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Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic

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Abstract

This article seeks to amplify discursive constructions of social connection through technology with an examination of the proposed and presumed intimacies of the Tinder app. In the first half, we ethnographically examine the sociotechnical dynamics of how users navigate the app and take up or resist the subject positions encouraged by the user interface feature of swiping. In the second half, we provide a discussion of the implications of the swipe logic through post-structural conceptual lenses interrogating the ironic disruption of intimacy of Tinder's interface.

Keywords

Tinder, acceleration, swipe, intimacy, mobile, images, dating, profile pictures

Introduction

In 2014, the then 2-year old *Tinder* had already been hailed by *Rolling Stone Magazine* as having "upended the way single people connect" (Grigoriadis, 2014), inspiring copycat apps like JSwipe (a Jewish dating app) and Kinder (for kids' play dates). Sean Rad, cofounder and CEO of Tinder, whose app manages to gamify the search for partners using location, images, and messages, had intended it to be "a simplified dating app with a focus on images" (Grigoriadis, 2014). The name itself, playing on an earlier tentative name *Matchbox* and the stylized bonfire icon that accompanies the brand name, insinuates that once users have found a match, sparks will inevitably fly and ignite the fires of passion. In a literal sense, anything that can be ignited by a match can be considered tinder, and as it turns out, not only users' time but also their profiles are indeed the tinder to be consumed. As we will explore here, this ignescent quality may no longer be restricted to circumstances of intimacy understood as closeness. Rather, *tindering* relations might mean that even the airiest of connections is flammable.

In traditional Western conceptions of intimacy, what is it that Tinder disrupts? Traditionally, intimacy was characterized as closeness, familiarity, and privacy from the Latin *intimatus*, *intimare* "make known" or *intimus* "innermost" ("Intimae," n.d.). However, we wonder whether the notion of the intimate as a certain kind of closeness (and duration) has been discursively modulated and disturbed through the ubiquity, immediacy, and acceleration of connection provided by Tinder. Has the nature of intimacy ironically embraced volatility, ethereality, airiness, speed, and featheriness; or levitas? Is it through this levitas that intimacy is paradoxically being conveyed?

In the first half of this article, we discuss the limits and possibilities afforded by the Tinder app and how they are taken up by users, while in the second half we discuss the swipe logic through the conceptual lenses of Massumi's (1992) interpretation of molarization and Virilio's (1986) dromology. We examine online discourses, interactions in the mobile dating environment, interview data, and user interfaces (UIs) to interrogate what we understand as a *screened intimacy* manifested through a swipe logic on Tinder. For us, the term swipe logic describes the pace, or the increased viewing speed encouraged by the UI of this app, and that very pace that emerged as a prominent feature of the discourses examined both online and off-line. Throughout, we are mindful of how intimacy is being negotiated and redefined through online practices; we trace emerging discursive juxtapositions between depth and surface, solidity and ethereality, and temporally between duration and volatility, instability, and movement. Following

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media theorist Erika Biddle (2013), we are interested in how "relational and fluctuating fields of affinity . . . engage on an informational plane" and work to "produce new forms of social control and subjectivization" (p. 66). We, thus, engage the microsociological aspect of the "swipe" gesture to develop ideas around what we situate as *screened* relations of intimacy to highlight aspects of speed, ethereality, fragmentation, and volatility. We use *screened* to acknowledge the mediatization and depersonalization that is encouraged as a result of the speed of profile-viewing enabled by the swipe logic and thus as a top-down discursive hindrance to intimacy. At the same time, we acknowledge the possibilities of obtaining meaningful connections where the affective impulses behind users' screened intimacies can create opportunities for their own bottom-up gratifications.

While other dating apps have subsequently incorporated the same swipe pattern, we take Tinder as exemplary for three reasons: first, its popularity: a 2014 estimate claims 50 million people have subscribed to the service (Guiliano, 2015); second, it is a useful example of a location-based real-time dating (LBRTD) application that provides affordances for self-presentation; third, because we believe there is a need to continue to critically examine how discursive and algorithmic regulatory conventions are interrelated. In this exploratory phase, we favored a non-exhaustive, empirical micro-study as a way to gain some traction in the area.

Methodology

Triangulating interview data, participant observation, and a survey of popular discourses from the broad range of sources mentioned above allowed the theme of swiping to emerge. Following Foucault's (1978) rule of "the tactical polyvalence of discourses," we understand discourse as a multiplicity of elements "that can come into play in various strategies" (p. 100). And because we hold "discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable," (Foucault, 1978, p. 100) we reject the divisions between accepted and excluded discourse in order to recognize mid-range discursive possibilities like divergent narratives and story-lines, and discourse-coalitions or actors grouped around sets of story-lines (Bingham, 2010). More specifically, we examine a specific story-line, that of the swipe logic, within a discourse-coalition.

