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STORIES BY A TRAVELING ARTIST – “MAN OF THE WORLD”

Nick Fedaeff, Russian and New Zealand surrealist artist, musician, multimedia expert, traveler, “man of the world”

Thank you for inviting me. I am Nick Fedaeff. Good morning to European, the US, and good afternoon to Siberian. I am broadcasting now from Lisbon, it is the capital of Portugal, and it is very early morning here, 7 a.m. But I woke up and my head is clear for this chat.

When I came to New Zealand and emigrated from Tomsk in 1996, I studied the subject called multimedia. Straightaway, it was a very new one: the Internet, video presentations, multimedia, CD-ROMs, etc. My position was a multimedia producer. I used to work in an organization, like Oakland University, I was lecturing other tutors and students to understand this new media, because, what happened in 1997 in Australia and New Zealand, the students, young generations, researched about new media, they were the first navigators of these areas. But tutors, the older audience, were conservative; they were still using the old ways to teach students. I was on a position to show the new media, new opportunities. I was doing it for about 2 years and then I organized my own company; the subject was web-marketing. So, about 5 years I was in this area, it was a small company, but we were successful in this area. And then I just left everything, because for some reason I decided: “Okay, it is all. I am done with this, I am an expert”. And I became an artist. So I am painting the way how Van Gogh painted, and Picasso, whatever. Without any media, just paint, but I am using digital media, the Internet for promoting my art from the beginning, because I knew this area by heart. For example, lots of artists are used to advertise, to show their art in the galleries, me – on social media, on the Internet, on online auctions from the beginning. And it was the core of my success.

From about three years ago, my kids have grown up, now they are more than 18 years old. They just separated: they live their own lives, and we, I and my wife, Klara, decided to go around the world, because I can paint anywhere. I just need an easel, canvas, and paints. So, anywhere in the world I can buy these. We live in different countries, about a few months, it depends on the visa situation and how we feel about it. We’ve been travelling for about 3 years now. This is my little story and now I am in the middle of travelling. I am right now in Portugal, and at the end of December I will come back to New Zealand and then go on.

What I can say about digital media at the very beginning, because I was one of the pioneers, who developed these things, and I was involved in producing some tools. We had a lot of conferences at the end of the last century, in 1998-1999, with Dolby Macromedia, Microsoft, Nokia in Sydney, Oakland, Melbourne, etc. I remember a very interesting conversation regarding the future of mobile phones; we are talking about mobile phones of that time. It was simple text messaging, nothing else; Nokia and Motorola – two brands that were dominating. I was the one who followed the version that computers are the future of the digital media, they will kill the television. I was right a little bit about this, because television now – we call that Smart TV, you have probably heard and know about this. I heard that Russia will change to digital TV soon. It is a very big step, because in New Zealand it happened about 5 years ago. These old TVs with tubes, very heavy, are gone. Nobody wants to buy them. I sold my old TV, a big new and good one – Grundig. I thought like somebody would buy it at least for 50 bucks. No, I had to pay 50 bucks just to throw it away. Digital TV now, Smart TV – it is basically a computer, but I did not expect that a little plain mobile phone will take such a big place in our life. For all young generation now it is not only texting, it is basically communication. What I thought – the digital world is more for entertainment in the very beginning, but the communication is dominating now. So social media is communication firstly, then entertainment.

Another thing we did not predict at all at that time is bitcoins, because all transactions at that time were just cash, plastic cards, etc. But to predict that you can use a credit card to buy a lot of

things on the Internet using digital money – nobody thought about it. Right now we are not sure what will happen in the next 5 years, because we simply do not know where technology goes.

I can tell you one thing about the digital world I am in. When we stayed in one remote place about 2-3 months, and there was no Internet connection, I had some sort of 3G service, it was very slow. Basically, I did not have a chance to fully participate on the Internet: I did not go to social media, I did not watch movies, YouTube, etc. Plus there was not much memory, about 4 gigabytes a month, basically nothing. I felt very limited in this kind of things. So, every week we went to hotel in the nearest town, about a hundred kilometers, just to get the Internet, just to be online. I did not expect it from myself, I thought: “Oh, yeah, I can read a book, think about life, paint, and listen to the birds” – no way. So my life is now very dependable on the Internet, I need it. I can say, lots of people feel the same situation: when something happens with the Internet, you cut offline, you feel: “What to do?” It is like when you have no light, for example, you put the candles on the table, you play cards, and you play and feel like: “Oh, yeah, like old time”. No, no chance to cover old time anymore.

So, the Internet is a huge part of my life, your lives, and my profession: I am an artist - without the Internet, without communications, it is impossible. I do online most of sales, because people are up there. I remember my lectures when I was lecturing about web-marketing. I said: “Okay, when you advertise something, you advertise where? You advertise where people are”. You put a tabloid on the road, where the busy road is. You advertise in newspapers, magazines that lots of people read. You do not advertise in small things, and it is important. On the Internet, at the very beginning to represent yourself you have to build a website. So, you put the website on the Internet, but then people realize: “Okay, but how will I find it? I have to search for it”. Then Google comes. Before Google era there were about 10 search engines and everyone was willing to build a website, you had to submit to every search engine, it is not easy, but how to find yourself on Google? You have to advertise on Google with the key words.

