PLURALITY OF ONLINE INTIMATE PARTNERS
AND ITS IMPACT ON EXCLUSIVITY OF CYBER-LOVE

A Master's Thesis

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To those who destroy their ego in search of love

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AND ITS IMPACT ON EXCLUSIVITY OF CYBER-LOVE

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

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ANKARA

May 2016

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

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ABSTRACT

PLURALITY OF ONLINE INTIMATE PARTNERS

AND ITS IMPACT ON EXCLUSIVITY OF CYBER-LOVE

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M.F.A. in Media and Design

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Online courtship practices and the nature of virtual relating have been evolved within the last decades thanks to the introduction of hypermediacy, ubiquitous computing, location awareness, and geosocial tagging that creates an information shadow atop existing physical places that leads to augmented reality. Both material and digital inform each other and viewing online and offline as two separate realms might be ineffective in generating meaningful discussions regarding online matchmaking. Primary research question guiding both video and master's thesis is *How does the plurality of available online intimate partners influence the exclusivity of cyber-love?* Implications of the romantic exclusivity in love online are, then, discussed with an autoethnographic research focus through disintegrating the components of exclusivity as to Privacy, Attention, Availability of Partners,

Distraction, Multi-Conversing, Commitment and Online Infidelity. Then, new media cases related to Internet Art, Interdisciplinary Research, Blogging, Social Networks, Performance, and Experiment are included along with an extended discussion of the M.F.A. Thesis Project, which in return create hypertextual surfaces of relating and loving in digital postmodernity.

ÖZET

ÇOK SAYIDA ÇEVRİMİÇİ ROMANTİK İLİŞKİNİN
İNTERNET AŞKI'NIN BİRİCİKLİĞİNE ETKİSİ

Tuncez, Meriç

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Tasarım

Tez Yöneticisi: Assist. Prof. Andreas Treske

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Çevrimiçi flörtleşme teknikleri, araçları ve bilgisayar aracılığıyla kurulan ilişkilerin doğası son yirmi sene içerisinde büyük bir evrim geçirdi. Bu evrimin gerçekleşmesi ve sevginin çevrimiçi dünyadaki akışında yaşanan değişimde; tüm medya teknolojilerinin giderek iç içe geçmesi, her an her yerde hesaplamalar yapabilen akıllı bilgisayar sistemleri, lokasyon farkındalığı ve lokasyon bazlı işaretleme teknolojileri gibi yeni medya gelişmeleri bir çeşit bilgi gölgesinin fiziksel alanın üzerine yerleşmesine sebep olur: biz buna arttırılmış gerçeklik diyoruz. Bu teori çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı arasındaki kutuplaşmanın incelmesini de öngörür. Hem videoyu hem tezi bilgilendiren ve yönlendiren ana sorunsal şu soruyla özetlenebilir: *Çevrimiçi partnerlerin sayıca çokluğunun internet aşkı'nın biricikliğine olan etkisi nedir?* Yazar internet aşkı'nın biricikliğinin farklı alanlardaki yansımalarına doğru daha derin bir yolculuğa çıkar ve biriciklik kavramını açarak Mahremiyet, İlgi/Odak,

Çevrimiçi Partnerlerin Sayıca Çokluğu, Dikkatin Dağılması, Aynı Anda Birden Fazla Partnerle Konuşma, Bağlılık ve Çevrimiçi Sadakatsizlik gibi konuları otoetnografik araştırma araçlarını kullanarak inceler. Ardından yazar, İnternet Sanatı, Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar, Blogging, Sosyal Ağlar, Performans ve Deneysel gibi alanlarda yapılmış yeni medya çalışmalarına ışık tutar. Bu medya çalışmalarının içinde M.F.A. Tez Projesinin detaylı bir değerlendirmesi de yer almaktadır. Projenin fikir ve teknik anlamında beslendiği ve danıştığı diğer çalışmalarla olan ilişkileri de bu kısımda vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilgisayar Aracılı İlişkiler, Biriciklik, Çevrimiçi Flörtleşme, İnternet Aşkı, Yeni Medya

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Prelude

Postmodern Self[1] is an embodied experience diversified around media, culture, society, and world. As it is delicately fragile and liquid, the self transcodes forms, shapes and ideas to find its way to ultimate desire, self-fulfillment that is feeling integrated, being one. This constant tension between the desire to be born and to die urges the self to explore more. Self goes through several explorations to find the one, to feel integrated. He is overloaded with incoming information, limited by time and focus, and born to die. In the context of online courtship, self as a geosocially situated data flows through several channels of interest. Interests include flirting, love-making, sex, idle talk, and more. In searching for one, self divides his attention and time to various online intimate partners with words as his key to ultimate seduction to achieve vulnerability and death. To be vulnerable online is to get

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[1] Further Reading*: The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* by Fredric Jameson

intimate. Self knows that and divides itself furthermore into various *objects of desire²*, bodies of life. The interplay between information, time, and love gives birth to possible selves that reproduce contents and objects of desire and rewrite personal history. Self wants to be exclusive with someone, to feel whole, and to feel integrated. How exclusive can the self be with someone while so diversified, broken, and loveless? As a matter of fact, love relationships require the devotion of time and attention to limited resources, objects of desire. Both online and offline relationship codes are mutating into a complex shape fed by media technologies and people's altering desires. Wanting to be exclusive with someone dear to our heart, at a point in our life, can we be exclusive when the search is not yet over to find the "one"? Distracted and fragmented, how can the self stay focused on an object of desire? Regarding the exclusivity of romantic love, Ben Ze'ev (2004:184) identifies "various aspects of romantic exclusivity":

> …attention (for example, thinking and fantasizing about another person or looking at pornographic pictures), verbal activity (such as offline and online flirting or cybersex), nonsexual physical activity (like going to a movie or to a restaurant), and sexual, physical activity.

What is implied by romantic exclusivity usually points to sexual exclusivity where both partners are expected to sexually exclusive with each other by not sharing their bodies with people other than their partners. However, emotional exclusivity also generates intense emotions in partners where only substantial emotional involvement in other people during an exclusive relationship may harm the exclusivity of the relationship. For instance, online relationships might generate real emotions. Therefore, secret online relationships usually bother the other partner

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² Further Looking: *Cet obscur objet du désir* by Luis Bunuel

who is emotionally cheated. This rather exploratory introduction sets the broad foundation for the problem that leads to the study. The primary research question and the problem identified in this paper are about the exclusivity of cyber-romance with its online and offline implications. Specifically, the *main research question* guiding both theory and practice for this research piece is

How does the plurality of available online intimate partners impact the *exclusivity*[3] of cyber-love?

1.2. Toolset and Methodology

The ultimate aim of this research and practice is to generate qualitative data, gradually adding to the existing body of human knowledge in media, communication and cultural studies, design, and psychology; cyber-psychology, and new media in particular. The specific aim of the study is to uncover qualitative data and generate theory concerning the impact of the availability of online intimate partners on the exclusivity of cyber-love through employing *autoethnography*[4] as a research method to produce new knowledge in the form of theory. The self-reflexive position that I inhabit both in theory and practice adds a qualitative layer to this research piece. Mauthner et al. (as cited in Mauthner & Doucet, 2003:414) identifies the position of reflexivity in generating new theory in social sciences and internet research as such: "the importance of being reflexive is acknowledged within social science research and there is widespread recognition that the interpretation of data is a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made

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[3] Further Reading: *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons* by Bennett W. Helm
[4] Further Reading: *Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method* by Dwayne Custer

rather than found." The position of self-reflexivity also adds a philosophical and theoretical quality to the writing that in return engages the author to excavate new qualitative data, insight, and meaning in their respective discipline.

In data analysis, Mauthner and Doucet merges several components of a research (research, method, and data) by positioning reflexivity in an attempt to create hypertextuality in a research: "there is an assumption built into many data analysis methods that the researcher, the method and the data are separate entities rather than reflexively interdependent and interconnected" (2003: 414). Researcher, method and data actively shape one another and the nature of this M.F.A. Thesis Project as involving both theory and practice yields a productive space for this reflexivity to occur.

Bartleet and Ellis (as cited in Pace, 2012: 2) exemplifies autoethnographers' journey into research, data, and method in the following passage:

> Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding. The output of an autoethnographic study commonly takes the form of an evocative narrative written in the first-person style such as a short story or novel.

Countless social interactions with implications upon society, self, love, and politics yield a natural resource of *qualitative*[5] data that I uncover and make use of both in my writing and video. The first-person style yields rich content across hypermedia space in which the researcher simultaneously describes and analyzes the qualitative data through reflexive writing. The reason for preferring an autoethnographic

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[5] Further Reading: *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* by Lindlof & Taylor

approach in design and research over other research methods is to integrate perspectives around media and culture to create hyper-textual meanings by valuing the personal and the experiential and to situate myself as both the subject and object of the research through self-reflexivity to depict an individual, fluid and social identity in transition. Also, both evocative and analytic autoethnography are employed in making of this research.

This research/practice employs multiple points of view containing both an academic voice and an artistic/autoethnographic voice. Sometimes this multiplicity of voices may pose challenges for the reader as to understand who is speaking now. To reduce the possible confusions on readers' part, in Chapter 3, the autoethnographic voice is italicized. Also, in *Are We Exclusive Yet?* in Chapter 4, the autoethnographic and self-reflexive voice is preferred instead of a scholar one. Thus, the reader is expected to differentiate the autoethnographic voice, *I*, which is employed in several stages of the writing. The interplay between objectification and subjectivation of certain sections of my work and myself gives an added hyper-textuality to the overall experience of reading the thesis.

1.3. Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter 1, INTRODUCTION,

Prelude into this paper begins with an exploratory introduction into research problem written in a narrative form employing self-reflexive voice of the author. Then, the primary research question and the problem are identified within the

prelude to stir the viewer's interest in the subject. In the *Toolset and Methodology* section, autoethnography as the research method for this project and the incorporation of self-reflexive writing into social sciences research practices are articulated and discussed to a great extent to uncover both aim(s) and tools of this study and to stress the theory-generating possibilities of the thesis and the project. And then, *Overview of the Chapters* section briefly describes the contents of each chapter.

In Chapter 2, HYPER-DATING AND LOVE IN POSTMODERN DIGITAL SURFACES,

In *Chronological Relevance of Online Matchmaking,* the author provides a brief overview of online courtship practices, a historical account of dating online. This section provides a brief literature review of love online and of what areas are mostly studied within the domains of psychology, media, sociology, cultural and communication studies that gather both quantitative and qualitative data in online matchmaking. Then, in *Remediation, Hypermediacy, and Ubiquitous Computing,* the author goes into greater detail around popular new media lingo containing remediation, hypermediacy and ubiquitous computing to capture the essence of new media practices and postmodern online and offline relating with technology, and society. Later, the author integrates three new media terms to arrive at a new term that has been lately studied and articulated beyond the online-offline divide: *Augmented Reality // Intersection of Digital and Material.* This section critiques the digital divide and offers a new way to approach to the virtual and material distinction. Finally, in *Bits and Atoms // Hyper-Dating and Mediating Love,* the

author remediates other sections within this chapter with extending their meaning into the domain of online dating to arrive at a new phenomenon: hyper-dating.

In Chapter 3, FALLING IN AND OUT OF LOVE,

In *Cyber-Love and Romantic Exclusivity,* the author discusses cyber-love and theories and descriptions around it to capture the meaning and implications of cyber-love. Then, the author shortly discusses the romantic exclusivity based on autobiographical and hypertextual references. The author, later, integrates two concepts, Cyber-Love, and Romantic Exclusivity, to arrive at the research problem, *Plurality of Online Intimate Partners and Its Impact on Exclusivity of Cyber-Love.* Here, the main research question that is introduced in the *Prelude* is discussed to a greater extent, and research problem is identified in more depth. *Falling In and Out of Love // Implications of Romantic Exclusivity in Love Online* is the later attempt of the author to discuss the impact of romantic exclusivity in online courtship practices which expand the notion and logic of exclusivity to cover *Privacy, Attention, Availability, Distraction, Multi-Conversing and Multi-Loving, Commitment and Online Infidelity.* His autoethnographic points of view are dispersed in narrative forms in these sections around the implications of exclusivity in a greater scope.

In Chapter 4, NEW MEDIA OBJECTS IN FLOW,

In *Video* section, *Are We Exclusive Yet?* includes a detailed identification and documentation of the video component of the M.F.A. Thesis Project. Autoethnographic style of writing and documenting are extensively employed in this section to uncover qualitative data and analyze the data through a self-reflexive

process. Starting with a short description of the project, the section discusses technical specifications of the project, a detailed visual description of the project, and list of equipment used to give an overview and quick reference for the reader to understand the essence and basics of the video work. Then, *Concept // Theory, Process // Design,* and *Exhibition // Curatorial* sections goes into greater detail about the project. Then, in the following sections, the author creates a psychological hypermediacy and hypertextuality by referencing new media works that were influential in making of the video and the thesis. In *Internet Art,* the author references Martine Neddam's latest project, *MyDesktopLife*, by briefly describing the project and then pointing its procedural/technical relevance for the thesis project. Furthermore, in *Interdisciplinary Research, Incautious Porn* by Art is Open Source, an interdisciplinary research lab, is discussed. This section focuses on this medium's theoretical and conceptual relevance for the thesis project. Then in *Blogs and Social Media*, blogs; https://www.instagram.com/byefelipe/, and http://straightwhiteboystexting.org/ are described, and the role of blogging, social media, privacy, and Internet and artist as a social communicator are emphasized. Finally, in Performance and Experiment, two cases about online dating qualifying as social experimentation, performance, and artists as social communicators are discussed, namely *#worstdateever* and *Brandon Scott Wolf*.

In Chapter 5, CONCLUSION,

A brief conclusion is provided by reiterating the research problem by focusing on the *next*[6] iteration of the project and the artistic and theoretical signification of the project. Then, a brief narrative statement about the future of online dating is included as to shed light on the future of online relating and postmodern digital loving.