By examining this gestural feature in relation to intimacy, this article contributes to the growing literature on hook-up apps and screen-mediated intimacies. We situate this particular aspect of the user interface (UI) and user experience design (UED) within the wider aspects of the functioning and features of the app in our critical discussion. Our initial 6-month participant observation of mobile image-sharing practices gave us ethnographic insights on the specific ways hook-up apps encourage standardized self-presentation through selfies, photography, short text, and voice recording (HelloTalk) through the workings of the UI. Apart from direct observation, eight open-ended face-to-face interviews with Tinder users (heterosexual males [4] and females [4] aged 19–43 years) were conducted in Paris (translated by the authors). All participants volunteered in response to a call on Tinder for participation.

These accounts are taken together with the popular discourses in blogs, websites, and Internet commentary including social media platforms, such as Tumblr and Instagram, through which users additionally publish individual exchanges. In sum, the iterative process between practice, reception, and the resulting discourse-coalition informs our reflections and subsequent conceptual analysis.

What Is Tinder, and How Is it Perceived?

A preliminary assessment of Internet-based commentary about Tinder in blogs, news, and popular media sites, not to mention the now infamous "Tinder Nightmares" Instagram account, presents a narrative of less than satisfying results for many users. The latter is dedicated to awkward or downright distasteful encounters on Tinder and has "455,000 plus followers" (Garnsworthy, 2014). Generating copycat sites such as Tinder Nightmares Egypt (http://websta.me/n/tindernightmareseg), the publicizing of everything from the ridiculous to the offensive has also produced a bewildering assortment of advice columns such as the blog TinderLines (http://tinderlines.com/) collecting memorable and comic pick-up lines. A student interviewed by *The Huffington Post* shrugged off the nightmare stories saying, "People don't think of [Tinder] as online dating, they think of it as a game" or "as a beauty contest plus messaging," while others see it as a "judging app" (Bosker, 2015). While opinions on the uses and misuses of the app vary, few disagree that while computerized dating services have been around since the mid-1960s, Tinder has irretrievably altered the digital dating-scape, processing more than "a billion swipes left and right daily" (Bilton, 2014).[1]

Those who sign up are given a limited number of images (6) (from Facebook) and words (500) to present themselves. Immediately profile pictures appear and, as journalist Holly Baxter (2013) notes, "You can scroll through hundreds of faces as you procrastinate on your morning commute, or in a tedious lunch hour al desko." In order to have a match, both users must swipe right. After matching, a pop-up animation shows both users' photographs and enables direct messaging. A swipe to the left discards a user's profile and reveals the next card-like image. This gesture makes profile skimming so easy and quick that it has prompted pundits and bloggers to describe the app as "a way of shopping for partners" (Baxter, 2013) or "the twitter of dating," for dating and relationship coach David Wygant (2014). The popular mood on the subject appears to concur to the extent that the *Urban Dictionary Online*'s top-rated definition simply notes, "Dating app. Tinder is the McDonalds for sex" ("Tinder," 2013).

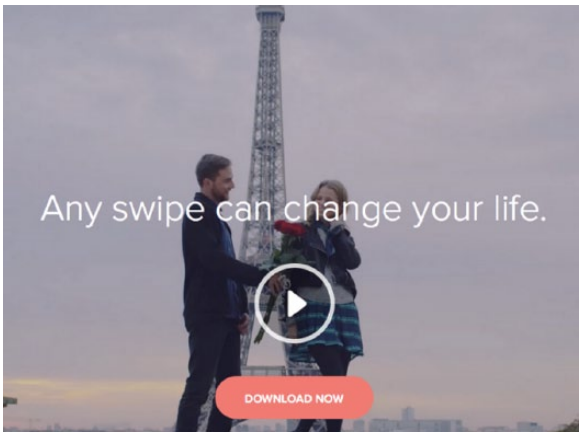


Figure 1. Tinder homepage (Screenshot, G. David). This stereotypical image of a man offering flowers to a woman features one of Tinder's premium upgrades (Passport) as another clichéd narrative of romance and travel.

Background: From Online Dating to Mobile Hook-Up

An extremely simple app interface codes itself as less intimidating than a face-to-face encounter. Images are crucial, functioning as if bait, and tempting other users to connect. Thus, mediated modes of signaling attraction invite singles to dive into the visual politics of dating and hook-up apps prompting these everyday mobile interactions to be seen as mechanisms of *mediated intimacy* (Vetere et al., 2005). According to these authors, the act of touching the small screen and its display space has become an intrinsic characteristic and habitus for users immersed in mobile cultures. In our case, all interviewees expressed exploring transition components of the UI such as the pace of profile swiping and location awareness, knowing that Tinder permits them to skim profiles of algorithmically determined partners in the proximate geographic area. Because other devices had touch screens long before smartphones emerged (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011),[2] current users have been exposed to an uneven, multifaceted process incorporating the haptic aspects of swiping, thumbing, and touching through varied devices. More specifically, gestures such as pinching, dragging, scrolling, zapping, and clicking foster connections primarily using images. Users seamlessly immerse themselves in mediated or presumed intimacy (Rojek, 2015) where, according to Tinder's motto, "Any swipe can change your life." This tag line discursively creates a possibility for presumed intimacy and tensions between the types of moments a user might experience. The spatial nature of the app contextualizes use (Figure 1):

> *Tindering* can be done publicly and collectively when with friends for entertainment. But sometimes I also swipe in a public-private place, such as in idle moments, when I commute, for example, but usually I *Tinder* alone, privately and in solitary moments. (Interviewee F1)