I had one situation: in the very early development of the Internet we had an idea of selling air. It is a crazy idea, just to sell air you are breathing. In New Zealand, as you know, there is very clean air, so we thought: “Oh, yeah, that is the best product to sell: air of New Zealand”. So we put it online and made a website called New Zealand Air. We did not think about it, because the major New Zealand aircompany is Air New Zealand, and we advertised on Google with Air New Zealand. We advertised the wrong things, because when you type these key words, you come to Air New Zealand – tickets, buying this stuff. These are the wrong key words. But we advertised it in a very interesting way. It was in 2000s, 18 years ago. I put 100 dollars on a Google account and had a cigarette. I went out for 5 minutes, and then I came back and I saw my account empty, I thought: “What is going on?” During that time all my money was gone and we had three purchases. Actually, these three purchases did not cover the money we spent, but it shows how quickly and how responsible is the Internet. It was 18 years ago, now this situation is even crazier. If you have the right product in the right time, the right key words, you can actually have your products sold on the Internet very quickly, and I know that, because I am selling prints, I need to sell them before Christmas, for example. I just advertise, and here we are – gone.

Now about how actually it looks like – the product on the Internet and the product in the real life. I am an artist and when I sell my paintings on the Internet, probably I have little chances to sell an expensive original painting, because people do not trust the image they see online. It is human behavior: they would like to touch it, to see it by real eyes. And when they have to buy small products, say 50 dollars or so, they can buy easily. When you have experienced it, you got something for a hundred dollars and you feel: “Okay, that is a really good product,” – then you buy again and again, it is trust. So, people do not trust a digital image, they trust something real. What happened with me: I had to go to different galleries, exhibitions, I showed real paintings and when people have seen them, they are easier buying online, because they trust it, they have seen them – they are buying the real product coming to them in a parcel. The same situation happens when you travel, for example. I am using lots of Airbnb services – when you have a flat, you can rent it out,

you order it online, it is like a hotel, but you live in somebody else's environment. So what I do: I search an Airbnb website, I find some flat. At first you see the digital image, and it looks big and nice, but when you come, it normally looks much smaller and not that nice. Now you have to read the feedback about this flat, because people who came and saw that situation say: "Okay, actually it is not as big as it is shown in the photograph", and you can think: "Oh, yeah, I see this trick". You can photograph this room from a particular position, and that looks huge, but actually that is not.

So communication's against that. When you communicate, when you ask questions, and read the responses – you understand more. Not just a digital image. When you see a digital image of the resort somewhere, like Hawaii or Madeira, you feel like: "Oh man, this is paradise, I would like to go!" Do not believe, because the real thing is different. Yes, that is probably a good picture, but it is not exactly what you expect. I will tell you about Tomsk. I have been following on Facebook the guy, who is showing very nice photographs of Tomsk, all the time. And I have not been to Tomsk for 22 years, when I came back this summer after 22 years, a big break, I was expecting in my head something like in these photographs. Actually, it was hard for me to show any photo of a good sight of Tomsk without some rubbish, without something bad, bizarre. I had to cut the photographs to make it nice, and then I put it online – it looks nice, but just next door – there is big bad stuff there. It happens everywhere. So, if you are looking for digital images of cities when you are travelling – they are all much better than real. And plus – as a tourist, when you go, you are always shown the center of the city, it is always nice. Even Tomsk, have a look at Tomsk at the center – it is better than somewhere in Lebedeva street. The same is in other cities – if you live, like me, not in a hotel in the center of the city, because I cannot afford to pay for a hotel for 3 months. I live in flats, like normal citizens of this town or country; you see this stuff around – rubbish, traffic, and people drunk, drugs – all that kind of things are everywhere. That is true.

A digital image you can see on the Internet is better. I presume how people are dating online when they see the face of a man or woman, and how they trust it, because you can do whatever you want with Photoshop: you can make yourself pretty, like Ben Affleck, or Scarlet Johansson. This is not true, again. The Internet and social media are a big fake. Remember this, I am not a big supporter of Trump, but he mentioned this kind of term 'fake news'. The fake news dominates now on the Internet, and you have to be very selective to find the truth, if you are looking for the truth. Most of us are not really looking for the truth, they just say: "Oh sensation, oh-oh-oh, man, let's have a look". In my case, I have some trusted people; I follow them on Facebook, etc. If you do not like somebody who dominates and uses, just ban them or take out from your friends, because, otherwise, you will be full of fake news, and that is bizarre.

So, this is my way of seeing the digital media. I am with the digital media, always with a phone, computer. I photograph, I analyze it, I use it for my profession, I travel with this, I book online, everything online, but there is one digital thing I do not do online, this is gaming. I am not on this age. I think when I am getting older, when I have some troubles, I will buy some nice gaming equipment and I will catch up with whatever popular game, Doom, whatever. Doom was probably the last thing I played long time ago.

Another thing I would like to add is about bitcoins. It is a very important part of our lives, because digital money is the future of money. I can predict now – 5-10 years in the future you will hardly see any paper money. It will be gone. You have digital money, a bank account, because it is easy for the government to get taxes from you, you know. In this area, lots of scam goes on, because people mistrust: you are receiving e-mails, a warning "Oh, yeah, you have been naked, I see you on the camera. Give me thousands bitcoins, or bucks, on this account and we will wipe out the cam". Or something like this: "You have a gift, please, just give a little..." So, that goes on. Remember such things about digital media, like virus war means, whatever, when something major happens.

Basically, the government of each country goes digitally further, and they hire experts. But who are the experts? You probably have seen them on movies – people with ties and suits, FBI,

they are always using some geek, a little skinny man, who is helping them with programming, with virusing. It is also kind of true, because lots of Internet geeks – they half look like that, it's true. And probably more danger from the Internet will be in the future than pleasant things. But, unfortunately, what I can see, there is no chance for us to get back to prehistoric, pre-Internet age, because now we are fully involved in this, and even in reading – I am still an old-fashioned guy, I am still reading books, normal books, I am smelling the pages, and I like that feel of paper. But when I started to travel, I had an E-book and I started to download, so I am using it now. So, there is no way to avoid the new age of the digital era and you have to be prepared, you have to be involved, and enjoy it. Get more used to it. That is it for me. So if you have questions, please, ask me.