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[6] Further Reading: *The Next Decade in Internet Time* by Leah A. Lievrouw

CHAPTER 2

HYPER-DATING AND LOVE IN POSTMODERN DIGITAL SURFACES

2.1. Chronological Relevance of Online Matchmaking

The advent of the commercial web browser and World Wide Web gave rise to the invention of emerging forms of relating to the Other with new communication tools and technologies. The content of the relationships formed online involves romantic to friendships, networking to idle talk, gender play to identity exploration. The discussion on *online courtship practices[7]* in the early ages of the Internet Research specifically was within the domain of psychology since the advent of the commercial web, research dating back to mid-1990's (Akser, 2015). The earlier research on online dating aimed at defining the *demographics of the users[8]* and deception in self-presentation. Interests of psychologists in this area with a negative bias towards the uses of Internet in dating makes sense as they explored this area concerning psychopathological symptoms occurred through using online platforms to develop relationships, problems including depression, breakdown, and even

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[7] Further Reading: *Timeline of Online Dating Services*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_online_dating_services
[8] Further Reading: *Who visits online dating sites? Exploring some characteristics of online daters* by Valkenburg & Peter

suicide. The dark side of the Internet was its anonymous nature where the individual could be anyone or pass as anyone. As Ben-Ze'ev (2004) argues, "in most cases, you cannot see or hear the other person." and this led researchers to study misrepresentation and it is still the most researched area in the field. The incomplete nature of the Internet gives people tools to come up with fantasy personas and imagine the other. Imagining is a key component of forming romantic relationships however on the Internet imagining takes up a higher priority. Traditionally, relationships formed on the Internet bear similarities with earlier communication technologies; in fact, they are evolved out of past practices such as letter writing, matrimonial advertisements and matchmaking agencies. Traditional romantic pursuits relied on imagination, but it was a passive one. For instance, in the case of matrimonial ads, rather platonic, a person who puts an ad to find the "one" would define the desired characteristics of the person and hope to get a relevant match to their romantic interests. The Internet, however, allowed individuals to imagine the other in an interactive way. As Ben-Ze'ev (2004) proposes, "The move from passive imaginary reality to the interactive virtual reality in cyberspace is much more radical than the move from photographs to movies." Indeed, the added interactivity is what makes the cyber-love, or online romantic relationships, feel "real." Many report highly intense feelings towards the other, whom they have never seen, heard or touched. The intensity of emotions in cyberspace gives the *online relationships*[9] a psychological and social reality. Although earlier research on cyber-love and online dating involved the analysis of emerging Web technologies such as chat rooms, bulletin boards, and MUD games,

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[9] Further Reading: *Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships* by Agnaldo Garcia

later on the invention of Web 2.0 allowed *netizens[10]* to employ visual and auditory communicative capabilities in their use of the Internet and SNS' (Social Networking Services) and this in return made researchers to rethink what they knew about computer-mediated relationships. With the advent of geosocial networking apps and websites such as *Facebook[11]* and *Twitter[12],* the distinction between virtual and real becomes even more blurred and futile. Later, online dating became mobile with the advent of online dating apps such as *Grindr[13]* and *Tinder[14]* and the invention of higher-bandwidth Internet connection. Now, the Internet and its users are omnipresent and are situated atop existing physical locations blurring the previous distinction between virtual and real. Currently, various researchers integrate disciplines such as communication studies, psychology and sociology, incorporating distinct methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks and models that show an interest in issues such as "self-presentation strategies and mate preferences; online communication and attraction; sincerity and deception; trust and privacy; self-disclosure; identity; sexuality; infidelity; and gender differences in online dating" (Casimiro, 2015). Only a limited number of studies examine online infidelity and deception (Cornwell &Lundren, 2001; Whitty, 2002, 2003, 2005), and its impact on sincere communicators (Albright, 2007).

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[10] Definition: Active participant of Internet,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netizen
[11] A popular and free social networking website/app, https://www.facebook.com/
[12] An online social microblogging service/website/app, https://www.twitter.com/
[13] A geosocial dating application for gay and bisexual men, http://www.grindr.com/
[14] A location-based dating application, https://www.gotinder.com/

2.2. Remediation, Hypermediacy and Ubiquitous Computing

Medium is the product of its older versions and is not an entirely new product. It remediates what was already there. For instance VR technologies remediate TV, Film and Sound technologies that preceded VR's introduction to the new media surfaces. Remediation takes existing medium; its functions, its lingo, its way of representation and decontextualizes these individual components in an attempt to redefine the medium, to give it another go. Nothing is entirely new but depends on previous cultural, social, and material innovations. Bolter and Grusin define the medium as, "that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of real" (2000:61). Remediation interprets the reality with a different twist.

New Media, in particular, relies on this act of refashioning the medium in introducing new techniques, styles, and art forms into the world of media products. New Media also affects the ways in which the self navigates post-human digital surfaces. The route that the networked or mediated self takes regularly changes and is redefined through the process of remediation. Changes that take place in media and previous forms of mediation affect the ways in which the networked self is constructed and dispersed among various media. Bolter and Grusin emphasize this fact: "Because we understand media through the ways in which they challenge and reform other media, we understand our mediated selves as reformed versions of earlier mediated selves" (2000:232). The remediated self adopts different points of view it encounters during its virtual journey into the abyss of digital mortem. The

repurposing function of remediation is that self is refashioned in a way every time it interacts with other people on a particular medium, and in-between mediums. In virtual planes, the self "empathize with others by occupying their point of view – techniques pioneered in film and now extended and intensified in digital media." (Bolter&Grusin, 2000: 232). For instance, in film, viewer takes up the character's point of view and empathizes with how they think, act, and react. This psychological remediation allows the mediated self to define herself through the different points of view that it absorbs. Networks of views are in dialogue with each other, each shaping the particular medium they inhabit and the other networkers. However, can they manage to stay integrated as one and become whole in digital surfaces?

Hypermediacy is an acknowledgment of multiple media and the *networks*[15] and relationships it entails. Each media whether it is TV, Film, Applications on an iPad, is constantly communicating with one another by repurposing and redefining the particular relationships that exist between different mediums and networked selves. Bolter and Grusin (2000:236) make a successful attempt in defining the networked self's journey in hypermediate environments:

> In the same way in hypermedia, she is defined as a succession of relationships with various applications or media. She oscillates between media – moves from window to windows, from application to application – and her identity is constituted by those oscillations.

Do constant oscillations shake up the essence of an individual's identity? Every notification received points the networked self to follow a different path

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[15] Further Reading: *The Rise of the Network Society* by Manuel Castells

remediated by a new set of relationships. Design of a particular medium informs its readers to be aware of the medium. Although transparent media or the logic of transparent mediacy strives to create digital applications that aim at erasing the medium, hypermedia, in contrast, relies on acknowledging the presence of the medium. Both transparency and hypermediacy are attempts to represent the reality in a digital form.

Ubiquitous Computing is the product of the logic of hypermediacy and acknowledges the reasoning and rationale behind the discourses of new media: "All existing media are translated into numerical data accessible for the computer. The result: graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces and texts become computable, that is, simply sets of computer data. In short, media become new media" (Manovich, 2001: 25). Through manipulating bits and bytes, numerical figures that represent the lingo of new media, an artist or a designer redefines our relationship with existing media. Computing is everywhere. Our *attention*[16] rapidly oscillates from program to program, application to application; computing never halts. Human becomes post-human. Multi-tasking is a product of the logic of hypermediacy and ubiquitous computing that is pioneered both by individuals and technology. Human becomes computer, and computer becomes human as the difference between those two is faded and the postmodern self is given birth in-between human and media as a post-human new media object.

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[16] Further Reading: *Infinite Distraction: Paying Attention to Social Media* by Dominic Pettmann

2.3 Augmented Reality // Intersection of Digital and Material

The introduction of World Wide Web and Web 2.0 raised concerns about how technology comes to define our new world. Terms such as cyber-relationships, cyber-love, and cyber-psychology came into being to define the virtual life. In 1990's and early 2000's, researchers and theory-makers including the general public criticized our evolving relationship with the digital with binary constructs around online and offline. This tendency to separate the reality into two distinct binary terms such as online and offline gave rise to "digital dualism" that Nathan Jurgenson criticizes in his influential essay, The IRL Fetish: "Digital information has long been portrayed as an elsewhere, a new and different cyberspace, a tendency I have coined the term "digital dualism" to describe: the habit of viewing the online and offline as largely distinct" (2012: para.13). Starting with Facebook, Twitter, and *Instagram[17]*, geo-tagging, location awareness and geosocial applications which integrate the flow of digital data atop existing physical locations portrayed a different trend in defining our relationship with the digital. We were afraid that we would become machines and time spent online would reduce the quality we spent in time offline. In an attempt to traverse our relationship with the new medium, augmented reality paves the way for the merging of digital and material data where Web meets Real Life and what happens *IRL[18]* is informed by ubiquitous social computing apparatus of digital landscapes. This augmented reality exists "at the intersection of materiality and information, physicality and digitality, bodies and technology, atoms and bits, the off and the online" (Jurgenson, 2012: para.14).

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[17] A popular photo-sharing app for smartphones, https://www.instagram.com/
[18] Abbreviation for *In Real Life*

Instead of leaving the real life, postmodern men and women in 2016 emerge with the digital and the digital divide becomes futile in answering our relationship with the digital. We are never really disconnected but exist as networks of relationships and different point of views, thoughts, audio and images as both bits and atoms. Online and offline are constantly informing each other and our bodies are becoming extensions of the particular mediums they navigate around.

2.4. Bits and Atoms // Hyper-Dating and Mediating Love

Hypermediacy in communicating and defining ourselves also affects the ways in which we make love and share affection with one another. I would like to propose a term, "hyper-dating," to describe the particular impact of hypermediacy in defining and shaping our online courtship practices. As time becomes "spatialized, distributed over the surface of the screen," dating takes up a different quality in time and space where both the medium of dating such as *Hornet*[19] or Tinder affects the user's dating practices, and also the user comes to define the particular medium in a timeless dialogue (Manovich, 2001: 325). Postmodern love is distributed over different media such as telephone, *Whatsapp*[20], Hornet, Tinder, Facebook, E-Mail, and Instagram. For instance, one relationship might start on Hornet, then users exchange phone numbers, and move on to Whatsapp, and occasionally talk on Hornet, or Facebook. Social Networking applications and websites become more and more integrated into digital dating in postmodernity as such that on Tinder we see the integration of job and education information into dater's profiles along with snapshots from their Instagram profile (McAlone, 2015). Those updates are a

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[19] A dating application for gay men, https://hornetapp.com/
[20] A messenger app for smartphones, https://www.whatsapp.com/

reflection of a desire for hypermediacy, a *desire*[21] to build an augmented reality, and hyper-dating as such the user has multiple routes in his disposal for getting what he wants: love and affection. Then, love is also dispersed among media, and online dialogues that have been initiated as unique relationships whose time and space qualities do not reflect a linear flow, but rather a disintegrated and timeless flow. Mediation of love in new media augmented reality more and more erases the early assumptions around cyber-love as being anonymous, deceptive and incomplete as it becomes almost-real, truthful: Now, the best dating profiles are the ones which reflect the authentic self, and users feel comfortable when they make sure that they are not deceived but rather communicating with a real person.

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[21] Further Reading: *The Technological Meets the Traditional: Mobile Navigations of Desire and Intimacy* by Cara Wallis

CHAPTER 3

FALLING IN AND OUT OF LOVE[22]

3.1. Cyber-Love and Romantic Exclusivity

Since mid-1990's, cyber-relationships have long been defined by researchers as distinct from real-life relationships with their binary oppositions such as detached attachment, distance and immediacy, lean and rich communication, anonymity and self-disclosure, sincerity and deception, continuity and discontinuity, and physical and mental investment (Ben Ze'ev, 2004). Cooper and Sportolari (1997: 7) argue the following in an attempt to define the inherent characteristics of *computer-mediated relationships*[23]:

> Computer-mediated relating (CMR) reduces the role that physical attributes play in the development of attraction, and enhances other factors such as propinquity, rapport, similarity, and mutual self-disclosure, thus promoting erotic connections that stem from emotional intimacy rather than lustful attraction.

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[22] Further Reading: "Falling In and Out of Love" in *Liquid Love: On The Frailty of Human Bonds* by Zygmunt Bauman

[23] Further Reading: *Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction* by Joseph B. Walther

Chat rooms allowed netizens and virtual daters to hide behind a pseudonym and act and be anyone, any gender, and self. Text-based dating in 1990's and early 2000's did not present exchanges of visual and auditory data between users thus the users employed text to communicate with one another. This, in return, gave rise to a phenomenon called *digital intimacy*[24] and virtual relating that were characterized as "meeting of minds," happening fast, in the blink of an eye. Thus, people started reporting cases where they fell in love in first chat where they met someone online and the meeting of minds happened so quickly that the users related to one another in unexpected intimate levels. Skills in writing proved useful in this pre-augmented reality where the quality of writing through humor, support, affection and witty turned any individual into the best dater in the market, thus, gave rise to increasing numbers of deception cases. Many married men resorted to online dating and cheated on their partners claiming that they fell in love online. Cyber-love is claimed to generate intense and heightened emotions in users where the presence of interactivity allows netizens to relate to one another online with only small mental investment. As Ben Ze'ev argues online relationship "enables people to reap most of the benefits associated with offline relationships without investing significant resources" (2004:6). However, the introduction of geosocial dating applications changed the nature of online relationships as online-offline divide becomes increasingly futile to provide meaningful discussions around online relationships. In 2016, physical characteristics in online love become necessary as opposed to Ben Ze'ev's descriptions in "Love Online". On Tinder, for example, most people swipe right or left based on their initial impressions from the profile pictures

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[24] Further Reading: *Does virtual intimacy exist? A brief exploration into reported levels of intimacy in online relationships* by Scotts, Mottarella, and LaVooy

of users. First impressions through physical attributes are defined and cultivated by the user's profile pictures, particularly, how attractive and real they look.