And the materiality of distance is also socially contextualized:

> It is a little guilty experience, I guess, and a little paradoxical. I feel it is between casting or fishing and playing roulette. I do not know . . . Tinder sucks . . . (laughs). It sucks when the "like" gives you a match but then she never talks to you. Or Russians match with you when they are actually in Moscow. (Interviewee M4)

Generally, online dating sites have become more socially accepted. In France by 2008, Marie Bergström (2011) had already reviewed 1,045 of them. In *Many matches but no spark*, Baxter (2013) observes the proliferation of dating portals for younger working professionals: "The stigma of online dating has faded as the first generation that grew up embroiled in social media has entered Real Adulthood" (p. 18). While Baxter's commentary might seem obvious for many of her readers, some social stigma around the use of hook-up apps still exists (see Duguay, this issue).

Precursors to swiping began in 2003 with Facemash, Facebook's antecedent, which presented a binary "hot or not" game for Harvard students. Over time, many other similar online dating sites emerged (i.e., Meetic.com, Match.com). While officially presented as dating sites, all interviewees perceived such sites as operating like disguised hook-up sites. In 2009, Grindr, a mobile LBRTD app for men looking for other men, shook up the market, registering over 3.5 million users in 192 countries in its first year (Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2014).

Tinder Platform Affordances/ Limitations and User's Creative Evasions

In this section, we provide an overview of Tinder constraints and features and some of the varied user responses. While its developers call it a social networking app for meeting people and not for finding sexual partners, participants do include finding dates and sexual partners among Tinder's main functions. Its protocols require pre-setting a limited geographical perimeter, age frame, choosing images, and device geolocalization for possible matches to appear. These pre-set parameters make up the search criteria. Tinder recognizes the user's coordinates and locates other users within the perimeter and then scans those profiles to meet the search criteria. Many users find creative ways to avoid the limitations embedded in these features, as we explore below.

Tinder requires drawing profile images from user Facebook accounts so that to avoid having a Tinder profile picture, a user's Facebook profile image must show the Facebook avatar only. Despite the image upload limit, the

possibility of linking to Instagram provides more image access. During fieldwork, only one profile revealed a direct link to the user's Instagram account instead of having a profile photo. It's possible for a user without an active Facebook account to create one, solely to generate a Tinder account. This alternative usage takes advantage of the interconnection between platforms. While users may add self-presentation texts, the majority does not.

Noticing many users (manually) linked their Instagram user name in their profile, administrators integrated it into Tinder after Facebook acquired it, to allow users to "show off their photos" (Prigg, 2015). However, participant observation indicated that most users were reluctant to share a larger portion of their private images with an unknown audience (one in seven profiles on average). When accounts are linked, a larger number (2,318 in the case of M1) of Instagram images are available. The almost exclusively image-based interactions are crucial for the emergence of the swipe logic, providing the assessing glance a surface, instead of lines of profile information. The centrality of images is reflected in interview comments: "If I was a master in photographic analysis, I would be quick to understand another person's style, humor, aesthetics, and passions" (F3).

As mentioned, the swipe option means that with a quick thumb movement, users can immediately arrange to meet. However, as the decision gesture is quick and sometimes because of involuntary reflexes, users may make mistakes:

> Basically, I'm not a regular Tinder user, but I've tried the app a few times with the hopes that I might stumble across an amazing human being (I know a few people who have met incredible long-term partners through Tinder!). I ended up being interested in very few of the "people" (or, more appropriately, avatars) that I encountered, and so I would occasionally find myself swiping left reflexively, only to suddenly realize that I had passed over a potentially interesting-seeming human. In that moment, I wished that I could "undo" my most recent left swipe—what if I had missed out on the most amazing person in the world? Well, it turns out that this "undo" function actually exists, but you have to pay for it! It's diabolically genius, really; the app developers were obviously acutely aware that a repetitive swiping action has the potential to become nearly involuntary. (F4)

Tinder's paid option, *Tinder Plus*, gives users access to a rewind feature, allowing the reversal of the undesired swipe. Because Tinder's algorithms also limit the number of "likes" a user can make in a 12-hr period, the premium option becomes even more attractive by enabling unlimited "liking" capability. Additionally, the paid *Passport* feature enables users to change their geolocalization and connect with people anywhere (blog.gotinder.com).

Tinder's Facebook linking allows it to display the so-called verified profiles to reassure its users that if they have connections in common, some measure of safety is ensured. For instance, one can visit any of the Facebook profiles of common friends and in a couple of clicks find, verify, and explore a potential match's personal data and possibly make contact. This feature layers context: an off-app degree of connection to every swipe. While users may find ways to obscure their Tinder identity (e.g., fake Facebook profiles, blurry photos, nicknames), other users may, through triangulation, identify how new ties are connected to strong and weak ties.

Users can go even further. For example, if a Tinder profile image is of interest but no additional platforms are linked, a quick mobile screenshot can be uploaded to any reverse image search and retrieve other sites where that user has posted the same image. The ways in which apps and profile pictures work, and get worked, underscore the significance of images regarding personal disclosure and data retrieval, privacy, and ethics.

