually reduced’ slight and subtle presentation that often uses existing or found material.
A participant in the work, Only You Know, 2013.

Due to my method of working it is difficult to make real experiments before a work is shown, as they are dependent on where they are shown. Maybe all my works are experiments in that they directly provide insight into the effects of adding to, or manipulating a certain context. Before their presentation I can obviously test the physical attributes of an artwork such as the material and technologically qualities. When afforded the luxury of art education I can even fully explore new ideas and receive knowledgeable feedback. But the validation (or even falsifying) of any hypothesis only really arises through its presentation, which I see as the moment of display within the exhibition/event it was made for.

With this in mind I used a recent opportunity to exhibit in London to ‘experiment’ with ideas I had been working on for the Konstfack Spring Show context later in the year. I was invited by a curator to participate within a small group show, Of Parameters - Measurable Truths, Definitive Outcome around a specific theme and as the only artist commissioned to make new work¹.

The work I produced carefully revealed itself through use of the title, materials list and the curator’s descriptive text (which I oversaw):

*Only You Know, 2013*

Telephone and GSM bug

A telephone that occasionally rings with a listening bug placed at an undisclosed location within the gallery.

The telephone I used was a particular art world inspired Blackberry mobile² that was placed on a large window ledge/information area next to the entrance of the gallery. A small bug (listening device) was hidden in the basement gallery space, which once activated by sound automatically calls the telephone upstairs until it’s answered, letting the receiver hear what is said or done. In addition,


² Before the iphone the Blackberry was noticeably the mobile of choice for the global, hectic curator and gallerist alike.
when the mobile rings the title of the work is displayed as the caller ID, acting as another entrance point into the work alongside the exhibition guide that was freely available.

I was deeply involved in researching areas around secrecy, transparency and privacy (as evident in the following chapters) and consciously brought these to the fore when thinking about ideas for a new work. But I still began like any new opportunity to produce work with what was given. This could be listed as the following: information and ideas around the selection of artists— their work and curatorial concerns; the physical attributes and architecture of the gallery including its exhibition programming; and the particular geographic, social and political situation the gallery is found within.

I kept in mind the curational ideas presented to me when considering different ideas and in conversation with the curator decided that I should show two works. The other is an existing work that is remade each time it is shown, for this realisation entitled, Approx. 2220 x 810 x 625mm (The Largest Possible Plinth To Enter The Gallery Space Without Altering The Fabric Of The Building), 2013. This monolithic white plinth, made via the same methods and materials as previous gallery furniture in the space, echoed the exhibitions theoretical premise very effectively— literally exposing the structure and measurements of the gallery space. As did the new work, Only You Know, through research into the historically rich ‘Ceil Court’ in central London where the gallery resides. I explored who now works and lives there and who used to, through to the actual origins of the court’s name and existence. I soon uncovered fascinating connections to diverse areas of secrecy without even looking for it. Such as the historic origins of court’s name that is believed to be in reference to Robert Cecil, the 1st Earl of Salisbury, an important courtier to Queen Elizabeth I and renowned as England’s inventive ‘spymaster’.

Only You Know, 2013, detail of the ringing mobile phone within the gallery.
Although such particular findings encouraged me to place ideas I had, I evidently didn’t disclose this material within the final work. For me, Only You Know works on two levels, one is that it attempts to deal with the macro: an interest in the ease and availability of covert listening devices; the huge industry that now exists in facilitating the demand in obtaining restricted information; the larger social implications of this; and current discourse around issues of personal privacy. The other is on the micro level: I’m interested in actively involving the viewer both involuntarily and voluntarily in completing the artwork, by letting them decide to answer a ringing telephone and possibly eavesdrop into others conversation. Much more optimistically I’m also interested in what is said within spaces for art, could art criticism be overheard; do we even speak our minds in such environments?