When someone is exclusive in a romantic way, she decides to give the majority of her attention and love to this dear person such that the loved one might become overwhelmingly attached to her sense of self. Feelings of guilt and shame cloud over the exclusive relationship with the one when this exclusivity is breached by one of the partners. Some couples negotiate a rather flexible consensus over what their exclusivity will imply; some others will strictly abstain from certain actions that would breach their exclusivity arrangement with the loved one. Thus, romantic exclusivity seems to constitute a unique set of choices established by two people over how to direct the gaze; where to look at, and what to avoid, thus, it informs how to live a life "together." Romantic exclusivity implies such significant issues around online dating that have been most discussed within the historical context of online matchmaking such as attention, self, privacy, commitment, infidelity, jealousy, and promiscuity. After identifying the research problem in the following section, implications of exclusivity will be discussed in greater detail with an autoethnographic tone as I will be adding personal and philosophical writings about the issue, employing an autoethnographic and philosophical approach to the research problem.

3.2 Plurality of Online Intimate Partners and Its Impact on Exclusivity of Cyber-Love

Multi-conversing capabilities of online dating technologies foster the production and maintenance of multiple online intimate relationships on different media such as Whatsapp, Facebook or Tinder. The large pool of available intimate partners on the *Internet*[25] challenges the notions of the exclusivity of cyber-love. Current strand of research raises questions about infidelity online and impact of intimate relationships upon primary offline relationships. For example, if someone's primary offline partner is giving them a hard time; they could easily turn to an online dating app, secretly, to communicate with someone who will not bother them with their problems. The point explored in the example raises questions about commitment in postmodern love affairs and how exclusivity is affected and shaped by the glowing available online partners. Many netizens report cases where they were deceived about monogamy saying that the people whom they have met online were also dating other partners (Albright, 2007). Furthermore, the ease of communication supports the process by which online infidelity occurs. Online, it is easy to access to a vast array of partners so for those already in a primary relationship; it is effortless to initiate or supplement the relationship with new romantic affairs. On the other hand, qualitative research on the implications of available potential partners upon the commitment in *exclusively internet-based relationships*[26] is lacking.

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[25] Further Reading*: The Internet, Electric Gaia and the Rise of the Uncensored Self* by Micheal Strangelove
[26] Further Reading: *On-line relational maintenance strategies and perceptions of partners within exclusively internet-based and primarily internet-based relationships* by Kevin B. Wright

Exclusivity refers to not allowing someone else, not divided or shared with others, or complete and undivided (Free Dictionary's online dictionary, n.d.). Being exclusive in a relationship implies monogamy, commitment, and privacy. It also involves the state of being with one person, and only one person, either labeling each other as boyfriend or girlfriend or not (Urban Dictionary's online dictionary, n.d.). How exclusive can we get with someone while the lure of the net distracts us with new notifications every day? For example, an individual can be exclusive with someone either offline or online, yet on Facebook, she gets a message from a secret fan of hers, someone who is interested in her. She replies to them just to kill time or to distract herself. Then, conversation grows into a certain form of cyber-flirting. Although it does not contain any sexually explicit material, it is a form of subtle cyber-dance where she plays with the other a game of *love*[27], affection, and desire. How does this breach her exclusivity with the beloved one? Can she commit to remaining focused exclusively on one object of desire? Alternatively, another example is where he is finally exclusive with someone, say he has a girlfriend. However he shows the supposedly private pictures of his girlfriend to his best male buddies without her consent. How does this affect the quality of the commitment that he gave? In conclusion, the problem identified here is that of exclusivity in a relationship in postmodernity where the term "exclusivity" bears implications for privacy, attention, availability, distraction, multi-conversing and multi-loving, commitment, online infidelity, self, technology, and society.

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[27] Further Reading: *The Lost Innocence of Love: Romance as a Postmodern Condition* by Eva Illouz

Primary research question guiding this study is:

How does the plurality of available online intimate partners influence the exclusivity of cyber-love?

Below, emerging subquestions are formulated in the initial stages of the research development to excavate qualitative data through an exploratory brainstorming:

How much can we control the extent of our privacy zones?

How can one fulfill the romantic ideal of satisfying all one's emotional needs in a single relationship throughout one's lifetime while the availability of partners threatens this uniformity?

Why do people tell complete strangers their most intimate secrets?

How does one negotiate between dullness and boredom of everyday life and spectral psycho-social domain of love online?

Do people realize that they leave traces when they engage in cyber-love and does this awareness affect their self-presentation strategies?

How does multi-conversing change the behavioral patterns of Internet daters and the way they divide their attention?

Do we build up anxiety and tension in knowing that there is a great abundance of desired options that are yet not actualized or communicated?

Might the reality of an online relationship be a preparatory tool for actualizing a successful offline relationship?

Is the relative stability of offline relationships threatened by the instability of online relationships?

How do the limiting parameters such as time and attention determine the number of desired and romanticized objects that we focus?

Does the presence of many attractive online partners increase the regret of doing nothing and the heavy burden of lost opportunities?

Even if the abundance of possible partners comfort and reassure the user, can it also take the form of an indefinite search for the one?

When does flirting cross the line and become romance?

What constitutes an emotional investment in a relationship?

How do romantic tolerance and flexibility bypass societal norms and moral grounds?

At what point in time in the media-mediated acquaintance do participants claim to have fallen in love, or actually love each other?

How does the specific medium affect the construction of identities and emotions on Internet?

How do small talk and idle conversing in online love generate profound intimacies?

How can someone fake sincerity and vulnerability online?

Are online-only romantic relationships emotionally purer as they bypass the noise stemming from traditions and societal norms?

By actualizing an online affair, do we kill the love that started online?

When does communication turn into intrusion?

3.3. Falling In and Out of Love // Implications of Romantic Exclusivity in Love Online

3.3.1. Privacy // do you watch me every night you go to bed?

Privacy is a mode of selective expression that is allowing an individual to select which information about themselves that they will share and which to keep exclusive. What constitutes the private is not only a personal choice but also the product of culture, language, society, and technology. When we label something as private, we give it a rhetorical meaning such that it is exclusive to us, that it is "our thing." However, technology provides means for the individual to become a public object and a chance to uncover often-repressed and unexpressed parts of their identity. Online dating, in particular, allows people to play with gender, self, language, and norms to explore what was kept under the s(h)elf. Advancement of the technology gave rise to a public consciousness where surveillance and everyday video recorders like mobile phone cameras are increasingly monitoring what we do, where we are, and the choices we make on a daily basis. What is happening IRL is a source for digital updates about us through text, photo, video or audio. Privacy is invaded to an extent that its value has never been higher. Therefore, people and

places which offer a little privacy are "favorited" and valued based on the solitude that they offer. The solitude that the privacy offers is a must for the individual to clear away the clutter in their mind and self. As the online-offline divide becomes hazy and blurry through the introduction of a flow of timeless and ubiquitous new media technology atop actual physical locations, the individual is not disconnected. Even when someone goes to a park with no mobile phone, no digital hardware as an ally, he is wired into the augmented reality, and he is on, changing, mutating, and connecting on an interpersonal and mass scale without his consent or intention. Information about him is viewed and manipulated by other people. Manovich (2002: 60,61) provides an account of the postmodern privacy syndrome:

> What before had been a mental process, a uniquely individual state, now became part of the public sphere. Unobservable and interior processes and representations were taken out of individual heads and placed outside - as drawings, photographs, and other visual forms. Now they could be discussed in public, employed in teaching and propaganda, standardized, and mass-distributed. What was private became public. What was unique became mass-produced. What was hidden in an individual's mind became shared.

Omnipresent Gaze foresees and shadows what is happening through introducing privacy settings which disturb the comforts of the postmodern individual. Sharing personal information on social spaces encourage the individual to look deep down into their being to perform identities and politics constructed around multiple points of view absorbed from networks and data mines. Individual is expected observe, reveal, and share their opinion with the world, therefore, placing once-private views, thoughts, feelings, and epiphanies in the public light, naked and vulnerable.

Romantic exclusivity implies privacy; not sharing the time, attention or the self with other potential intimate partners, keeping it all reserved for the one: Loving one person at a time, and only one. When someone is in an exclusive relationship with the other, the relationship and its content and memories are assumed to be kept private. For instance, someone in an exclusive relationship might take sexually explicit or even everyday pictures of their intimate partner with their partner's consent and keep them on their mobile phones for them to look at later, to reminisce. Then, the partner shares some of these pictures with his best male friends as to show them how beautiful as a couple they are. On the surface, no sexually explicit thing would immediately breach the privacy that this romantic relationship implies. Even this act of sharing the once-private snapshot of an exclusive relationship without the consent of the partner might pose a breach to the exclusivity of that relationship. This is just one example of how the privacy might unintentionally be harmed and degraded in a romantic relationship on multiple levels. Another example comes from a personal experience I had on Hornet. *I am multi-conversing with hundreds of people in a week, and the app portrays a supposedly private experience in a public place surrounded by gay men. I seem to like a guy such that I give most of my romantic attention to him, and then I start to cyber-flirt with him, yet notifications of new messages from the past and present intimate partners pop up and immediately disrupt a private moment that I am having with this guy. I might tap on the notification, and boom, the partner is changed, and the privacy is gone.* We can take this example to an even further extreme: *let's say that I am in a public place like a Coffeehouse. I am plugged in, earbuds on, listening to some of my favorite music, and simultaneously chatting*

with intimate partners online. Is this a private experience? Guy sitting just behind me or near me might take a peek without my knowing, or the security camera just above my head might be recording what is on my screen. Privacy is disintegrated and dispersed in public.

3.3.2. Attention // look at my eyes now

From a postmodern perspective, attending to a party or going to a night club typically involves chatting with few people, gazing at each other, checking out familiar faces and potential intimate partners, if there are any, and the rest is about holding our heads down on our mobile gadgets; proliferation of multi-tasking and masking the silent, vulnerable and insecure moments of the self. Attention is divided and goes anywhere eye-catching; the subject is both the driver and the subject of attention-driving forces within the socio-technological augmented reality of a party. Online dating is similar to attending a party: Constant gazing or checking out the alternative intimate partners, switching between tasks, such as jumping onto reading an e-mail, or switching to an app or a social notification other than dating that demands attention, and theoretically having fun by getting an update on our self-esteem by swiping right or left on Tinder, for instance. Exemplified phenomenon is depicting of how our attention manages its functions in ubiquitous social computing: I am attending there as such I am here and everywhere. Gaze beholds an omnipresent quality in attending to stimulating offers. Attention is self. Gaze is attention. It appears omnipresent by fragmenting itself and spreading its bits and bytes into the information infrastructure that is atop physical reality. Fragmented and dispersed attention perhaps never fully realizes itself. It might

appear as it has done so but it is never matured but always expanding, spreading, and growing.

Regarding the romantic exclusivity, one in an exclusive offline relationship with the significant other is expected to attend to the loved one's presence, needs, wants, and demands. In online dating and exclusively Internet-based relationships, however, exclusivity is an idealization of a traditional norm: In offline relationships, attending to other objects of desire either by flirting, dating, committing infidelity, or having sex with them is presumed to breach the exclusivity of the primary relationship with the loved one. Depicted traditional norms around exclusivity and commitment might not so easily be transferred to the online psychological reality; that is computer mediated-relationships, either exclusively online or primarily online. It seems ontologically possible to simultaneously date and flirt online with more than 50 people around the same time; in fact, this has become the norm to navigate the online courtship practices of postmodernist love landscapes. If attention is so fragmented and dispersed around multiple love partners, then, how do we manage to focus on a few ones? Romantic love requires the devotion of time, energy, and attention on a few objects of desire because it is overwhelmingly consuming of the self's available resources. Lover demands attention; the lover is often needy, demands to be looked at, demands from you that you stay faithful to the ideals of the relationship, its discourses around its exclusivity. It requires that one's attention is not dispersed around other people, events, and connections; potential threats to the exclusivity agreement that is usually not iterated clearly but implied by their cultural and social upbringing. New media technologies, augmented

reality landscape, and postmodernist agenda, however, fragment this attention by introducing unexpected social connections through a variety of media. In exclusive romantic relationships, every potential social connection other than the one that the two have might pose a serious threat to the exclusivity of a relationship. This fact becomes pain-inflicting if one is to transfer the traditional concept of exclusivity into the postmodern world whose narration and meaning we are just beginning to discern.

3.3.3. Availability of Partners // so many men, so little time

Romantic exclusivity implies a mutual consensus over defining and packaging the love that two people have for each other in a predefined paradigm of exclusivity. Frequently, cultural, traditional and religious codes inform the relational and social codes; individual's way of connecting with each other and defining their connection with a mutually-shared vocabulary. Exclusivity is part of this cultural vocabulary that has historically been favoring monogamy, romantic love, the pursuit for the "one", privacy, restriction, what-to-dos and what-the-hell-in-no-ways. Traditional concepts around romantic love have been shattered and fragmented yet still hold its secure place in postmodern individual's psyche and affects how they connect and make love. We still seem to be searching for the "one" that will make us happy and content with ourselves for the rest of our lives. Idealistically, an individual can, in fact, find the "one" relationship that will be exclusive and extraordinary enough to cater to all of their emotional, mental, and physical needs. In fact, there are a plethora of self-help literature both available in print and in an electronic format that guide and inform the reader as to how to find their soulmate; the one to go,

one to love, one to be exclusive with. On the other hand, many netizens report their frustration in this endless search for the "one," as how the search is never over and how disappointment and frustration creep over their sense of self in the pursuit of love.