With Tinder, the "likes" and originality of images are not ends in themselves. Unlike other dating sites where users can see who has visited their profiles, in Tinder there is no way of knowing. Here, users can only register whether they like each other or not. Until recently, there was no way of signaling another user prior to "liking."[3] Here, mobile images are positioned more as self-presentation and much less for self-expression knowing that viewers are subject to the binary of either liking it or not. Thus, "On one hand the algorithm enhances the swipe logic, but on the other it urges users to be witty, humorous, sensitive, and go for the most intelligent profiles to get attention" (M1). Still, some users resist swiping preferring the like (<3) or dislike (X) buttons instead:

> I feel a nice dynamic. I actually enjoy the buttons more, especially since I check the profile of any prospective match before <3-ing or X-ing. So, I actually don't really swipe much, unless it is someone I know beforehand. (M3)

As image-based spaces, hook-up apps illustrate "the changing pictures of domestic photography" (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011, p. 35). Furthermore, as visual apps increase in popularity, self-produced images can be seen adopting the iconographic conventions of advertising and self-branding. One could even link this to the famous *carte-de-visite*, the portrait photography format for mass production, popular between 1860s and 1880s when millions of *carte-de-visites* were sold (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). These *carte-de-visites* differed from today's business cards by including photographic portraits. The speed of the feedback loop[4] between impression motivation to control how one is seen and impression construction itself plays a part. Following sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), these numerous everyday life photographs, populating the enormous dating/hook-up app databases, are, here, considered part of a learning process of self-mediation, training users in the editing, curating, and construction of a pseudo self-authenticity (Winnicott, 1965).

Among the stereotypical smiling, smoking, and drinking faces, distinctly original profiles stand out. These images confirm that the swipe logic can be played with and

subverted, or even ignored. For example, Joachim Roncin's *Je suis Charlie* slogan was mass adopted shortly after the Charlie Hebdo shooting on 7 January 2015. After 6 months, many accounts still displayed *Je suis Charlie* suggesting infrequent profile image updating. Views of beaches or ski scenes, even pets and drawings are also common ways of obscuring one's body or identity. Yet on occasion, blatant self-promotion is also visible, where the profile description space is linked to extended personal information on other social media platforms and to personal websites and resumes.

Often, built-in features like autocorrect provide unexpected exchanges to the extent of generating sites such as *Damn You Autocorrect* (http://www.damnyouautocorrect.com) dedicated to these kinds of bloopers. In the following anecdote from field notes, the first teasing message ending with a smiley emoticon is followed by "*Be my fat poney.*" Response, "*Fat poney? Neither one nor the other.*" Reply, "*Did I write, poney??? Oh shit (autocorrection) be my love honey. Thanks Android*" (David, 2015, p. 367). Anthropologist Richard Chalfen (2012) humorously notes, "As we have gone from analog accidents to digital dilemmas, the stage is set for iTrouble: new and unanticipated predicaments" (p. 210).

Regardless of the obvious affordances and limitations of the app itself, there is always already an imperative, a demand to type, for example, "I must enter the string that is my password in order to receive my messages" (Baldwin, 2015, p. 9). While most users assume a degree of autonomy and freedom in their communication, the micro-layers of control informing features and interfaces are always already guiding the user to conform to some kind of pre-existing or pre-designed form of relationality, such as the *correctness* of Word processing autocorrect functions. In other words, the logic at work behind the overlapping layered demands presented through the technological interfaces is "not just the control of touch but rather a technical and social program for the adjustment of sensibility as a whole, including proprioceptive awareness, the body's internal sense of its own position and movement relative to the outside world" (Bogard, 2007). As users become more immersed through haptic gestures, "capitalism's modes of desire and anxiety are inscribed in bodies as processes wherein devices and their users have become increasingly adaptive to each other" (Biddle, 2013). In the case of Tinder, the delicate mix of a precise index movement, a decryption of the photograph, and a consciousness of being located and subject to the moods of those in the vicinity creates the tension between desire and anxiety that Biddle describes.

Other issues arise when users are unsure how the app works or when the protocols or structure of the app is changed without notice. After Tinder developers provided privileges based on subscriptions, the standard free model began to limit matches. For instance, during an interview, while simultaneously *tindering*, both interviewer and interviewee decided to check whether they had the same number of propositions (profiles presented/offered) by setting the same parameters of sex, age, and distance. Interestingly, while in the same physical place, they received *different* propositions. This brief experiment indicated first that the algorithm initially favored proposing candidates with whom one had a common link. But why did one of them have many more propositions than the other? Repetition of the experiment indicated the frequency of use and the quantity of propositions might be inversely proportional (both had Tindered in that location before). Tinder claims that its algorithm tailors itself to users depending on their past use. It won't reveal what the algorithm's criteria are, but our example supports the claim.