My biggest regret is that I was unable to personally experience the implementation of the exhibition and new work. However through numerous discussions with the curator and friends who visited I was able to obtain some feedback on how it was received and functioned. I knew and recognised certain technological limitations such as clarity of sound but was pleasantly surprised that, through experimentation, the gallery were able to get the bug to activate as soon as anybody went down the stairs (using the sound of somebody descending the stairs). As the downstairs space was very small and intimate I was happy with this solution, however it did alter my initial intentions that only when a voice was detected would the phone upstairs ring. For me what is heard (or not) once the phone is answered is secondary to what is actually happening and the consequential rumination I hope for by framing such an intrusion.

A problem, for the gallery staff at least, is that people were reluctant to answer the ringing telephone and only did so when encouraged or informed that it was, “part of the exhibition”. I envisaged this scenario and instructed the gallery to do as they wish but not to end the call. This created a situation I did not fully apprehend beforehand, an acoustically and spatially intrusive artwork that could fill the small gallery spaces for a long period of time. As one friend and visitor to the show remarked:

  The phone was irritating because it was calling constantly, but this was a good thing. A majority of the works in the show were quite passive, whereas the phone was an interesting sound work that filled the space. I answered it and welcomed the respite.

I could only speculate certain situations and chance encounters between different visitors. Through the realisation of this new work I am now more aware of their actuality and consequences, even their possibility to cause disruption and irritation. I feel this could be achieved by careful consideration of where such sound activated bugs are located, so they are not constantly or so easily activated. This work relies heavily on chance, the unexpected and the imagination of the visitor.

Although not against producing a spectacle, I prefer the possibility of creating a sense of doubt or a subtle intrusion into the everyday that can disclose—or just begin to introduce—information that is not always attainable to the viewer.
Begin with Beurling (an introduction)

“The goal of art, after all, is not to change things—things are changing by themselves all the time anyway. Art’s function is rather to show, to make visible the realities that are generally overlooked”.

— Boris Groys

I want to start with the end. At the end of my two-year Masters course I will present a final presentation of my ‘exam work’ within a group exhibition during and as part of Konstfack’s much larger Spring Exhibition. In line with course information provided to us, even if our individual projects are planned for a public context outside of the school, “the project must be represented in the exhibition through coherent documentation”⁴. I am working with the context I have been studying within, and ultimately exhibiting in relation to, Konstfack. This is the context that will frame our Spring Exhibition; we are exhibiting as Konstfack art students, presented and united via that integral aspect. My artworks are typically rooted and develop from the situation I find myself in as an artist; the very context I exhibit the work within. Parallel to this I set out to examine and act in response to social, as well as environmental aspects that shape, define and work upon a context used to display art.

The underlining theme throughout my artistic practice is a desire to reveal what is concealed or overlooked. I do this by trying to understand the situation I find myself within, on both the micro and macro scale. As the philosopher and art critic, Boris Groys expresses so precisely at the beginning of this chapter, I wish to make visible, through various slight and subtle means, those realities that are generally overlooked by the viewer and possibly the public at large.

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⁴ Quote from an informational document handed out at the beginning of the second year, ‘APR2 – Information’ (Konstfack, September 2012) p5.
So I begin with Konstfack; the school’s building is an imposing spectacle on the local landscape and its history often intrigues me. Konstfack (renamed numerous times) was originally located on Norrmalm in Stockholm city centre, between Klara kyrka and Hötorget. Then in 1959 it was moved to a new building on Valhallavägen and subsequently in 2004, it moved to its current location in the redesigned former headquarters of L.M. Ericsson$^5$ at Telefonplan. The school uses a large part of the previous factory and office buildings within the vast complex. The old headquarters’ Functionalist style is replicated across many old Ericsson workers’ apartment buildings around the Hägersten and Midsommarkransen area, in what was known as LM-staden (LM-city). It is in one of these apartments that I now live.