The introduction of ubiquitous new media technologies in our everyday life presents us with available desired partners that are just a few clicks away from us. Sometimes the search is initiated by us to look actively for someone to love, to talk. Other times, we are the ones that the Other is searching for and messaging. Whoever the agent who initiates the dialogue first is, there are various happenings and intentions in the air we breathe in the experience of online dating. For instance, when logged into Hornet, one can scroll through and skim for intimate partners almost in an endless design. *First, the touch of an individual starts very slow because what they see are partners on their immediate surroundings, meaning the ones who are spatially closer to them. This spatial and physical closeness perhaps arouse the individual to start slow and make sure that they are not missing out on anyone new in their area. Then touch and gaze gets a bit faster and slightly more aggressive, detecting who is new, whose profile picture is updated, emotionally coming into contact with a few ones that they talked before, contemplating on what they have talked about, what kind of a person they are, searching and sorting out the ugly ones who escape their gaze, having a few epiphanies, piling appreciation and support for their online ego. Finally, touch and gaze are mesmerized by the available options that it drives itself mad, and the scrolling action is now fast and furious. Given that his time is limited and valuable; individual drives itself crazy over finding*

someone to focus on, someone to love, later left with frustration and pity over lost opportunities.

What I see on an Internet Dating profile is a picture, so close and so intimate that it invokes real emotions, and so distant at the same time that I have never seen this guy IRL. My gaze is often unfocused, dirty and cluttered with new notifications from Hornet, approached by a new guy that is asking for my attention, interest or love. I am looking at this picture that it invokes real feelings in me. Should I text him back or remain silent, or perhaps just play the "hard-to-get" and reply him back a few hours later so that I pass as "cool" or busy who has higher priorities in life. Whatever the case might be, I seem to be an object of love in the sea of possible partners. Am I attractive enough to hold someone's attention with my profile picture?

3.3.4. Distraction // notification sea

The postmodern man is presented with glowing options to choose from that anchor, define and encourage them to edit and market their self in a multitude of ways. Questions that haunted philosophers from the beginning of the ancient times such as *Who am I?* and *What is the meaning of life?* are now accompanied by an alternate technological structure with its power to design and define our self-conception. Ubiquitous new media follows us everywhere and distracts us while it can. In the case of online matchmaking and searching for love, nearby partners on the dating sites, SNS' and digital landscapes which provide human interaction, the plurality of partners as a first example seems like the most visible distraction in our interaction and exclusivity with the loved ones and us. How do we not get intimated

and aroused in a public sphere full of different objects of desire? How do we stay true to our exclusivity arrangements with our partners, if we have any? Although the plurality of available intimate partners seems to be an obvious discussion point that is held liable for the distraction in our everyday love-life and the erosion of love, other factors join their forces to mess with our identity, sense of time and self-worth. For instance, *I wake up and what I do immediately is to catch up. I am never logged off; so I need to catch up with what happened during my sleep. What emails I received, sorting out what is substantial and what catches my eyes, which ones are related to my personal life, professional life, school, careers, personal interests and trash that I never open up but they are there anyways. Alternatively, let's take what happens on social media during my sleep. Which photos of me are liked, commented, or shared. Is there any notification that I miss out? I think I need to scroll through and check every app with a sociality enabled function to see if there is anything new happened during my consciousness was in sleep. Do I ever sleep? If I sleep, do I notice the changes that take place in the mass augmented reality? Even if I check every notification first thing in the morning when I wake up, do I ever catch up with the ubiquity of technological apparatus that is embedded in the fabrics of everyday life?*

Old and new media penetrate so deep into our consciousness that what is implied by distraction could be termed as just a layer in the augmented reality: a way of living and navigating in postmodern imagination: Notifications as informative points in deciding where to go next. *Am I distracted[28] or am I just being notified?* On the

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[28] Further Reading: *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* by Maggie Jackson

surface level, distraction implies a negative state of being that is disturbed, paralyzed, and caught vulnerable in the dim light of the screen. What if we come to see this distraction with a new vocabulary and rhetorical tool that already exists in the lingo of software, apps, and social networks: Notification. If information overload is a given, then, it is our responsibility and right to filter and select the daily dosage of information intake. Although design choices in software imply constrictions in how users navigate the digital information landscape, filtering functions enable the individual to cater, catalogue and display the most relevant information based on the individual's choices. Then we are not distracted by the unlimited data flow but rather informed about what is happening around us. Likewise, in online dating, most dating applications give theirs users filtering options by age, gender identifications, what they are looking for (date, friendship, networking, sex, casual hookup, etc.) and such design options free the user from viewing this mess as a distraction; to put it in a different twist, they are just being notified and updated to what has happened and is currently going on in their augmented reality.

3.3.5. Multi-Conversing and Multi-Loving // i love you, you and you

Can we love more than one person? Can the love be shared with multiple people? Multi-conversing adds an interesting dimension to the discussion of romantic exclusivity. Loving multiple people online means that we initiate, develop, and maintain simultaneous intimate relationships around the same time. Although the name implies a synchronous communication as if the individual is chatting literally with more than one person in a given time, this is technologically not realizable as

once we are chatting with someone, we are not chatting with the other. However, time and space is stretched and follows a different rhythm in the digital world and within augmented reality, and therefore, multi-conversing is possible as time and space are stretched to accommodate multiple streams of data at a single time. Multiple conversations are taken care of individually by the user as each one of them, if they are a dialogue, that is replied back, implies an emerging relationship with the other. Online, expectations around exclusivity and commitment are particularly low, and this gives rise to a freedom of choice to whom to direct our gaze upon, and whom to flirt.

Cyber-love can be exclusive if partners choose it to be, but the cyber-dance that is conversing with multiple people is not an exclusive act but a public performance for purposes of self-exploration and ego statements. People are curious about discovering what they like and what they dislike. When it is love, they seem to have an unlimited supply of energy and motivation to keep exploring what is around them. The temptation is easy and accessible. Primary offline relationships suffer because any displeasing moment in the relationship with the loved one may tempt one to sway from their exclusive arrangement and look for online partners to satisfy their emotional or sexual needs easily. Since online, people are more vulnerable, and speak their mind easily; they are drawn to connect with random strangers very fast; experiencing a meeting of minds, merging with the other. This can lead them to compare the newly-discovered levels of connection, love and being with their primary offline relationship and in effect the act of comparing affects and even lowers the quality of the primary relationship, sometimes leading to the

termination of the relationship. Ben Ze'ev proposes that "Multi-loving may express a revolt against human limitations; it involves the belief that we can have it all." Then it is logical to ponder about how realistic the multi-loving can be. People are limited and imperfect as they have limited resources; time, attention and love, and "multiple goals;" agendas, intentions, and destinations (Ben Ze'ev, 2004: 182). This belief in *we can have it all* approach is stronger in cyberspace, though, as *loving*[29] multiple partners do not require as many resources of the lover as it could in an offline relationship.

3.3.6. Commitment and Online Infidelity // you are mine

Commitment is one of the major implications of romantic exclusivity as it implies committing to someone meaning that the time, attention and a significant portion of the energy of the self will exclusively be reserved for someone special, and they will abide by certain rules and expectations that are either defined in the preset, or implied by the relationship, culture, society, language, or the individual. *Commitment*[30] is usually lower in online-only relationships as such the availability of partners and opportunities are tempting and the rule of thumb is not to stop exploring the self for the sake of the self. Although commitment appears to be lower online than offline, still, we are committed to developing certain online relationships depending on our personal intentions, ranging from taking it to offline, meeting face-to-face or just an ego boost along the way. Anytime we direct our attention to an intimate partner; we are committed to attending to what they have

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[29] Further Reading*: A typology of styles of loving* by J.A. Lee

[30] Further Reading*: Relational maintenance and the influence of commitment in online and offline relationships* by M. K. Rabby

to say. Commitment perhaps becomes a little problematic in cyber-relationships when both partners utter their decision to commit to each other. Indeed, online commitment is an under-researched subject as the dynamics of it is still not excavated. For instance, if an online couple decides to be exclusive with one another that they commit to each other, and announce themselves in a chat room or a dating app as having a unique and committed relationship, how do they remain committed when each one of them would receive messages from online intimate partners on a daily basis? Moreover, how do they know if one is not cyber-flirting with others while claiming to be exclusive online partners? It seems challenging to negotiate the terms of commitment and exclusivity in an online public setting than in an offline one.

Online infidelity occurs when someone in an offline and exclusive relationship or a primarily or exclusively Internet-based relationship, decide to cheat on the other partner by flirting, having sex, or dating with other online partners than their primary one. For example, when a partner in an exclusive offline relationship goes into Tinder without their partner's awareness with an intention to flirt with others and even for checking out who is out there in the dating market, this might be considered as online infidelity. Ben Ze'ev (2004: 183) identifies the psychological making and process components of the act of infidelity:

> The loss experienced when a partner engages in a romantic affair is often described as a loss of resources, such as love, time, attention, sexual energy, and financial resources. The unfaithful person is described as transferring such resources from the spouse to the lover. In accordance with this description, it has been claimed that infidelity consists of taking sexual energy of any sort – thoughts, feelings, and behaviors- outside of a

committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship. His descriptions stress the importance of the nature of exclusivity by pointing out to the fact of transferring of available emotional and sexual resources into someone other than the one who we are exclusive with, the Significant Other. Many spouses get furious over discovering their partner's infidelity acts either online and offline, and this frustration is carried over to the relationship affecting its quality. Online cheating is indeed cheap, often anonymous, easy to hide, accessible 24/7, requiring few sacrifices. A bump in the relationship; an individual may go on Tinder to find out people who can, in fact, give you love and attention free from the arrangements made in an exclusive arrangement with the significant other.

CHAPTER 4

NEW MEDIA OBJECTS IN FLOW

4.1. Video

4.1.1. Are We Exclusive Yet?[31]

Love relationships require the devotion of time and attention to limited resources, objects of desire. Since scarcity prevails and our time, attention, and identity are limited to and dispersed in different media and people, privacy is at stake. In post-modern notification culture, online dating raised substantial questions about the exclusivity of love, commitment, privacy, and promiscuity. Often, many primary offline relationships are threatened by the availability of glowing desired online partners. Even online-only romantic initiations might suffer the same consequence as pissed-off GFs do whose boyfriends are secretly enjoying geosocial speed dating apps such as Tinder. People's desires are in a constant dialogue with each other which informs the makings of the complexity around both online and offline relationships. Then, how does the plurality of available online intimate partners

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[31] Youtube link for the M.F.A. Thesis Project:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

influence the exclusivity of cyber-love? - In using the term, cyber-love, I refer to both primarily-Internet based relationships and exclusively-Internet based relationships. – Is exclusivity a postmodern illusion for acquiring a certain level of intimacy with the other? Distracted and torn apart, can the individual manage to stay as one in his search for the "one"?

Specifically, this project represents a flow of consciousness composed of varying layers images, texts, sounds, and voice merged into one another. It recommends a glimpse into a virtual-daydreaming in front of an imaginary virtual space when what happens inside your mind get intertwined with online romantic conversations, memories, typed texts, keyboard, video, all this colored by fleeting moods, disturbed by the availability of partners and popping GIFs, and then resuming its flow in a supposedly exclusive paradigm.
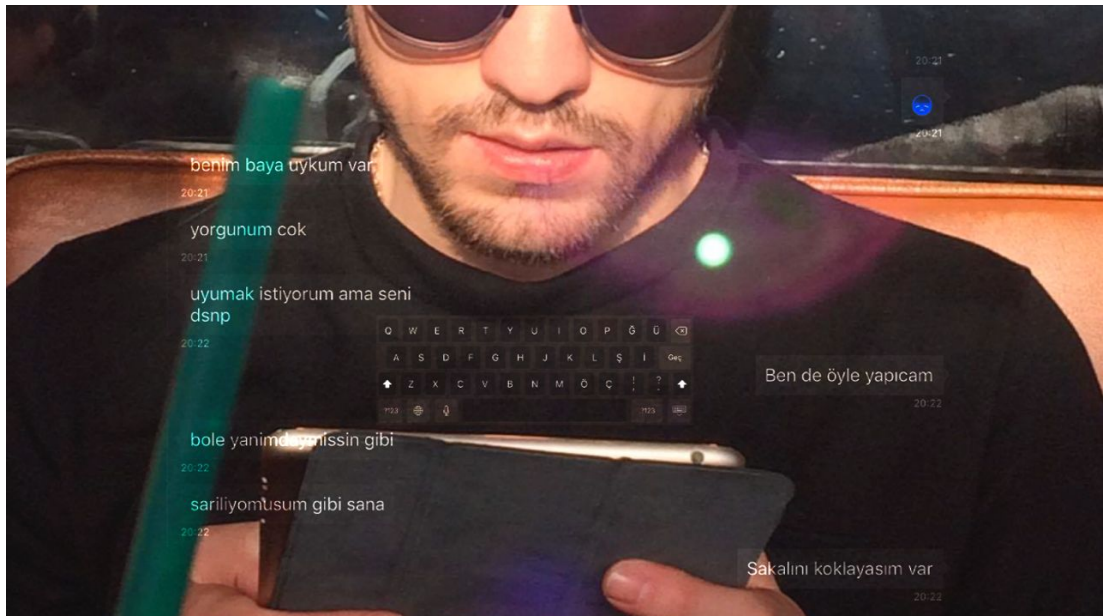

Figure 1: Tuncez, Meriç (2016), [video still], In Are We Exclusive Yet? Courtesy of the Artist, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

Technical Specifications

Dimensions: 16x9 (W: 1920 H: 1080) HD

Media: Video Art, New Media

Duration: 10 minutes

Exhibition Medium: iMac

Detailed Visual Description

The background picture is an MCU (Medium Close Up) of myself while I am using my iPad to connect with people. I look down on my iPad with sunglasses on. This background picture is the underlying element that is the Reflexive Self, from which all desire and affection originate from and communicate with other objects of desire.