The app's algorithms function to decrease the number of viewable profiles, as its use increases. Unless a user pays for *Tinder Plus*, only 20 consecutive right (positive) swipes are available. As one swipes, the number of potential Tinder-matched candidates gets *used up*. For example, Tinder might show users that no matches are nearby, when in fact there are other users in the area but Tinder does not offer them. Once a user's metaphorical tank is empty, a period of waiting is enforced until the swipe tank is re-filled and the user can recommence swiping. All interviewees knew that by changing the settings from "searching men and women" to "searching only men" or "searching only women," a new cache of profiles became available. Most participants admitted to refreshing the available number of profiles this way only occasionally because "Tindering time spent is usually around some minutes, and the proposition of available possible matches is usually more than the tindering time I devote" (F2). However, "when my number of swipes finishes, and I *really* want to continue swiping, I change my settings and then another collection of would-be-matchers appears" (F2).

Discussion: The Concept of the Swipe Logic

Tinder's CEO Sean Rad celebrates the effect of selecting matches by swiping left or right, telling journalist Grigoriadis (2014), "It's a casting session and you're in the director's chair . . . At the end of the day, it's just one big party, and you're just sitting there saying, 'Yes, no, yes, no'." Paradoxically, Rad adds, "The irony of Tinder is that in some ways the lack of information, or text, is actually less superficial than having the information" (Grigoriadis, 2014). There is nothing about the relation depicted in the first comment that would support the claim in the second, which itself is inconsistent. The paradox alerts us to a process of molarization, the in-itself of contradiction:

> . . . Best understood . . . as the process presiding over the creation of a certain kind of image (general images: those constituting categories, identities good/commonsensical ideas) and certain media functions (reductions: from the multidimensionality of life in the flesh to the two-dimensional flatness of the silver screen and those who are identified with its images). (Massumi, 1992, p. 111)

The process of molarization as Massumi (1992), following Deleuze and Guattari, elaborates is always about turning complexity into a pragmatic "black or white of Good or Bad" so that the "complications of desire" are reduced to the "simplicity of mind or body," or an A or B. And while he adds, "the world rarely obliges" (p. 112) to indicate that material reality does not indulge this artificial flattening, we must wonder in the context of the dating app: How much does "the world's" cooperation matter? To some extent, *it works* by having users accept the binary logic and reveals a plane of transcendence being created by molarization (Massumi, 1992, p. 111). The Tinder CEO's assertion that the poverty of information actually promotes the intensification of connection between people demonstrates the plane of transcendence or movement of abstraction and simultaneous embodiment as being successfully *in play*. Thus, the symptomatic position of the Tinder CEO Rad speaks about "moves in two contradictory directions simultaneously: toward a beyond, and back to our world. Abstraction and reconcretization (application)" (Massumi, 1992, p. 111).

For Rad, one can sit in a proverbial director's chair and preside over "auditions" at the same time as one can feel the process is "less superficial" than other dating services. Perhaps the dearth of information is seen as allowing users to more directly access their own inner compass. Again, this is literally a "separation of thought from the body (transcendence)" (Massumi, 1992, p. 107) for Rad and for others: one of the bloggers writes, "Swiping my life away one superficial first impression after the next. I matched with a guy. He looked cute" (Jay, 2015). Similarly, Kate (pseudonym), who started using Tinder after a breakup, tells UK researchers, "You are more likely to throw caution to the wind . . . [Kate] didn't originally sign up to Tinder for casual sex, but ended up sleeping with three of the five men she met. 'Sometimes we'd been chatting for ages so you feel more advanced in your flirtation' . . ." (Bhattacharya, 2015, p. 32). Nick Bilton (2014), writing for *The New York Times* comments, "all that swiping has given Tinder the nickname 'the hook up app', for its reputation for one-night stands." In terms of an embodied subject, here the plane of transcendence serves to prepare the "target body," which must be "kneaded into shape" and "coaxed into acquiescence or punished into docility" (Massumi, 1992, p. 113). But first "openings must be cut into its perception to provide entryways for generality . . . to give it habits of thought and behavior" (p. 113).

We have seen how users work the app in innovative ways and create desired lines of sociality in their search for intimacy. However, we cannot ignore the ways in which the app works users through molarization thereby creating a plane of transcendence lifting bodies out of "the uniqueness of the spatiotemporal coordinates through which they move" (Massumi, 1992, p. 112). Bodies falling prey to transcendence "are reduced to what seems to persist across their alterations" (Massumi, 1992, p. 112); thus, dating becomes a process that is "as quick and easy as flicking through the pages of a magazine" (Bhattacharya, 2015, p. 31). One user recalls feeling "like I was looking through some kind of weird catalogue" (Wygant, 2014). The experience of glancing through profile images as if one was turning magazine pages is eloquently unpacked in Milan Kundera's (1992) psychological realism in *Immortality*:

> If you put the pictures of two different faces side by side, your eye is struck by everything that makes one different from the other. But if you have two hundred and twenty-three faces side by side, you suddenly realize that it's all just one face in many variations and that no such thing as an individual ever existed. (p. 35)

Accelerating the skimming of profiles produces the emergence of an excessive visuality that is reminiscent of philosopher Georges Bataille's reference to the "the traumatic liquification of the eye," effectively reducing an individual to the status of "one wave lost in a multitude of waves" (Featherstone, 2003, p. 441). In this context, Virilio's analysis of superabundant information as a zone "where all difference collapses towards the greyness of the same" (p. 443) is worth consideration.