$^5$ Ericsson, as the company now trades as, was originally known as L.M. Ericsson, an abbreviation of its founder, Lars Magnus Ericsson.
Our neighbours decided to sell their apartment and move out to the country. They weren’t particularly noisy neighbours but we could often decipher their whereabouts from loud footsteps, beats of music and the occasional banging of doors above us. Otherwise, compared to our previous homes, our apartment building and its residents are mysterious to us. Especially the Russian who recently shaved-off his overgrown beard but still only wears one outfit comprising of a white ski jacket (usually with the hood up) and jeans—come any weather. He avoids any acts of communication at extreme lengths, even retreating back into his apartment if you enter our shared staircase at the same time. We had become good friends with our old neighbours and one of them mentioned something in passing that has intrigued me since. His grandmother, no doubt like many of her generation living in the area, had worked at the L.M. Ericsson complex nearby. Once she happened to mention to her grandson that she was involved in producing something in the factory during the Second World War, in complete secret. She never revealed what that something was to anybody in the family and took her secret to the grave.

History books on the area and Ericsson’s own printed and online material describes the dramatic change of production at the complex during the war. Production increased to cater for wartime requirements and such things as ammunition, automatic rifles and submarine communication devices were manufactured. However even the very helpful Centre for Business Studies (Centrum för Näringslivshistoria) and several visits to The Military Archives of Sweden couldn’t shed any more light on what was precisely manufactured at Konstfack and what this secret production could have been. It was only after enquiring amongst colleagues that I was informed from a previous student (who had also taken a keen interest into the building’s history) that it was known Ericsson was involved in the production of a very important decoding device called the ‘App’ during the war. Could this have once been produced where I now study?

The story goes that after the initial shock of the successful German attack on their surrounding Nordic neighbours, Norway and Denmark, the Swedish Government’s Intelligence branch decided never to be surprised again. The government allowed Germany to use the Swedish West Coast cable for communications between Berlin and Oslo, amongst other connections, throughout the war with the intention of tapping them secretly. Unique wartime arrangements allowed foreign rented lines that passed through their territory to be tapped, without breaking Swedish law.

The Germans used an electro-mechanical cipher machine for teleprinter signals (telex) developed by Siemens & Halske to send highly encrypted and strategic military messages across the cables to one another. This was commonly known as the Geheimschreiber (the secret writer), and was a so-called ‘online machine’. Messages were typed without encryption and were immediately printed out the

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6 From the following sources: Anders Johnson, LM-staden: Folkhem i Förr (The Centre for Business History, Stockholm, 2006); The History of Ericsson website, (http://ericssonhistory.com/) [September 2012]; and email correspondence with the aforementioned author.
7 I received information and suggestions via email correspondence from Linda Israelsson, Archivist at The Centre for Business History, Stockholm (September 2012).
same on the other end with the same machine. The operators never saw any enciphered text, unless they used the wrong key.\(^9\)

After only one month, Sweden had a small group situated within the 4\(^{th}\) floor of a dilapidated building at Karlaplan 4 in central Stockholm working around the clock, intercepting and printing the messages. Some of the messages were in a strange type of cipher and Sweden’s most eminent cryptanalyst, Arne Beurling a Professor of Mathematics in Uppsala was drafted in to help. Miraculously after only a few weeks Beurling could present plaintext and not long after, “the mathematical model for the principles of the secret Geheimschreiber”\(^10\). To this day nobody knows exactly how such a feat was undertaken, Beurling only ever disclosed that the numbers 3 and 5 were important, usually getting irritated by such enquiries and answering, “A magician does not reveal his tricks.”\(^11\)

To aid the ever-increasing traffic of messages that were being deciphered manually, by the end of summer 1940 a special machine was needed. Along with Beurling, Vigo Lindstein, an engineer at L.M. Ericsson, was assigned to build the ‘App’ derived from the Swedish word for apparatus, apparat. According to one account, “there were more than 40 of them in operation”\(^12\) and by another source, they were “built in quite large numbers in L.M. Ericsson’s workshop for precision mechanics”.\(^13\) Although where exactly that was is unclear (and only cited briefly once), it is clear that Ericsson manufactured them utilising specialist machinery and skilled engineers. Completed at the beginning of the Second World War in 1940 their brand-new, ‘LM-staden’ at Telefonplan, with its production facility for heavy manufacturing at its centre, consisted of a 14,000 square meter hall with saw-tooth roofs and sky lighting that is now Konstfack.