On top of this background picture, various layers are situated to imply the flow of time, attention, desire and love from and to the reflexive self:

Dispersed around the frame: Cyber-love conversations pop up in any available space in the frame. Selected online conversations are reproduced in Adobe Premiere and cut to display a natural and flowing conversing. To give the audience the opportunity to explore the notion of exclusivity of cyber-love, I disperse the conversations in a way that they don't get mixed up so much, therefore, allowing the viewer to arrive at their conclusions. Still, the conversation biggest in scale carries the content of cyber-love, and it is primarily an Internet-based relationship. Other conversations' contents include cyber-flirting, idle talk, gossiping, support, affection, compliments. Other conversation's scales are relatively smaller than the

main one implicating the relative attention given to them. This rationale behind the arrangement of the scales of conversations indicates the preference of the artist to give the audience a chance to question the notion of exclusivity of cyber-love while portraying multi-conversing.
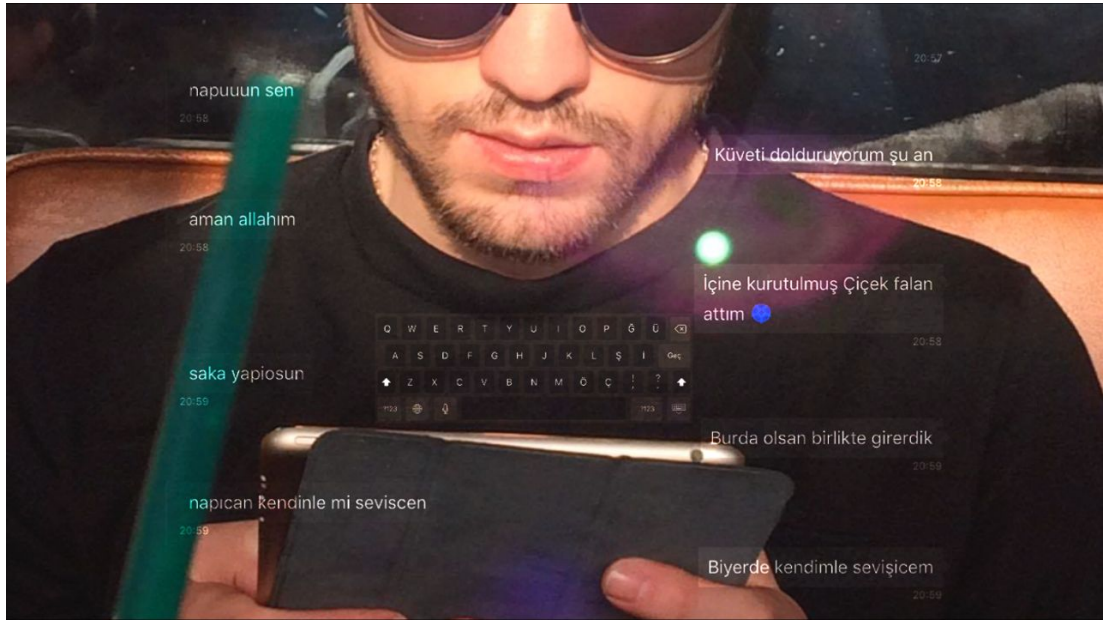

Figure 2: Tuncez, Meriç (2016), [video still], In Are We Exclusive Yet? Courtesy of the Artist, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

Middle Center: To imply the act of writing, screen keyboard of iPad is introduced right at where the heart of Reflexive Self is located visually within the frame. This placement choice represents the origin of flow of affectionate words that is the Heart, the organ of desire.

Sound: Big Apple by Will Flisk. This appx. 8-minutes song's genre is Lounge. Through experimenting, I found out that lounge music does not distract or trap the viewer but rather allows them to dive deep in the video, increasing their focus on the subject. Although I choose to distract the viewer because the experience of cyber-

love or conversing is incomplete and distracted, I still want them to be able to focus on the content of the conversations.

2-seconds GIFs: Every 30 seconds during the video, a GIF as a found footage pops up for 2 seconds in the full frame which works like a subliminal message and a distraction at the same time. All those footages exist only on the Internet, and their content carries the weight and nature of the conversations as well as the Reflexive Self's emotional attitude.

List of Equipment Used

Computer
Adobe Premiere CS 5.5 (Software)
iPad Mini 3
Internet

4.1.1.1 Concept // Theory

This project is born out of concepts that drove it where it is now, and they are briefly indicated below:

> digital intimacy, seduction, cyber-love, desire, affection, emotion, obsession, promiscuity, love, depression, identity formation, impression management, masks, online love, fantasy, imagination, self-loathing, make-believe, erotic encounter, pleasure, technologies of desire, asymptotic encounters, falling in and out of love, orgasm, cyber-flirting, cyber romance, platonic love, exclusivity, commitment, online-offline divide, multi-conversing, performative acts of gender, masculinity, femininity, queer theory, space, identity, gay men, mobile media, geosocial, social media, cyber-dance, online disinhibition, immersion, consciousness, possible selves, virtual virginity, seduction, online intimate relationships, online conversation, autoethnography, performance, reflexive self, modernity, postmodernity, distraction, privacy, body, self-reflexivity, internet art, new media, video art, technology, media, society, mediated relationships and networked identities.

Further examination of available research on online courtship and my extensive experience in dating online allowed me to gain greater insight about *love online*[32] and online dating and out of these concepts the project's seeds were planted.

According to Maréchal (2010), "autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing" (p. 43) and Carolyn Ellis defines it as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (p. xix). Self-reflexivity is a fundamental component of autoethnography as a qualitative research method. I am quite experienced with online dating as an artist, and I have participated in countless dialogues with potential intimate partners in queer speed-dating app, Hornet and other SNS' such as Facebook. As the project is a video that transgresses boundaries of personal, political, theoretical, and artistic, I have decided to build the foundations for the video with objective data, my personal conversations as a gay man with an autoethnographic attitude. I have participated in more than 500 private conversations on Hornet in 2015. I have skimmed and scanned for the content of the conversations to build an excellent portfolio of 20 conversations that reflected many theoretical underpinnings of relevant literature and subquestions that drive my thesis. To abide by the ethical code of research, then I asked for the permission from chosen partners to use those dialogues in my thesis without revealing their name, picture or any identifying information. Content-wise, selected conversations reflect the nature and characteristics of online relationships, ranging from idle talk,

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[32]. Further Reading: *"'Doing Love' Online: Performative Gender and the Urban* Everyday by Schoemaker Holmes, Jacqueline

cyber love, cyber flirting, gossip, and cybersex. Since I am particularly drawn to investigating the impact of available partners on the exclusivity of cyber-love, the majority of the content displayed in video is comprised of cyber-love and cyber-flirting, both online liquid love forms. I have excluded using cybersex conversations as not to offend the viewer with sexually explicit content. Primary research question guiding both thesis and video is "How does the plurality of available online intimate partners impact the exclusivity of cyber-love?"

This project makes an attempt to expand intellectual and artistic traditions around Internet Art and Video Art to merge each other through employing remediation, hypermediacy, and ubiquitous computing to create a New Media product. I refrain from specifying the genre for the project however the Internet is a great resource for inspiration, data, and feelings for this project and Video Art best captures the dynamics of it; effective and strategic decisions around the making of the project. On the other hand, what is implied by Internet Art usually is an interactive art project with hyperlinks that the users employ to interact with and to guide their personal experience of the medium. On the surface, this video invites a passive participation of the viewer as they watch what is going on. However, the psychological and conceptual participation of the audience ensures that this project creates abstract hyperlinks around discourses of online love. Manovich (2002: 57) points out to this distinction in his new media inquiry:

> When we use the concept of "interactive media" exclusively in relation to computer-based media, there is the danger that we will interpret "interaction" literally, equating it with physical interaction between a user and a media object (pressing a button, choosing a link, moving the body), at the expense of psychological interaction.

Psychological interaction allows the reader of this video to interact with this particular media in intellectual and emotional ways. Manovich continues his discussion on New Media by assuming that, "The Internet, which can be thought of as one huge distributed media database, also crystallized the basic condition of the new information society: overabundance of information of all kinds" (2002: 46). In this massive digital farm of bits and bytes, we are bombarded with incoming information available on the Internet. Discourses of Internet transcode above the cultural life and become fluid and social points of knowledge to redefine and rearrange existing relationships between individual, society and technology. As such, new media relies heavily on the Internet in that, "the logic of a computer can be expected to significantly influence the traditional cultural logic of media; that is, we may expect that the computer layer will affect the cultural layer" (Manovich, 2002: 46). The interaction between culture and the computer gives rise to post-modern surfaces of our augmented reality.

4.1.1.2. Process // Design

Recommending a "crafted/performed" intimacy in/via mediated, interactive sphere, the thesis project opens up and expands the current discourse around video art. Relying on my artistic intuition in exploring the exclusivity of love, I have participated in countless dialogues with potential online intimate partners on Hornet. While having conversations, I had no pre-agenda to participate in online dating on Hornet as a researcher. Rather, as a gay man who has experience in online dating through Grindr, Planet Romeo, Tinder, and Hornet over the past decade, I already had an intuitive experience of dating online in Turkey and abroad.

Specifically for this project, I have chosen the medium as Hornet to gather data for online dialogues to be used in the thesis project. The reason for this is that Hornet is currently the most popular gay geosocial speed dating app in Turkey. Since Grindr was banned in Turkey and due to the flaws inherent in its design, speed, reliability and efficiency, complaints grew and the demand for a new, better and stable application resulted in the explosion of Hornet in Turkey. On Hornet, I have participated in more than 500 individual conversations with potential partners in 2015. Then, I have scanned carefully the content and nature of the conversations with an eye on the emotional charges of the dialogues to select the ones that would be appropriate for the thesis project. This scanning and analysis showed that almost 80 percent of the conversations had an explicitly sexual overtone and can be categorized as cybersex or a sexual exploration. Since my focal point was on cyber-love and not on sexting or cybersex, I have decided to dismiss the 80 percent for selecting cyber-flirting, cyber-love, or idle/small talk conversations. Further analysis showed that I had a few genuine cyber-love conversations, other conversations were short, introductory, small talk which usually involved compliments, support and affection, and flirting aspects to it. Then I have decided to make use of 20 dialogues that reflected my concerns for this project. First, I have individually contacted all of the partners that were included in the project and asked for their consent to use the dialogues for this project. Concerning the *ethical*[33] implications of my decision to not disclose myself as a researcher but a genuine participant, I had to make sure that individuals would grant their permission and consent to make those once-private dialogues public therefore rendering it non-exclusive.

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[33] Further Reading: *Ethics of Internet Research: Contesting the Human Subjects Research* Model by Bassett and O'Riordan

Among 20 online intimate partners, approximately 4 of them deleted their profile, so I was not able to contact them at all. Then, 5 of them chose not to grant permission for the use of dialogues. Remaining 11 users given their permission if provided that their names and any identifying information were not disclosed. As for this project and thesis, I will include sections from chosen 11 dialogues but I will use pseudonyms instead of participant's names to ensure their privacy rights. Below is an example of a section taken from one of the conversations in my data. M stands for Meriç and identifies me, and other initial is a pseudonym for the other intimate partner.

> M: tişörtün o kadar güzel kokuyo ki
>   pamuk şeker gibi
>   iyiki bıraktın
>
> F: ahahaha
>   ya bebisim
>
> M: ders çalışmaya zorluyorum kendimi
>   ama seni özledim
>
> F: olsam orda beraber calissak
>
> M: enerjim bitti resmen
>   evet ya
>   senle temas halindeyken çalışabilirim inanıyoorum
>   koluna bacana deysem yeter
>
> F: ben calistiririm seni calismassan cezalandırırım seni
>
> M: yaa
>   keske birlikte olsak

11 dialogues then were sorted out with identifying short tags that implied their nature, content, and emotional charge. Short tags included online, long, cyber-love, cyber-flirting, compliments, long reply, disagreement, confusion, emotionally charged, platonic, dynamic, emotional, taking it to offline, idle talk, offline

relationship continuing online, confusion, first interaction, longing, arguing, etc. Use of the tags organized and summarized the nature and content of the dialogues for me to be better able to analyze and compile the information later in the editing process. Mixing and matching conversations and sequencing them relied on this rigorous artistic methodology. This methodology allowed me to design a textuality that invites further inquiry into the research question by the viewer.

One dialogue particularly overrides others, and that one is highlighted as a genuine cyber-love conversation that was part of an offline relationship I had in 2015, the only one I had, indeed. It stands in the context of an exclusive relationship now rendered non-exclusive since it had ended and I am political in sharing this sensitive information and making it public.

In remediation process, I had encountered the challenge to recreate the conversations that would be designed in a way to look natural and flowing. To create a real-time synchronous conversation, I have created two different accounts on Hornet and used one iPhone and one iPad and asked for a friend's assistance to act as the other intimate partner. Then we have reenacted the conversations by sending messages and simultaneously recording the screen of the iPad, where Hornet was on display and conversations would build up as we have reanimated the past.

Originally, online dialogues materialize in an asynchronous manner meaning that although current high-bandwidth internet technologies allow synchronous

communication, often people are on and off the conversation. The conversation never ends, keeps growing and online relationships entail the virtue of giving its participants the freedom of choice; when to reply and how to reply. Unlike an offline, face-to-face dialogue, online, one is not expected to reply back in seconds but rather can respond in their time whenever they wish to. Taking this fact into account, I knew that relying on this fact to reanimate the online dialogues would come short and this could lead to hour-long conversations that would not fit into the thesis project's aim and goals. The modern audience is primarily distracted and has a very short attention span. The challenge was, then, to design this process of reanimation relying on certain limits. Screen records of online dialogues constituted raw data that was later to be edited to ensure that the flow was achieved. Although my friend and I did our best to reanimate the conversations in a natural way, unwanted time gaps occurred between messages due to the instability of the speed of the Internet and sometimes-low responsivity of Hornet. To further shorten the dialogues relying on certain design principles and constraints, later in the editing process in Adobe Premiere CS 5.5, I cut the screen records of online conversations to ensure that the undesirable time gaps were eliminated.

Through experimentation, I have come up with the following design limitations and considerations that afforded me with natural and flowing conversations that would not bore the viewers: 2 seconds between messages of the other user; 2 seconds before I start typing my response to his message once I see his last message; and finally 2,5 seconds before he replies back to my previous message. Sticking to above parameters, I have edited each conversation in a different sequence. This process

was time-consuming yet was vital in successfully conveying real time-synchronous conversations.