Abstracting the body, by combining acceleration and a visualizing technology, enables a system of identity to be extracted so that the "identity grid is actualized in images, in an instantaneous redescent of the plane of transcendence toward the flesh, via a technical or social apparatus or medium" (Massumi, 1992, p. 112). According to Bartram (2004), the technological demand for the repetition of the instant looking at face after face is "an experience produced by the imperative to create the instantaneous and ubiquitous" (p. 286) disruption of subjectivities. And at the same time, demanding "that the slowness of the body and its world become sacrificial offerings to the weightless, ethereal nature of the image" (Featherstone, 2003, p. 443). On both ends of the UI, subjectivities are disrupted by a "spectral economy" (Featherstone, 2003, p. 443) that zombifies individuals who immerse themselves in serial swiping while their bodies are persuaded to remain static. The other, in turn, also becomes a phantom following Virilio's particular theory of alienation (Featherstone, 2003). Corporeality is stripped toward the creation of a "commodity body" (Massumi, 1992, p. 129) as users consume the profile pictures of others: "It's like cocaine for the mind. Picture after picture, and you don't even have to read the descriptions. All it does is trigger all the same feelings guys have when they were young and stole their Dad's first *Playboy*" (Wygant, 2014). This "spectral economy" (Featherstone, 2003, p. 444) is also revealed in comments around how Tinder is used for entertainment:

> Tinder is a nice app mainly built around existing interfaces and smartly packaged like a video game. This entertaining element makes people more than willing to pass it around their friends on a Friday night; it's undeniably fun, *when you disconnect from the idea that the people on it are real.* (Baxter, 2013, our emphasis)

Massumi (1992) notes that the stripping of corporeality ostensibly favors a deeper layer posited as "soul, subjectivity, personality, identity—which in fact is no foundation at all, but an end effect, the infolding of a forcibly regularized outside" (p. 112).

One columnist claims that it does something "no previous app or dating site ever has before: it makes everyone feel okay about hooking up with near-strangers" (A. David, 2013). In this case, the habit-forming or addictive swiping gesture is more than a "dead-simple user interface [that] helped propel the app—and its interface—into the realm of pop culture artifact" (Melendez, 2014): as a subtle "glorification of habit" (Massumi, 1992, p. 112), it is key for transcendence. In an article on why Tinder is addicting, Bosker (2015) relates that the app has produced its own pop-malady: "Tinderitis, or the sensation of having a sore thumb from swiping to approve or reject the faces of people offered up as potential date material." Thus, we must think about the swipe logic not only on the level of the users' physical experiences but also as a UI with built-in psychologically persuasive patterning. One UI training site pitches a course to help new designers: "Learn how to apply psychology to design engaging online user experiences, that *make people take action*" (http://ui-patterns.com/, our emphasis). Is this what the preparation of the target body for a process of molarization exacted through a "forcibly regularized outside" looks like? After all, people are swiping until it hurts.

In an article titled "Swipe and Burn," the *New Scientist* reports on a research team investigating six regional outbreaks of syphilis across the United Kingdom since 2012. What they found "startling" was that "even when they controlled for other factors that are known to influence STI risk, such as age, ethnicity and drug use, the link to phone app use remained" (Bhattacharya, 2015, p. 32). Concluding that, while not an isolated factor, "location-based networking apps played an important part in how patients had met their sexual partners," (p. 32) and more research was needed to investigate "the idea that this technology makes you more likely to change your behavior, causing you to leave your common sense at the bedroom door" (p. 32). Few studies have reached these kinds of conclusions, but the narrative is part of a discourse-coalition. One advice columnist generalized, "Tinder makes women supremely open-minded" (A. David, 2013). While further studies are needed, the concurrence between the UK research team, the subjects they interviewed, and popular discourses warrants a consideration of how presumed intimacies now participate in a narrative linking of the spontaneity and immediacy of swiping as something that is fast, to the relaxing of seriousness (it's a game) by virtue of speed and informality: *this* is the swipe logic.

If we wonder how habits of thought and behavior can be influenced "from the outside," we need to consider how the "entryways for generality" (Massumi, 1992, p. 113) might be cut into a body's perception. How do the "mechanisms of capture and containment" (Massumi, 1992, p. 111) operate? What changes when individuals subject themselves to an ocularcentric system privileging real-time visuality and the speed of transmission of images "over the slowness of the body and its world"? (Featherstone, 2003, p. 446)

A number of features encourage the acceleration of swiping on Tinder: one of these is the simplification of choice by reducing it to a binary. Whereas the hyper-successful[5] Canadian-owned Plenty of Fish dating site used to show users apparently random profile pictures with a choice of yes, no, or maybe, Tinder and other mobile interfaces reduced options to the strictly yes/no binary as part of the function of the swipe logic. Speed is intentionally encouraged by design, as one app developer put it, "our challenge is how can we make sure that people get into the product as quickly as possible" (Melendez, 2014). At the heart of a screened intimacy is precisely the ambiguity or ability to encapsulate and present *both options* in an either/or binary mode, which allows individuals to identify moments that might obstruct intimacy, as instances of creating it instead. But people do not have the time or inclination to pause and sort it out. As one dating and relationships columnist repeatedly reminds her readers,

