

“Stalk Me to the End of Love”: Mutual Watching and Intimate Affections through the Use of Smartphones

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“As an artist, my work questions the experience and construction of reality through everyday technological devices and the affective relationships that arise from/through/with them. My practice is transdisciplinary and frequently participatory, resulting in hybrid projects between living arts, experience design, visual arts, and sociological experience” (Ascaso 2023).

“Stalk me to the end of love” is a speculative project of artistic investigation and social experimentation in the digital sphere that questions the way in which affective relationships occur when technological devices mediate them. The project proposes a hyper-surveillance space between equals (peer-to-peer watching) by creating a smartphone app. The app creates a random connection between two users who don’t know each other, allowing an unusual bond of communication and surveillance. In that sense, the main interest in this project is to question the construction of intimacy through the performative use of personal technological devices, as well as the way we are affected in our daily lives by constant and ubiquitous surveillance.

From an artistic perspective, the aim is to link the concept of liquid love developed by Zygmunt Bauman (2018), which concerns the fragility of affective relations and the contemporary commodification of love, with Byung-Chul Han’s (2014: 15) reflections on digital communication, where he affirms that “anonymity and respect are mutually exclusive.” Can we affirm that the figure of the digital stalker corresponds to a new form of romantic love or even toxic love in the digital era? In that sense, the artist questions whether the desire to access others’ intimate space could be compatible with respectful behavior. At the same time, is it possible to remain anonymous by over-exposing our intimate space? What kind of images constructs our intimacy in digital environments? Can an experience like this generate affective bonds between unknown people that surveil each other?



Figure 1: "Stalk me to the end of love" installation. PC6-2019. Bilbao's Experimental Arts International Festival – MEM.



Nº

ToDo LoVe

Después de esta cita rápida...

Escribe la primera palabra que pienses.

¿Te ha sorprendido lo que has visto?
♡♡♡♡♡

¿Has sentido algún tipo de conexión?
♡♡♡♡♡

¿Quieres saber más del ser que hay dentro?
♡♡♡♡♡

Figure 2: "ToDo LoVe Club" feedback form. PC7-2019.

Alternatively, "ToDo LoVe Club" is a participatory performance that takes place following the mechanics of conventional Speed Dating. However, people do not meet face-to-face but through their phones. It is a romantic date with a cellphone that is not yours. What a thrill! Each date lasts two minutes and the only rule is that people are not allowed to modify anything on those phones: they cannot reply to a message, delete a photo, post on Instagram, etc. This project is an exercise of trust, detachment, curiosity, and, of course, watching.

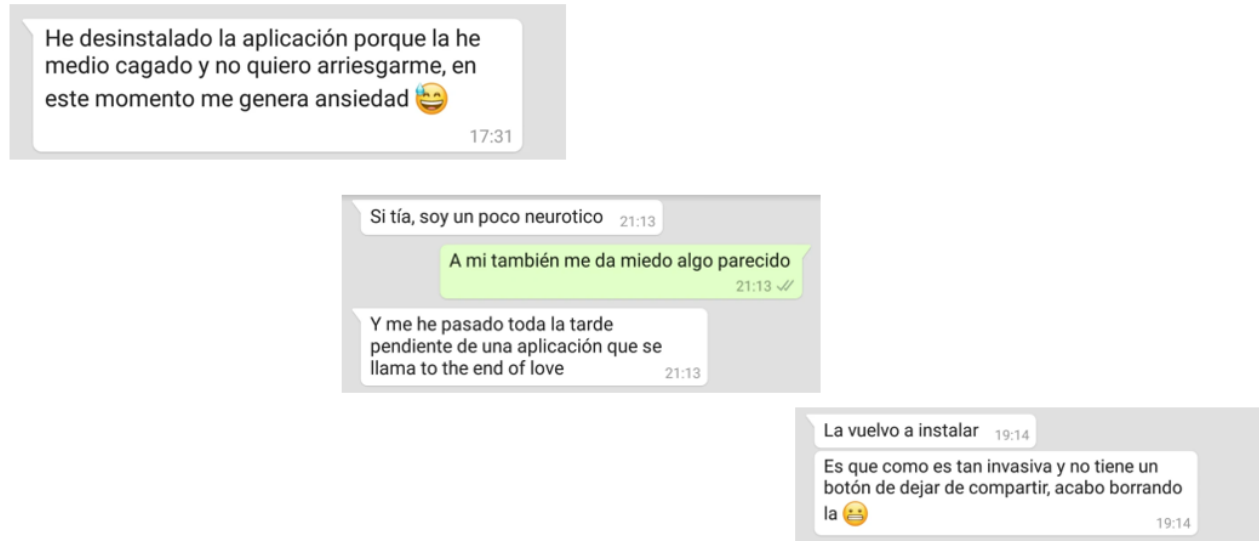


Figure 3: "Stalk me to the end of love" public conversations. PC8-2019.

A participatory discussion followed the speed dating. Some of the background questions are: How did you feel? Was it more challenging to give away your phone or to check the device from others? Have you deleted anything from your phone before starting the experience? Were you comfortable surveilling other people and being watched? In short, this proposal complements the first one and also seeks to experiment with personal affection through technological devices, redefining our understanding and way of feeling anonymity, identity, privacy, and intimacy in real-time. In turn, these points redefine our sense of living under surveillance by/with others in hyperconnected societies.

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