After I was done editing 11 dialogues that were to be used in the thesis project, I have moved the online dialogues to a new sequence and started experimenting as to how to convey the main research question that is the availability of online intimate partner's impact on the exclusivity of cyber-love. As I refrained from generalizing or simplifying the research question and taking a stance in answering the research question, my intention in designing the video was to allow the viewer to examine the issue of exclusivity in their frame of thinking and rhetorical vocabulary. The most valuable piece among 11 conversations, as stated, was the one with a cyber-love and exclusivity overtone. When I decided to disperse the conversations in the *virtual imaginary space* (Figure 3) created in the video, I had positioned the exclusively cyber-love dialogue in a visible and legible space, making its font size slightly bigger than the others and kept the conversation active and present during the entire video. Remaining 10 conversations were dispersed around the frame, their font sizes were relatively smaller, and they were on and off, visible for some time and disappearing in the other. However, they are designed in a way that they are legible enough if the viewer comes closer and wishes to delve deeper into them. This rationale proved useful as I later encountered viewers' positive reactions as to what the video attempts to convey.
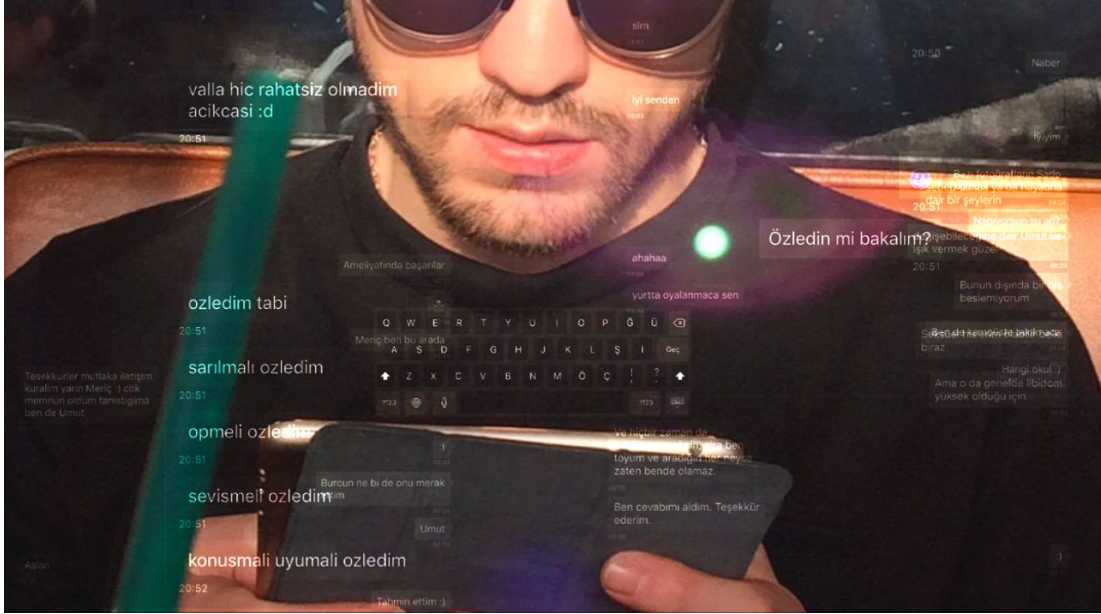
Figure 3: Tuncez, Meriç (2016), [video still], In Are We Exclusive Yet? Courtesy of the Artist, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

To generate new theory and expand the research question; the viewer is expected to move between words and sentences of desire, *intimacy[34]*, affection and love to navigate the realms of online love. The striking appeal of the conversations and written words is emphasized in the video; as through words and dialogue, online relationships grow and be maintained. Current technological advancements afford the luxury of exchanging visual data in online mating media such as Hornet and a profile's success in attracting potential mates heavily depends on the picture of the self. For example, on Tinder, swiping decisions of users rely on the pictures that they encounter. Although visual stimuli precede written words and dialogue during the initial stages of an online relationship, words, sense of humor, wittiness, and communication capabilities of the user come into prominence in the development and maturing stages of a relationship. Through words, affection and desire move

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[34] Further Reading: *The Transformation of Intimacy : Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* by Anthony Giddens

seamlessly across time and location. If the user is not good at writing or texting online, then, having an attractive picture might not help much in developing a quality and meaningful communication.

To further imply the act of writing in the development of an online relationship, I have positioned the keyboard of iPad in the video where the keyboard becomes an artificial organism, a vehicle for transmitting desire and affection. The keyboard is ever present and embedded in the overall design of Hornet and taking up almost one-third of the entire screen. Decontextualizing the keyboard implied an added strength for the focus on words, dialogue, and writing.

The background picture indicates a reflexive self from and to which desire and words flow seamlessly. First, I decided to use a video of myself, iPad on my hand, texting with various potential mates. Then, I realized that this rendered the thesis project distracting and through feedback I have understood that if the video were to be used as the background material, this decision would pull the focus of the viewer away from the conversations and the research question. This leads to the reason why I have employed a stable picture of myself that visually mingled with online dialogues.

Figure 4: Tuncez, Meriç (2016), [video still], In Are We Exclusive Yet? Courtesy of the Artist, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

The decision to use *GIFs* (Figure 4) is a critical one to construct the work around the discourses of Internet Art. On the Internet, GIFs are becoming popular as short videos are now the norm to express anything as it is evident in the strategies of *Vine[35]*, *Snapchat[36]*, and Instagram. GIFs afford fun doses of glimpses into reality and human imagination and often exist exclusively on the Internet. They are deeply linked to the Internet culture, blogging; and even Apple's keyboard or Facebook's Messenger now allow users to exchange and share GIFs in their personal conversations as to convey emotional response and intensity. I have positioned GIFs in the thesis project in every 30 seconds, and each one of them takes up the entire frame for 2 seconds. They work both as to distract the viewer away from the ongoing emotional intensity of online dialogues and to reinforce the nature and emotional charge of the conversations. This binary opposition worked well with the

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[35] A short-form video sharing service, https://vine.co/
[36] An image messaging and multimedia mobile application, https://www.snapchat.com/

conceptional motivations behind the thesis project as such the viewer is distracted in every 30 seconds for 2 seconds, rendering the GIFs a subliminal quality. 30 seconds gap works well as it gives the viewer enough time to immerse themselves in the flow of the conversations. The *content of the GIFs* (Figure 5) reflect cyber-love, human-computer interaction, and computer-*mediated relationships*[37] and increase the fluidity of online love that is portrayed in the video. Postmodern online dater is distracted by the availability of potential intimate partners but also other happenings in their media environment. For instance, while conversing with someone dear to his heart, an individual can easily be distracted by a popping notification: new e-mail, a new message from another SNS platform like Facebook, or a notification about their dying battery. Sometimes this is not a distraction but rather a way of navigating hypermedia surfaces. Within the paradigms of the chosen medium, iPad in this case, I enjoy scrolling countless blog posts on Tumblr, Facebook or VK while having an intense online affair as such that I take away my attention from the partner, distance myself to see clearer. Also, postmodernist paradigm dictates and favors *multi-tasking*[38] although it is empirically studied and showed that human mind can only focus on one thing at a particular time, and especially romantic love requires focusing on a few objects at one time as each object demands considerable time, focus and energy.

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[37] Further Reading: *Mediated relationships: Authenticity and the possibility of romance* by M. Hardey.
[38] Further Reading: *The Myth of Multi-Tasking* by Nancy K. Napier
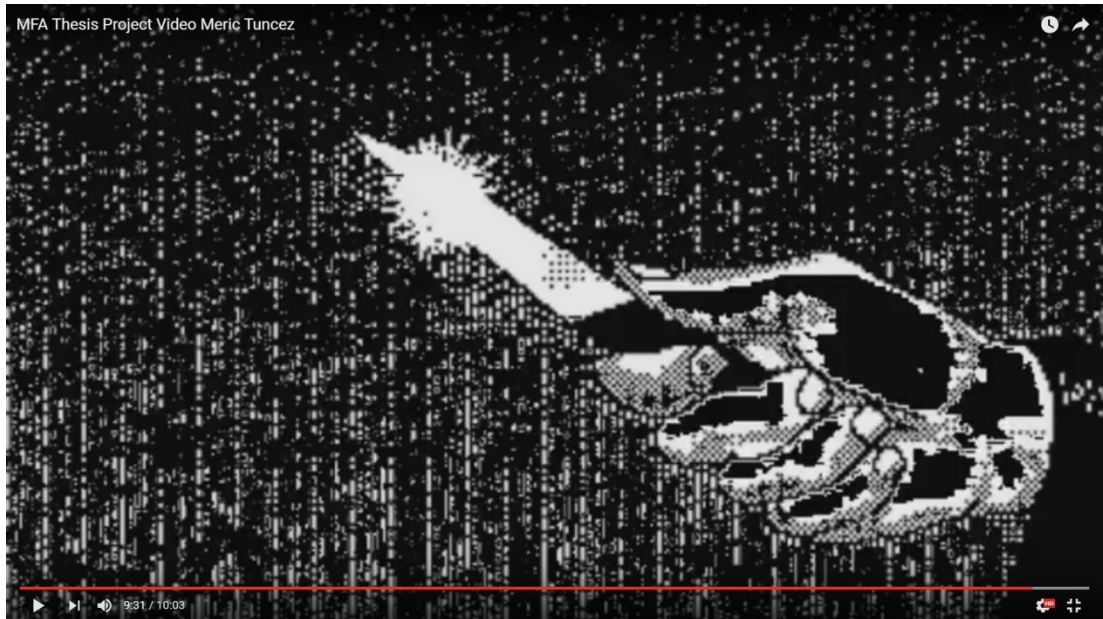https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/creativity-without-borders/201405/the-myth-multitasking

Figure 5: Tuncez, Meriç (2016), [video still], In Are We Exclusive Yet? Courtesy of the Artist, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3tcmLkbFtY

Although the thesis project is primarily intended to be displayed in FADA Gallery at Bilkent University in M.F.A. Thesis Project Exhibition, after I was finished exporting the video, I have uploaded the video on YouTube allowing public access and sent the links to my friends and colleagues to get feedback. I plan to share the thesis project with online magazines, forums, and pages to reach a greater audience and to keep it alive on the Internet.

Furthermore, all of the dialogues are in Turkish, and I had decided not to translate the conversations to English as to completely transfer the emotional charge and *pleasure of the text[39].* Even if I had decided to translate the content to English, it would require a lot of time and effort to successfully translate the content which exceeds the scope and time limit of the M.F.A. Thesis project. Turkish, by nature, is

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[39] Further Reading: *The Pleasure of the Text* by Roland Barthes

a highly emotional language, and I respected this fact and took advantage of this emotionality in the thesis project.

Remediation of online dialogues was a challenging and intensive process for me as I have relived each and every word of desire reaching into its new context, the source of life, and decontextualization occurring in a new medium in an entirely different habitat of media. First, online dialogues took place on Hornet over the span of a year. Then, I decontextualized the data while the media was the same as my friend and I used Hornet to reenact the original scene. This process alone was emotionally challenging for me because I declared my conversations with the consent of my online mates as public data allowing my friend to join this once-private and exclusive scenery. There is a certain haunting quality to repeat and remediate what was once a source of desire with personal relevance. Distancing myself from this experience to most of my abilities allowed me to take a step back and analyze what was occurring there on emotional and intellectual behalves. The insight gained from this process enriched the thesis project as it added self-reflexivity and documentation as valuable tools to articulate both text and video. Later, editing of the dialogues gave the thesis project a second chance to move across mediums. On Premiere Pro, intensive editing and positioning of each one of the 11 conversations presented an opportunity to decontextualize what was once on Hornet into a Video Art piece. Emotional challenges occurred once more as I have now matured into a different set of relationships with my previous online intimate partners and respective relationships as I have edited words and sentences. New meanings and epiphanies arrived in a striking manner where the vocabulary of exclusivity,

commitment[40], privacy, media and the self extended far into a new terrain of textuality in my private artistic and academic domain. I was fragmented into million pieces of words in public as I have searched for what it meant to be exclusive and in love.

4.1.1.3. Exhibition // Curatorial[41]

Preparation for and execution of M.F.A. Thesis Exhibition in FADA Exhibition Hall at Bilkent University allowed me to work closely with my supervisor and peers to put together our pieces of work to make a contribution to art and research in media and design. Mert Aslan, Maria Brzozowska, Mustafa İlhan, Narjis Mirza, Erhan Tunalı and I with the help of our supervisors and respected faculty members collectively created the show and the exhibition opened on April 26, 2016, between 5-7 pm and the exhibition gallery hours were set as Wed-Fri (April 27-29) between 10 am-5 pm.
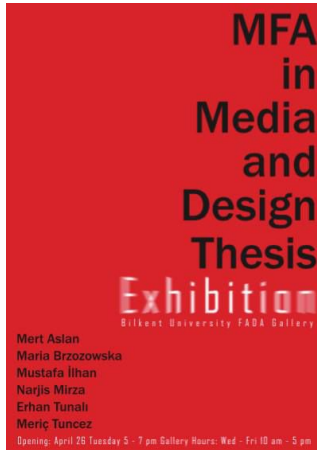

Figure 6: M.F.A. in Media and Design Thesis Exhibition of Bilkent University (2016), [poster], Retrieved from https://scontent.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t1.0-9/13055594_10153445535255614_1635605124995311566_n.jpg?oh=cddd62ae76b828cb13848e5bf321384b&oe=57E3829F

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[40] Further Reading: *Double Click: Romance and Commitment among Online Couples* by Andrea J. Baker
[41] Link for Bilkent University - MFA in Media and Design Thesis Exhibition Video on Youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNyLTYWmt1k

Figure 7: Upon the Entrance to the Exhibition: Posters, Bilkent University (2016), [video still], In MFA in Media and Design Thesis Exhibition, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNyLTYWmt1k

Although each presented work reflected the artist / M.F.A. candidate's private artistic and academic line of inquiry, curatorial decisions regarding the placement and display of the works proved successful as reception to the show was a success. For my work, a large space/wall was provided and to take advantage of this free space, I have printed 12 sentences chosen only from one dialogue with cyber-love and exclusive quality that I positioned with a bigger font size in video. The rationale behind choosing them was simple: chosen ones were the most relevant sentences to my inquiry and carried the emotional weight of the project. Then, I printed them on a 1 to 1 meter paper and cut them into 12 pieces. I also printed out a *smiling face with a halo emoji*[42] on a 60 to 60 centimeter paper. I positioned the emoji print just above the iMac where the work was displayed. Then I spread out each line of 12 sentences, 6 to the left and remaining 6 to the right of the iMac like an angel's wings. Overall, this proved useful as it gathered attention and both emojis and

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[42] http://emojipedia.org/smiling-face-with-halo/

sentences were appropriate vehicles of desire and affection that were often used in online dialogues. The rationale behind selecting the Angel emoji was that in the forefront exclusive relationship that I was depicting and also in other dialogues, smiling face with halo emoji was frequently used to carry the emotion of a purer nature: sincerity, affection, and a mysterious attraction. Also, an angel is innocent; likewise, what is taking place here with Multi-conversing and Multi-Loving appears innocent as they become a post-modern norm for executing and searching for love. My intention with choosing this emoji and display style was to invite the audience to the illusory nature of exclusivity in romantic relationships and to purify conceptually the noise stemming from other online intimate partners.