One of the Apps built by Vigo Lindstein on the right of a Siemens & Halske teleprinter. The cables are for rekeying the machine for deciphering. Photo: FRA Archives, Stockholm.

\(^10\) Bengt Beckman, _Breaking the German Geheimschreiber during WW2_ (Försvarsmakts Historiska Telesamlingar, 2000) p2.
\(^11\) Beckman, _Codebreakers_, p75.
\(^12\) Fn. ibid p88.
As a neutral country with the persistent fear of an imminent invasion, the type of extracted information that the Swedish Government and Defence staff was able to acquire because of this machine was priceless during the war. Surrounded by German armed forces in Norway, Finland and Denmark they were able to keep ahead of troop movements and important actions as well as German reactions to their own ‘neutral’ Swedish foreign policy at the time. Most espionage was through spies on the ground, infiltrated behind enemy lines. To have such highly strategic military and diplomatic information available throughout most of the war—acquired unknown by the adversary—was exceptional.

The breaking of the Geheimschreiber assisted in establishing the Swedish Signals Intelligence, Försvarets Radioanstalt (FRA), as an independent authority in 1942. The government realised their current organisation was inadequate to properly deal with obtaining and processing such ‘intelligence’. Sixty-seven years later the FRA-law took effect that authorises the Swedish state to warrantlessly wiretap all telephone and Internet traffic that crosses its borders. The Swedish parliament narrowly passed the bill by a vote of 143-138 with many critics within government against such a measure. A highly contested law that infringes on individual privacy, the FRA will no longer need a court order to instigate surveillance, unlike the police. The FRA insisted it would filter out domestic communication and monitor only international traffic but many experts in the field have argued that it is impossible to differentiate between domestic and international traffic\textsuperscript{14}. The days of sending direct wartime telex messages between Oslo and Berlin via Sweden are over, Internet traffic often propagates across national borders and back as Internet providers and servers exist elsewhere. The Swedish IT media house, IDG, reported before the law was even passed in 2007 that it believed FRA had purchased one of the world’s most powerful supercomputers which, like the notorious USA and UK’s ECHELON network, would also allow the agency to search through vast amounts of data in search of key words or phrases\textsuperscript{15}. What was once only a wartime arrangement has now become law.

\textsuperscript{14} Before and after the law was passed on June 18\textsuperscript{th} there was much domestic and international media coverage on such a controversial bill. Such examples are: ‘Sweden to allow emails snooping’ (The Telegraph Newspaper, 19\textsuperscript{th} June 2008) (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/sweden/2157023/Sweden-to-allow-emails-snooping.html); and ‘FRA har samlat data i tio år’, (Dagens Nyheter, 16\textsuperscript{th} June 2008) (http://www.dn.se/?a=794486) [December 2012]

\textsuperscript{15} “Secret” supercomputer believed to go to FRA (IDG.se, 5\textsuperscript{th} June 2007) (http://www.idg.se/2.1085/1.110686) [December 2012]; ECHELON is a name used in global media and popular culture to describe a signals intelligence (SIGINT) collection and analysis network.
Privacy in public

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”
—Article 19, The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights

As set out in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights above, we are all entitled to our privacy as a human right and in such we are entitled to reveal ourselves selectively—when and how we wish. We only need to think of the prevalence of social media, through the likes of Facebook, to observe how rapidly what we do or vitally do not communicate about ourselves is altering today. As I’m writing this I’m periodically researching relevant articles and material thanks to the Google search engine and checking my emails via Google’s Gmail service over my school’s WiFi connection, an invisible private and encrypted connection between my computer, the school’s router and the Internet. We are living in a world where the systems and parameters we operate with and within are becoming more and more invisible and complex, and what we might believe to be private is not. I already know from when I first arrived and received my information sheet, ‘IT at Konstfack’, that what I can access, download and view is restricted. Konstfack is connected to the Internet through SUNET (Swedish University Computer Network) who have in place their Acceptable Use and Code of Ethics polices. These ultimately adhere to what is legal according to Swedish law as an organisation based in Sweden. What I don’t know and what I must presume (in order to regulate these polices) is that my web history and communication is stored for a period of time. In Sweden we can turn to the governmental body, The Data Inspection Board, if we’re unhappy with how our private information is used. The board creates the preconditions for the processing of personal data, so as not to lead to undue privacy infringement. Although as their Director-General, Göran Gräslund emphasises, “…at the end of the day, it is our politicians who determine the adjustments to be made when balancing privacy and other essential interests in society.”

Today when an immense amount of our personal information is processed daily by government and corporate institutions, it is as much our own responsibility to be more attentive—to how and what we provide— as it is to trust those who can regulate how it’s used. As The Data Inspection Board asks, “Should we accept personal responsibility before something happens, or let the government monitor what has happened and act after the fact?”

From 1st March 2012 Google changed its privacy policy causing much concern across the Internet and an on-going review via European Union data regulators who said, “transparency rules have not been applied.” The changes Google have implemented mean what I—and millions of other users—believed was private data is not. Using their search engine, for example, can be shared with Google’s multitude of other services such as Gmail, YouTube and more than fifty others. Essentially the company wants to tailor their business (selling adverts to

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18 Fn. ibid
targeted individual behaviours) by collecting very specific and private user information. But what they actually intend to do with the data, not just what they might do at some unstipulated point in the future, is unclear. Users, such as myself, are not in control of how my private information is shared unless we opt out of using such services or find ways to work around the constraints.

Another on-going and highly publicised example of privacy infringement is ‘The News International phone hacking scandal’ from 2011, that involved employees of the now obsolete News of the World newspaper being accused of phone hacking. Initial police investigations concluded that only celebrities, politicians and members of the British Royal Family’s mobile phones were hacked. But a few months later it was revealed that the phones of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler, relatives of deceased British soldiers and victims of the 7/7 London bombings where also accessed. This rightly caused considerable public outcry, the closure of the News of the World and subsequent involvement of official inquires. The debate between exposing the truth via whatever means necessary and the question of personal privacy remains, but it’s clear that grubby and illegal phone hacking in pursuit of a tabloid headline is publicly not acceptable. It has been said that the phone hacking that took place is relevantly easy and access to mobile phone answer machines via a four-digit pin was straightforward to manipulate. This is quite a contrast to Arne Beurling’s meticulous mathematical model for the principles of the secret German messages and shows that, as technology has developed, the way in which privacy is protected and violated has changed with it.

Over the summer of 2011 the British media reported numerous articles on the phone hacking revelations, one such example: James Robinson, ‘Milly Dowler phone hacking: Family shocked by NoW revelations’, (The Guardian newspaper, 4th July 2011) (http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/jul/04/milly-dowler-family-phone-hacking) [September 2012]

The secrets of others

From this revealing discovery: a rumour of a secret that exposes a secretly manufactured apparatus that deciphered Nazi secrets (and the on-going bewilderment regarding my guarded Russian neighbour), I wish to explore and have a better understanding of the notion of secrets. In her book, ‘Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation’, Sissela Bok defines secrecy as “intentional concealment” as she explores the ethical issue of secrecy that affects everyday situations both in public and private life. Secrets are in part a social convention; our sense of sin, shame, taboo or reserve is largely dependent on our culture’s values. We are, speaking from a contemporary Western culture, more likely to discuss our sex life than our salaries for example. The eminent philosopher Georg Simmel knew secrecy as the “definitive sociological form for the regulation of the flow and distribution of information”. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, he thought that the social structure of modern society permits and requires a high degree of secrecy. As he outlines so clearly, “human interaction is conditioned by the capacity to speak, it is shaped by the capacity to be silent”.