> Tinder is all about the immediate response . . . Tinder is a game played at warp speed . . . This is not the time to find out about her hopes and dreams or see how she feels about full moons. (A. David, 2013)

The action or gesture of the swipe itself specifically demands a firm, decisive, micro-action. Easily done with one finger, or thumb, browsing and swiping belong to the "slide to unlock" convention seen on the mobile screen when users want to start using their mobile devices. The verb "swipe" can be a synonym for blow, rob, hit, or strike: something that is quick, easy, and transient. If gestures denote practices, they also inform habits of thought: "Tinderers can flick the photo aside, as if the person has been summarily dismissed, banished with a wave of the hand" (Bosker, 2015). Again, Kundera (1992) provides interesting insight:

> A gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of an individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to nobody else), nor can it even be regarded as that person's instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations. (pp. 7-8)

Concluding that, on a planet that has seen billions of people, unique gestures belonging to every individual would be mathematically impossible, Kundera's (1992) character deduces that there are "far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals" and the "shocking conclusion: [that] a gesture is more individual than an individual" (pp. 7-8). The implications of successfully appropriating a gesture then are important. In other words, what the Tinder developers have succeeded in doing is taking a pre-existing gesture and re-inserting it into an individual's repertoire in a predetermined

way. Although swiping (a card) was already charged with meanings such as pay, charge, or open, in dating it now takes on the most elemental binary meaning of yes or no. The negating leftward swipe mimics the turning of a page (finished, done). By reinforcing this already coded motion, Tinder has successfully re-signified the swipe gesture to the extent that it is now often first associated with the app and the approval/disapproval binary.

Since "interfaces are symbolic systems that filter information and actively reshape communication relationships, and also reshape the space in which social interaction takes place" (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 4), mobile interfaces have curatorial power over what becomes visible. Recognizing this, and the indisputable success of the swipe, other apps have been appropriating this UI to offer "everything from employment to puppies to threesomes, [and] rapidly becoming as familiar a part of the mobile ecosystem as the checkbox is to the web" (Melendez, 2014). In the dating arena, Teazies, a hybrid app between Snapchat and Tinder, does not demand a physical thumb swipe: Instead, the rejecting swipe concept is already visually embedded. When a user clicks on the "X" and not on the heart icon, the image animation visually appears to sweep itself away. Because Tinder's LBRTD aspect folds into its implicit promotion of the *swiped* match-up, app designers recognize that "the swipe design's close ties to Tinder can make other swiping products seem less than serious" (Melendez, 2014). Thus, startups have adopted a variety of features to distance themselves and make swipes seem more meaningful (Melendez, 2014).

The acceleration packaged into the UI pattern of swiping works to diminish "a part of the field of perception" (Virilio, 2012, p. 22) for users in terms of reflection, deliberation, or observation. Acceleration today is not about traveling faster; rather it is "about the increasing speed of information transmission" (Armitage, 1999, p. 36). While Virilio (1986) sees the reduction in distances often resulting from acceleration as corresponding to the very "negation of space" (p. 133), Shields (2013) counters that it is not just a matter of negation but "a change to conventional understandings and practices of space, a topological shift which involves time and space: a new cultural topology" (p. 192). This shifted topology is manifested through Wygant's (2014) story of his unsuccessful Tinder experience. He writes,

> I mean after 48 hours I felt a little uglier as a person. In fact, if I wasn't as secure as a person, or I had any issues with looks or social anxiety, 48 hours on Tinder would send me over the edge. You put a picture of yourself up, and after 48 hours, nobody finds you attractive. You've lost all your looks. You no longer have it. The world decided you're ugly. (Wygant, 2014)

Wygant punctuates the space of six sentences and fewer lines with three references to "48 hours" as if this time frame was significant. Exemplifying the topological shift, 48 hours, which until recently indicated an individual was too eager, is now almost excessive time to discover whether someone nearby likes your picture. These feelings and perceptions are reinforced by the constraints of the app, but they tend to become normalized through repetition. Then, is it only a topological matter? After all, his perception of time might resituate itself when no longer relative to the app. Perhaps it is more of a matter of the "logistics of perception" (Bartram, 2004, p. 293) in play.

After sending out 100 hearts and not being contacted, Wygant (2014) wonders, "How are you going to feel about yourself?" He concludes, "If you want to feel lousy about life, spend a day or two on Tinder" (Wygant, 2014). The intensity with which he expresses his disappointment seems out of sync with the actual amount of time it took for his life to "feel lousy" and in which "the world decided" he was ugly. If we take the political economy of speed seriously, Virilio's lens of *Dromology* (Greek for *dromos*) offers insights into "the science of the ride, the journey, the drive, the way" (Armitage, 1999, p. 35). Virilio's linking of time compression with visualizing technology to understand a "new ocular reality" (Bartram, 2004, p. 286) is primarily concerned with acceleration—the acceleration that Tinder's swipe logic encourages, and for some enforces, a split in time between the "real time" of Wygant's activities and the "real time of media interactivity that privileges the 'now'" (Bartram, 2004, p. 294), as framed by the UI constraints. In other words, rather than set the virtual against the real visual experience, Virilio suggests thinking of the co-presence of the two: "They transpear either side of the screen" (p. 294). Power relations within scopic regimes reveal themselves when we examine how features like Tinder's UI impact user's perceptions of co-presence or in the transpearance of real and virtual vision. The swipe logic is based on acceleration as a way of controlling contingency and indeterminacy. The "potential to disrupt subjectivities" (p. 286) as evident in Wygant's case is produced by the aforementioned demand for instantaneous and ubiquitous results in the virtual time field created by the app's constraints. Within these logistics of perception, the co-present time of the screen is actually disproportionately *worth more* to him and works to displace his own time of direct observation and materiality. The expectations influencing Wygant's perception of time in this case are more determined than volitional and more intuitive than rational.