Since my artistic and theoretical direction is focused, I disdain from employing a "shotgun" approach to defining the target audience. Focusing on a target audience builds social, psychological and technological bridges between like-minded individuals. The ideal audiences for my work are academicians, theory-makers, designers, researchers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and netizens who take an academic, artistic or professional interest in computer-mediated relationships, *networked identities*[43], cyber-love, exclusivity, privacy, and so forth.

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[43] Further Reading: *Profiles as Conversation: Networked Identity Performance on Friendster* by Boyd and Heer
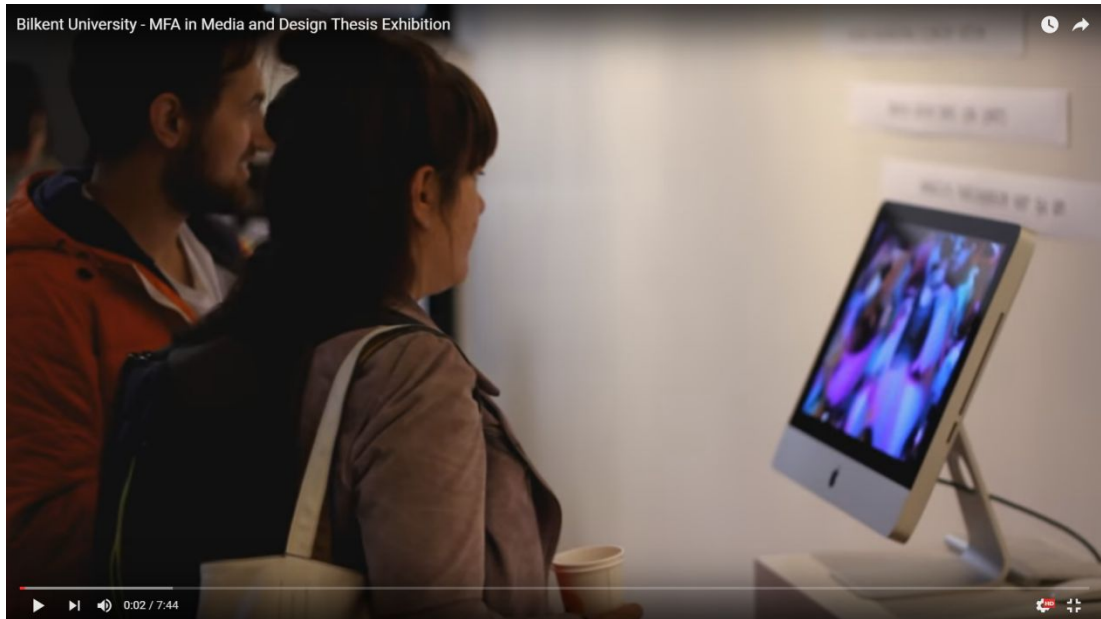
Figure 8: Viewers' Interaction with the Work, Bilkent University (2016), [video still], In MFA in Media and Design Thesis Exhibition, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNyLTYWmt1k

My expectation is to draw the *attention* (Figure 8) of the viewer into the video work and the angelic space of desire. To accomplish this, I used a song, Big Apple by Will Flisk. For two years, I have hosted a radio show in Radiofil, an Internet-based electronic music radio, displaying music from the genres of Lounge, Techno, and Deep House. Over the years, I have created almost 80 radio shows that were aired live and partially shared on *Mixcloud[44].* This experience came in handy when questioning how to incorporate sound into the video to attract greater attention of the viewer and to integrate sound and the video in a seamless design. The Lounge genre, as I have observed, pulls focus in and allows the listener to go into a trance-like state. In this show, I have carefully constructed the harmony between distraction and focus. Certain elements like GIFs and other available intimate partner's dialogues might have worked as distractions whereas the lounge music and the central cyber-love conversation were designed to pull focus in and immerse

[44] Mixcloud Page of Meriç Tuncez: https://www.mixcloud.com/puremeric/

the viewer into the work. This tension between distraction and focus worked well as the sound of the music alarmed a mystic call for further engagement.
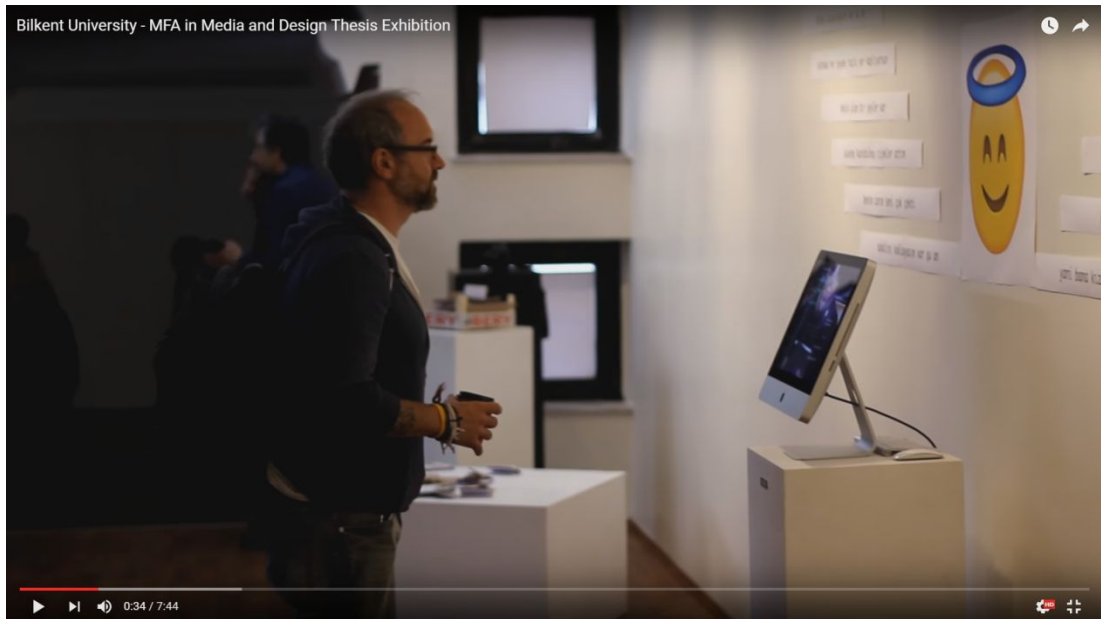

Figure 9: Viewers' Interaction with the Work, Bilkent University (2016), [video still], In MFA in Media and Design Thesis Exhibition, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNyLTYWmt1k

Reader (Figure 9) of the work constructs his or her meaning as they bounce back and forth, up and above the imaginary virtual space of the video through focusing in and out of words of desire, love. They might choose to concentrate on specific dialogues, words, or sentences depending on their personal history, past relationships, motivation, and acquaintance with media technologies and interests. Both design aspects, dialogues and the reader of the text contribute to the making of this work through engagement, enlarging its scope and effect in the discussion of online courtship and mediated relationships. The work is intended to trigger memories, associations, questions and epiphanies regarding the self, love online, and media technologies.

4.2. Internet Art

4.2.1. MyDesktopLife

During the summer of 2014, I had the privilege to work with *Martine Neddam* (Figure 10), an internet artist, in Amsterdam under the grant received by Erasmus Internship Program. This experience introduced me to the *#netart*[45] community and artworks and expanded my research interests in online relationships, online identities, performance, artist as a social communicator and new media.

Figure 10: Neddam, Martine, [photograph], Retrieved from
http://fast.mediamatic.nl/f/sjnh/image/876/75026-625-833.jpg

The following brief passage identifies who Martine Neddam (http://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/1301/martine-neddam) is along with her important projects and research interests:

> Martine Neddam is an artist who uses language as raw material. Since she began as an artist her favourite subjects always were 'speech acts', modes of address, words in the public space. Since 1988 she exposed text objects (banners, plaques, shadows on the wall) in museums and galleries. She also

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[45] A portal to web-related art: http://www.net-art.org/

realized many large-scale public commissions in several European countries: Netherlands, France, and Great Britain.

Since 1996 she created on Internet virtual characters that lead an autonomous artistic existence in which the real author is never disclosed.

- Mouchette, created in 1996 whose website is still active to this day is a 13 year old girl who exposes online the fantasies born from her dark imagination, constantly triggers for user's participation and response from her web audience. She has become such a cult figure that she decided to share her identity with her online friends in Mouchette's Network.

- David Still who was created in 2001 offers his identity and the use of his email account to all the passing web surfers.

- XiaoQian, created in 2006 is a Chinese artist who creates virtual persons. There, in May and June 2008 she is giving a special course in the Masters Program about virtual characters.

Martine Neddam is a brilliant artist who plays with language, culture, suicide, death, identity politics, and gender. She has long been curating those projects under pseudonyms such as *Mouchette* (Figure 11) or David Still. Her extensive knowledge of language allows her to fabricate multiple layers of desire, affection, love and intimacy on post-mortem digital artifacts.

Figure 11: Neddam, Martine, [website still], In Mouchette.com, Retrieved from
http://dpi.studioxx.org/demo/images/15/mouchette4.jpg

Martine Neddam's latest project, *MyDesktopLife* is defined on the project's website

(http://www.mydesktoplife.org) as the following:

> MyDesktopLife is a custom-made software for creating films and animations
> that play online in a browser. The software allows the user to present a flow
> of consciousness composed of different layers of images, texts, sounds, and
> voice that melt into each other. It also makes possible the creation of online
> narratives by mixing digital content. The system has a unique style of sounds,
> movements, and text and the goal is to stimulate the development of
> expressive languages inside a browser.

> The inspiration for a new online editing program stems from the Internet's
> increasing visual impoverishment in recent years. The individual design of
> web pages has become extremely limited, because editing programs have
> become too technical and the code inaccessible. This prevents artists and
> designers from being able to freely play around with existing possibilities. In
> this light, the idea of the web being a place for creativity and imagination is
> in fact limited. The freedom for artistic niches on the Internet was the belief
> fueling the experiments of the early Net.art period, which is what
> MyDesktopLife taps into.

MyDesktopLife[46] (Figure 12) is essentially software that allows the reader to form unique narrations in a virtual space. It offers a virtual day-dreaming in front of the computer desktop where every icon, text, audio and image merge into one another forming hypertextual surfaces by enabling the user to add self-reflexive and autobiographical accounts of their personal history into the web. The concepts of hypermediacy, ubiquitous computing, remediation, and interactivity are exemplified and reflected within the theoretical and visual poetry around this work.

M.F.A. Thesis Project implicates both conceptual and procedural references to this work. As a theoretical reference, In *Are We Exclusive Yet?* Remediation, hypermediacy, and ubiquitous computing are extensively discussed and articulated through theory and design. As a procedural reference, the "flow of consciousness in a virtual space" technique in forming a narration influenced the design of the M.F.A. project. Also the way to distribute auditory and photographic images in a virtual space technically informs how the M.F.A. project was designed, through creating a personal and intimate experience where my mind, including my dialogues and history are projected and transferred into a visual and auditory form providing qualitative data to uncover different points of view, networks of self.

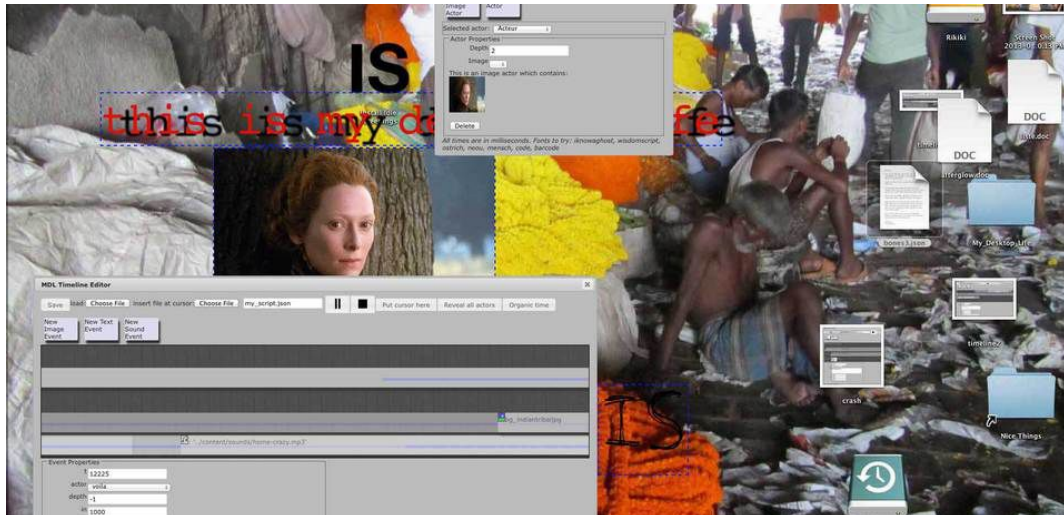[46] Video done with the application's software: https://vimeo.com/89489980

Figure 12: Neddam, Martine, [software still], In MyDesktopLife Software, Retrieved from
http://netspecific.net/files/3/1/98/posterframe_Martine_Neddam_My_Desktop_Life_interface_2.jpg

According to Bolter and Grusin (2000: 234), networked self is captured naked in hypermedia space as an omnipresent being in the following description:

> the self that participates in a virtual conference is embodied as a video and audio image within the available digital video technologies; the self that surfs the Web is embodied in its IP address, it's web browser, and it's plug-ins; and so on.