We are provoked by the secrets of others and use them in the games (and wars) we play. But keeping a secret is not easy. Secrecy we all know is the cause of much human conflict and suffering, especially in private life. That dangerous and slippery slope of having to lie to withhold a secret can burden and affect the way we act and are perceived. However secrets are also needed sometimes and can

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be a good thing, because everyone is so different. Secrets have an important role in the formation of our identity, be that personal or professional. Gossip and secrets go hand in hand there would be no gossip without secrets and Sissela Bok devotes a whole chapter on the subject of gossip. She defines gossip as "talking about the lives of others" and a vital part of soul searching, but only when talking becomes darker. We define who we are and our beliefs through disclosing our thoughts and opinions on others. Gossip is when conversation becomes about persons absent, isolated or excluded and never about the participants themselves. Consequently, gossip must be in secret.

What about the compulsion to confess, to release the all-consuming burden of a secret, and the confusion and duality of motives that this creates? One perspective would be to reflect on secrecy within relationships, particularly between intimate individuals. Simmel states “even in marriage secrecy must exist... in revealing all, marriage becomes dull and boring and loses all excitement.” The very act of sharing a common secret creates a strong bond between people (secret societies come to mind here) but at the same time secrets are required to add spice to our lives. So within relationships there are secrets that are desired, surprise for example, as well as those that we all know are harmful and self-destructive. One way to discern between them is to consider the difference between privacy and secrecy. Between a private and a secret life. In this sense a secret life can be more poisonous, it usually involves a spoken lie or deliberate omission of key information. Private life on the other hand is something needed in a relationship; we need to hold on to the individual qualities that united the relationship in the first place. Privacy could be said to be something that concerns only the individual and does not in any way affect the relationship. But there are also strong cultural pressures that take effect; refusal to disclose private information is often linked to being secretive. Again it is important to remember that privacy is often discussed from a Western cultural view, not a worldwide view on the subject. Our own conflicting particular cultural ethics (that broadly differ even within nations as Bok would stress) often determine our understanding of what is private and secret.

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24 Bok, p78.
25 Fn. ibid, 109.
The Age of Transparency

“There’s no secrecy on the Internet – that’s the lesson we’ve learned and we are now trying to spread that.”
—John Young

Today secrecy in the public realm, aided by the Internet, is a hot topic. WikiLeaks and the organisation’s public face, Julian Assange, have caused a renewed and urgent interest in the subject by disclosing highly secret information at a very public level, accessible via the Internet. Even before Assange, fellow Cypherpunk and Cryptome.org co-founder John Young was publishing classified and secret documents online. Although a notable opponent against WikiLeaks, the two agree on the same principles — that the real threat to democracy comes for those in power harbouring secrets. As Young outlines in a disparaging letter to Wall Street Journal reporter, Jeanne Whalen, “In truth, secrecy protects and empowers those who use it and weakens those for whom it is invoked to protect”.

Transparency is the key word used today, with the times we live in being often referred to as an, ‘Age of Transparency’. Openness not secrecy is demanded and brought to the forefront of public debate. Micah Sifry, political analyst and

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writer of, ‘Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency’, claims that WikiLeaks is an indicator of the continuing generational and philosophical struggle between older, closed systems and the new open culture of the Internet:

What is new is our ability to connect, individually and together, with greater ease than at any time in human history. As a result, information is flowing more freely into the public arena, powered by seemingly unstoppable networks of people all over the world co-operating to share vital data and prevent its suppression.  