UK scholars Emily Keightley and Anna Reading (2014) propose replacing Virilio's "simple compression and speeding up of time" (p. 295) with a mediated mobilities understanding of temporalities. They conceive of the experience of temporalities as multiple, of different scales and intersecting and interfering with each other through, "mediated processes of connection and disconnection, embodiment and disembodiment and emplacement and displacement" (p. 295). However, Virilio's dromology as a

phenomenological approach is not only sophisticated and complex in its application, but it also takes into account both differential movements and simultaneous ones while refusing to categorize and contain them in measurements such as macro, meso, or micro. While their methodological agenda utilizes concepts like "intermediacy" (p. 295) and is sensitive and appropriate, it is still important to appreciate Virilio's view of "the relationship between the virtual image and the substance of actuality, or the event, it seeks to describe" (Featherstone, 2003 p. 435).

Virilio convinces us that in examining screened intimacies, we still need to address the direct phenomenological aspects of lived experiences. Precisely, what users must work to retain or reclaim in the swipe logic of either/or is "The place of invention [which] is a space of transformational encounter, a dynamic in-between" (Massumi, 1992, p. 106) or the time-distance that is eroded by this logic yet remains necessary for meaningful human relations.

Conclusion

As a preliminary and necessarily partial foray, we have provided a snapshot of technosocial relationality, as informed by the swipe UI. We have traced the story-line of the swipe logic to explore the tensions involved in screened intimacies between superficiality and depth, and closeness as a function of duration versus the quick and ephemeral, with the understanding that an analysis of what platforms invite users to do constitutes the ground for understanding of what they actually do.

We asked what screened intimacies might mean in the context of the swipe logic. With the multiple platforms, apps, filters and aesthetic changes, and the almost effortless sharing of these mediated moments, users revealed how they work to communicate *otherwise* through inventive and vernacular uses of the Tinder app. Users knowingly engage in the proposed figuration of intimacy as levitas (volatile, ethereal, and quick), despite its ambiguity. By subverting or playing with its limitations and affordances, many users navigate Tinder through their efforts to assert individual agency and the curatorial self.

At the same time, the swipe logic means that instrumental patterns discursively created through this gesture bind the decision-making powers of users to a binary yes or no. Tinder's platform excludes users from freely defining how they will interact with others and domesticates them by shaping the social dynamics that in turn depend on the platform. With the swipe logic, Tinder's platform features do more than "guide, distort, and facilitate social activity—they also delete some of it . . . They don't just circulate our images and posts; they also algorithmically promote some over others" (Gillespie, 2015, p. 1). Connecting the "design (technical, economic, and political) of platforms and the contours of the public discourses" that they encourage and discourage allows us to conceptualize how "platforms matter" (Gillespie, 2015, p. 1) discursively and materially in influencing attitudes and behaviors through speed and repetition.

In the end, does the subversive acquiescence of people using the app consist only in periodic movements away from transcendence and the sum disruption of subjectivity? Or is this oscillation between moving toward intimacy through vernacular uses of the app, and moving away (when the app economizes users), part of effectively interrupting the ceaseless processes of molarization commoditizing the body? Understanding the self as non-continuous, non-unitary, with fuzzy, porous boundaries and sensitive to social context would mean that reversals of an instrumentalizing objectification process are possible.

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Notes

1. After scathing criticism, Tinder developers scrambled to put together a promotional campaign of real-life Tinder success stories on their homepage.
2. Antecedents like the IBM and BellSouth's *Simon* (a touch screen mobile phone, pager, calendar, scheduler, address book, calculator, sketchpad, and e-mail) were released in 1993; few scholars or others reporting on the 2007 Apple iPhone seemed to be aware of *Simon* and its touch screen user "innovative" interface.
3. If you "Super Like" someone, that person will see that you like him or her before they make the decision to swipe left (and never talk to you) or right (and begin the chat). Super Likes are limited to one use per day. Paying *Tinder Plus* users can Super Like a match up to five times per day.
4. Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) describe this precise feedback loop in "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience.
5. Maclean's Magazine reported that Plenty of Fish was the number 1 online dating sight in sheer volume and traffic in 2008: "With 18 million hits per month in Canada, and 58 million worldwide, it is the nation's most popular dating site. Roughly 1.2 million people visit the site every month in Canada" (Shimo, 2008, p. 8).

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