Both Neddam's work and Are We Exclusive Yet? as new media case studies indicate a questioning of embodiment of identity, language, new media, and hypermediacy in digital surfaces of affection.

4.3. Interdisciplinary Research

4.3.1. Incautious Porn

Art is Open Source, AOS (http://www.artisopensource.net/), identifies itself in the following passage as such:

AOS, Art is Open Source, is an international informal network exploring the mutation of human beings with the wide and ubiquitous accessibility and availability of digital technologies and networks. We move across arts and sciences, using technology, communication, performance, art and design, to instantiate emotional actions and processes that are able to expose the dynamics of our contemporary world. We do this in academic, artistic, business and activist domains and, actually, we are focused on moving fluidly among each of these spaces.

AOS is an interdisciplinary research and practice unit navigating the portals of post-Internet: Moving across disciplines, techniques, theories and discussion around design, performance, communication, and new media. In search of a postmodernist escape, AOS artists/researchers search for instantiating an emotional response by exposing the postmodernist fantasy in their work. Artistic and scientific practices become entangled to conceptualize the everyday life of post-human identity: the augmented self. AOS (http://www.artisopensource.net/about-art-is-open-source/) was "created by *Salvatore Iaconesi*, and joined by *Oriana Persico* (social scientist, artist) and now includes more than 200 artists and researchers from across the world."
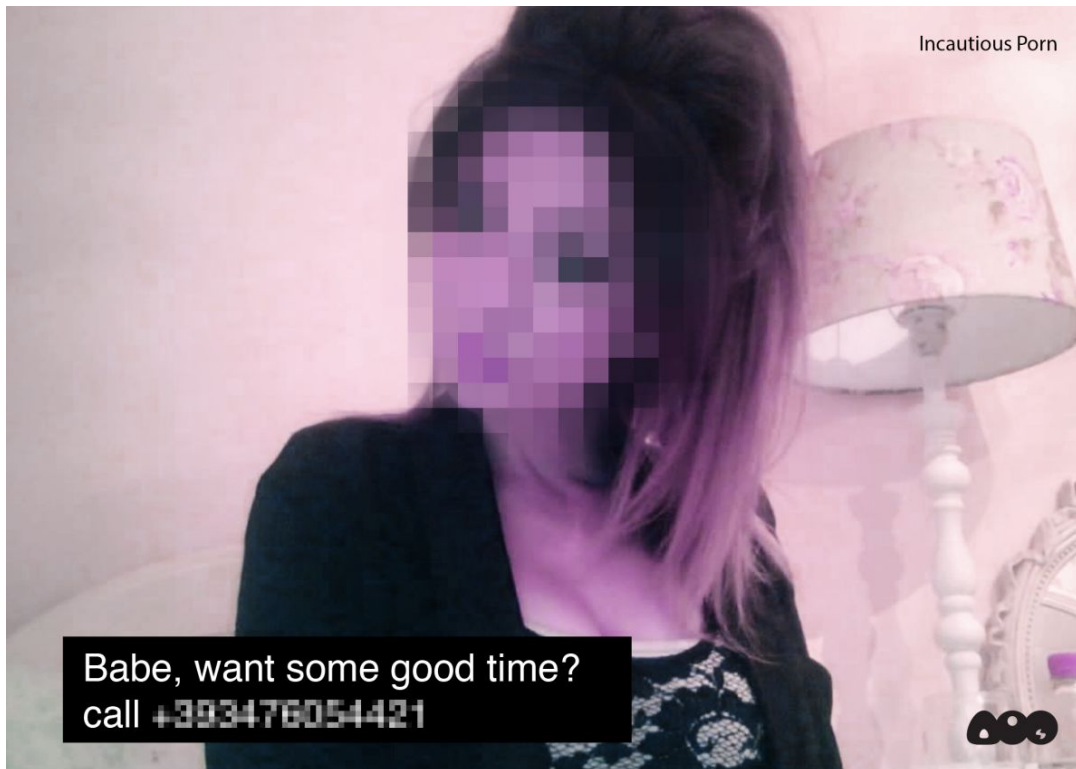
Figure 13: AOS, [illustration], In Incautious Porn, AOS Research Database, Retrieved from http://www.artisopensource.net/network/artisopensource/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/9240402907_31fe7df548_o.png

AOS defines *Incautious Porn (Figure 13)* as the following:

> We access social networking websites every day.
> We think they're free, but what we really are doing is accessing services which we pay by granting access to our personal data to companies, organizations, institutions, aggregators, marketing firms etcetera.
> And there's more.
> While we navigate these websites we tend to radically transform our perception of what is public and what is private.
> We often engage messaging, chats, comments and content production without realizing that we're saying and posting things in public, where anyone can see them, and use them.
> Incautious Porn is about this.
> *It is about the transformation of the ways in which we perceive private and public spaces.*
> *It is about being sold hundreds of times each day: our data, information, emotions, relations.*

Above manifesto of the project clearly communicates research objectives and

interests around the work: privacy, spaces, and the personal data. They develop

software to scan through the databases of porn pages and to detect individual comments in this public space. After they collect interesting qualitative data about cyber-sex, they make paintings (Figure 14) by using certain typographical design choices and visual forms. Again, the act of remediation, hypermediacy and love online are present in this work as in Are We Exclusive Yet? It feeds into the conceptual and theoretical discourses around Are We Exclusive Yet? specifically in regards to privacy and remediation, both the remediation of media and the remediation of words. Also, an intention to process and identify qualitative data in Internet Research is both aims of me and AOS'. Moreover, the pleasure of text is stressed, and the role of words in generating emotions is highlighted in both works.

Figure 14: AOS, [illustration], In Incautious Porn, AOS Research Database, Retrieved from http://www.artisopensource.net/network/artisopensource/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/whatyoubuy.png

4.4. Blogs and Social Media

4.4.1. https://www.instagram.com/byefelipe/

Bye Felipe is an Instagram account, a database for qualitative data about online dating, jealousy online, and cyber-sex that are comprised of text-message exchanges of countless users who feed the Bye Felipe with insightful data every day. The idea behind the project (http://www.bye-felipe.com/#!about/cf5y) is articulated in their website as such:

> Alexandra Tweten started Bye Felipe on Instagram in October 2014. The idea came from a discussion between women in a private Facebook group about terrible messages women receive from men when they say they aren't interested. Dozens of women posted screenshots of messages they had received and Alexandra decided to gather them all and post them on Instagram.

Figure 15: Bye Felipe, An Example of a Post, [website still], Retrieved from http://instagr.am/p/uyYV5XJK7V/media/?size=l

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Once-private moments of individual lives are translated into a public format, damaging their exclusivity. Also, in Are We Exclusive Yet? decontextualization of online dialogues and reformation of them as public objects are theoretically informed by Bye Felipe. Both of them strive to gather qualitative data around issues of privacy, exclusivity, and cyber-love. Also, the two share similarities in their humble beginnings as they display their autoethnographic journey through the creation of new media artifacts.

4.4.2. http://straightwhiteboystexting.org/

Creator of the blog (http://straightwhiteboystexting.org/important) on the naming of this page gives the following account:

> The name of this blog is based off of the phenomenon of the "straight white boy text" aka asking "hey what's your bra size ;)" in the middle of a conversation, or things like "what would you do if you were here haha lol ;)". Basically things that even if you *want* to sext with the person, they either completely ruin the mood either because they're not sexy or because it pretty much puts all the sexting work on you. The phrase "you sext like a straight white boy" comes from this. Boys of all orientations and races do this. And not all of them do it, either.

What is intended through this project bears similarities and communicates with both *Bye Felipe* and *Are We Exclusive Yet?* This creepy text theater is a museum of absurdity that generates qualitative data in Internet Research through exposing mostly sexts, weird encounters, and failed relationships. Among online dialogues employed in Are We Exclusive Yet?, almost %80 of the data indicated a sexually clear tone so it makes perfect sense that both StraightWhiteBoysTexting and Bye Felipe share similarities in uncovering large sets of online sexual data. Furthermore, the qualitative data identified in this new media work are related to the discussions

around identity exploration, self-presentation, impression formation and gender-play. Are We Exclusive Yet? shares similarities in its attempt to generate qualitative data around those issues. Online relationships involve many idle talks which are configured as small talks, as forms of gossiping. Also, the life of many online dialogues range around only a few exchanged text messages that later become dysfunctional and die in digital surfaces. This blog captures those small talks once again reminding of qualities and functions of my dialogues.

Figure 16: StraightWhiteBoysTexting, An Example of a Post, [website still], Retrieved from http://66.media.tumblr.com/cfb72dea755a2f86c7d192152a183e0d/tumblr_o6vv68iSl41tpdteqo1_1 280.jpg

4.5. Performance and Experiment

4.5.1. #worstdateever

#worstdateever is a popular Twitter hashtag through which users post their descriptions around date experiences that went wrong. Anne Thériault used the discourse of the hashtag to describe a bad first date with the world by live tweeting it. The act of *live tweeting* (Figure 17) renders the private as public and exposes qualitative data around online courtship do's and don'ts. People's accounts in narrative forms are woven into the Twitter hashtag, #worstdateever and Thériault focuses on capturing the real-time qualitative data and narratives as part of an online and social performance.

Figure 17: Thériault, Anne (2015), Post Examples, [website still], Retrieved from
http://s32.postimg.org/fqqp3wjat/Untitled.jpg

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Also, the artist as a socially aware being situates herself as the reflexive self and displays a public performance of networked identities. Are We Exclusive Yet? shares similarities with this new media object's reflexive, performative, and autobiographical aspects.

4.5.2. <u>http://www.datebrandonscottwolf.com/</u>

Brandon Scott (Date Brandon, n.d.) and what he does with his website datebrandonscottwolf are described as the following by Law (2015):

> New York City man Brandon Scott Wolf has tried OkCupid, eHarmony, Tinder — you name it — and still wound up unlucky in love.
>
> So, he set up his own online dating site with one crucial difference to all of the others: His is the only profile on it.
>
> The aptly named <u>DateBrandonScottWolf.com</u> is described as "The #1 Online Dating Site for Brandon Scott Wolf".
>
> The profile reveals that this 25-year-old bartender from Brooklyn is a no-nonsense guy "looking for that one special person to share experiences with."

This guy is a regular guy who takes the performative, self-expressive and marketing units of the media to its next level by *marketing himself* (Figure 18) as an *exclusive product* in the dating market. This performance highlights his extensive experience on online dating platforms such as OkCupid, Tinder, and Grindr and finally, through remediation, he creates an entirely new medium for dating: his dating profile in a website format. It is a clever way to market one's self and its autobiographical, performative and self-reflexive components share similarities with Are We Exclusive Yet?

Figure 18: Wolf, B. Scott, [website still], In datebrandonscottwolf.com, Retrieved from
http://s32.postimg.org/as8u4h48l/Untitled.png

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Research about online courtship is recently evolving and attracting the interests of scholars from diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, media and cultural studies and philosophy. Much of the contribution revolves around self-presentation, misrepresentation, and deception. There are a few studies and scholarly books about the commitment among online couples and online infidelity however more research is in demand to uncover the exclusivity of cyber-love, not only on the grounds of commitment and infidelity but also incorporating monogamy, privacy, distraction, attention, self, technology and society, therefore broadening the scope of the implications for the exclusivity of cyber-love. This study will potentially provide a significant contribution to the fields of new media and cultural studies, cyber-psychology, and design with new qualitative data in an attempt to arrive at the formation of a new theory in online matchmaking. Overall, the implications of romantic exclusivity in cyberspace are discussed with references to various theoreticians, artists, and designers by employing theory and practice, research and

art, self-reflexivity and autoethnographic first-person voice. This inquiry attempts to expand the body of knowledge in online dating, new media, and computer-mediated relationships in 2016 and to uncover qualitative data around the logic of exclusivity in online dating.

The next logical iteration of the M.F.A. thesis project would be to extend this evolving discussion on romantic exclusivity in cyber-space through employing grounded theory in a new media and communications Ph.D. studies, in the future. Using grounded theory data analysis methods and *qualitative research methods*[47] such as semi-structured interviews and an online survey, my later intention is to uncover both quantitative and qualitative data around the same issue by adding the issue a positivist twist in social sciences. Then, the data gathered through grounded theory shall be discussed and exemplified in an interactive design project. Furthermore, the living artist's work is an open-ended and an extending body of knowledge and in digital format; the questions around the living space of the work of art, its aura becomes even more complex to answer. M.F.A. Thesis Project, in particular, will be extended further in its aura by creating an M.F.A. Thesis Book. The book will make sure that this piece becomes eternal, and its aura is glowing in a timeless and eternal light.

The next technological step in online dating and relating will probably make use of widespread applications and functions of remediation, hypermediacy, *ubiquitous*[48]

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[47] Further Reading: *Qualitative Research Methods* by Liamputtong & Ezzy
[48] Further Reading: *The Liquid Self: Exploring the Ubiquitous Nature of the Future Internet and Its Pervasive Consequences on Social Life* by Enric Bas

social computing, augmented reality and VR to offer the individuals the experience of dating and relating online. The introduction of sensory-based data into the design of VR dating environments might create a very realistic and efficient experience for the postmodern individual to transcode in-between mediums and to upload and download affection, desire, and love with the blink of an eye.

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