From the Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini’s comment, “It will be the September 11th of world diplomacy”29, to U.S. Congressman Peter King stating that it “presents a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States”30. WikiLeaks’ has noticeably annoyed politicians from all positions. Notions of transparency within government seemingly differ from those outside of it. Sifry expresses the conflicting nature of politicians’ views on the freedom and transparency of the Internet in disclosing secrets when he states that “most politicians, including (President) Obama, have used the Internet to consolidate their power, not to empower others for any other purpose”31. The result of WikiLeaks is a series of extremely difficult contradictions within our governments. It seems externally they want to be seen as democratic and embrace openness but in truth they maintain the idea that secrets are a very necessary part of keeping us safe from ‘attack’. The independent UK Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, says “The best form of defence is transparency — much more proactive publication of what organisations do. It’s an attitude of ‘OK. You want to know? Here it is’”32. But shouldn’t governments be transparent to begin with and then rationalise when it decides to make something secret, not the reverse? The best defence against Wikileaks is transparency after all. Somebody with many years experience in governmental secrecy and effect, Max Frankel, former editor of the New York Times, was involved in the historic ‘US Pentagon papers’ where his newspaper in 1971 leaked that the American Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress on key aspects about the Vietnam War. Frankel writes candidly on secrets for The Guardian Newspaper in response to the initial WikiLeaks release of classified information, whilst still supporting the idea that certain secrets are necessary:

I well know that no family, business or government can function without some genuine secrets. The trick is to focus on the genuine and to treat truly essential secrets accordingly... The threat of massive leaks will persist so long as there are massive secrets 33.

29 Quote from an interview with Italian state television (Rai) (28th November 2010).
31 Sifry, p106.
33 Max Frankel, ‘WikiLeaks: Secrets shared with millions are not secret’ (The Guardian Newspaper, 1st December 2010). (http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/30/wikileaks-secrets-pentagon-papers) [September 2012].
Undisclosed wealth

“Money, more than any other form of value, makes possible the secrecy, invisibility and silence of exchange.”
— Georg Simmel

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century yet increasingly pertinent today, Simmel saw money as a part of life that helped us understand the entirety of life — completing his epic work ‘The Philosophy of Money’ in 1907. To him, the money economy allowed people to hide transactions, acquisitions and changes in ownership. He speaks of money allowing for “invisible” transactions, now money is such an integral part of human values and beliefs; it is possible to buy silence. We are now, over one hundred years later, in yet another financial crisis with a seemingly never-ending spiral of economic recession that began in 2008. The effects of numerous bankers trading invisible ‘futures’ is felt most strongly when a family is made homeless and governments continue to bail out large banking institutions with more invisible money.

A United States Senate report from 2011 on the on-going financial crisis claimed that “high risk, complex financial products” and “undisclosed conflicts of interest” amongst other factors, were to blame for the financial mess. As one of the world’s most famous industrialists, Henry Ford apparently said, “It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning”. It seems that some fundamental systems— usually the most important ones in our lives— are deliberately kept secret from those on the outside.

Although by no means exemplary, Ford did rightly regret that people think about their monetary system and the prevailing economic structure, only in times of depression. This is ever the case today, it’s what is affecting the majority of us in one-way or another, if we see it or not. Something that has featured widely recently, particularly within the media, is the 1% (the wealthy elite). The ‘global super-rich elite’ are written and spoken about on a daily basis now. One such popular topic is the secrecy of where and how the wealthy store and invest their money, the ‘offshore bank account’.

Recent research commissioned by the campaign group Tax Justice Network put the figure of wealth ‘offshore’ as much as the American and Japanese GDPs (Gross Domestic Product) put together, some £13 trillion. To explain what is a very complicated and secret process the wealthy, aided by private and investment banks, take advantage of the increasingly borderless global economy

35 Fn. ibid, p388.
37 1% in reference to the well used expression of the growing wealth gap in between America’s wealthy elite compared to the rest of the population, originally from the 2006 documentary of the same name.
38 Figures taken from: (http://www.taxjustice.net) [September 2012]
to deposit their money outside of their country of residence. A nation's wealth literally disappears offshore instead of being invested at home. The research suggests such staggering figures of almost £500 billion leaving Russia over the past twenty years since its economy was opened up. To quote from the group's website:

The Tax Justice Network promotes transparency in international finance and opposes secrecy. We promote tax compliance and we oppose tax evasion, tax avoidance, and all the mechanisms that enable owners and controllers of wealth to escape their responsibilities to the societies on which they and their wealth depend. Tax havens, or secrecy jurisdictions as we prefer to call them, lie at the centre of our concerns, and we oppose them.39

As a Guardian newspaper article on the subject reported, there have been repeated pledges to close down tax havens since the financial crisis of 2008 when, “the secrecy shrouding parts of the banking system was widely seen as exacerbating instability”40. But the problem, and what Tax Justice Network would like to see, is that many countries refuse to make the essential details available to the tax authorities as standard practice. Interviewed in the Guardian article James Henry, a former chief economist and an expert on tax havens, summarizes the role of secrecy in this arrangement when he says, “The very existence of the global offshore industry, and the tax-free status of the enormous sums invested by their wealthy clients, is predicated on secrecy.”41

Regulation of offshore banking is supposedly increasing, although critics maintain it remains largely insufficient. Nobel Laureate and former senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz calls for the abolition of offshore banking and corporate secrecy. In an interview with investigative journalist Lucy Komisar he explains the diverging and entangled reasons why such clandestine systems still exist:

You ask why, if there’s an important role for a regulated banking system, do you allow a non-regulated banking system to continue? It’s in the interest of some of the moneyed interests to allow this to occur. It’s not an accident; it could have been shut down at any time. If you said the US, the UK, the major G7 banks will not deal with offshore bank centers that don’t comply with G7 banks regulations, these banks could not exist. They only exist because they engage in transactions with standard banks.42

With the continued pressure from such organisations at the Tax Justice Network, hopefully banks and the governments who regulate them will become more forthcoming and transparent on where and how the wealthy hide their fortunes. But I fear this might be a long way off. The reason it seems is clear, money threads through every walk of life. As with any suggestion of political wrongdoing— you just need to ‘follow the money’.43

39 Fn. ibid.
41 Fn. ibid.
42 Taken from an interview on: (http://www.thekomisarscoop.com) (18th June 2001) [September 2012]
43 Journalistic phrase used in political misconduct investigations and originates from the 1970s Watergate Scandal, specifically the film about it, All the President’s Men (1976).
Conclusion

This essay reflects a particular method of working that I use when researching. I have tried to use the process of researching and subsequent recording through this essay as an apparatus to assist a future artwork. Much like the ‘app’ that was possibly manufactured where I have been studying and where I will exhibit my new artwork, I wanted to begin to decipher and understand what is meant by secrecy, privacy and transparency today—the very act and construction of concealment.

Simmel and Bok have helped me understand the significance of secrets in the development and endurance of the relationships we have, and how we govern the way we are perceived. The recent and on-going public topics related to secrecy and privacy that I explore, ground my understanding of the subject as it exists today. Modern society relies on secrecy as a means of information control. Public authorities relate democracy to transparency whilst simultaneously expressing that secrets still need to exist, the pertinent Orwellian word, doublethink comes to mind here, the act of simultaneously accepting two mutually contradictory beliefs as correct.

Technological advancements in communication are rapidly effecting and changing notions of information control. As Simmel speaks about money, information has a value that is related to the difficulty of obtaining it – the more difficult, the greater the value. As such, what we believe as private is often exchanged as a commodity. Wikileaks and its opponents have stressed the central use of the Internet in facilitating a more transparent age, where what is gained through openness is greater freedom and participation in the society we want to live within. But as ‘offshore banking’ emphasises there will always be the moneyed and ruling minority that wish to look after their own interests first, connected through an intricate web where secrecy and encryption play a vital role.

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44 The word coined by George Orwell in his dystopian novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four, where ‘doublethink’ is part of ‘Newspeak’.
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