

Digital Pleasure, “Digitans Couples”

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Abstract

The revolution of hyperconnected society seems to have contributed to the birth of a new type of human being: “Homo Digitans”, a citizen of modernity perpetually bent on the smartphone display and absorbed by the continuous novelties proposed by the Net. Influenced by the digital world, this new type of citizen has acquired new ways of relating both affectively and sexually. The smartphone gives us the possibility to have the Other between thumb and index finger so that our relationships are characterized by immediacy; the fantasy of owning the Other and knowing it in its totality has to do with a dimension of power and not of relationship. To summarize, the virtual connects allows the connection, but the risk is not to realize that we can slip into flattening, into alienation, in the moment when our life online becomes fulfilling and becomes a replacement for the real one. The article introduces also other two neologisms: the “Digital Pleasure” and the “Digitans Couples”.

Keywords: sexting, couples, dating apps, sexuality, social network, cyber-relationships

The revolution of hyperconnected society seems to have contributed to the birth of a new type of human being: “Homo Digitans”, a citizen of modernity perpetually bent on the smartphone display and absorbed by the continuous novelties proposed by the Net. His relational experience appears to travel on a privileged and exclusive relationship with the screen, an intermediary that allows him to get in touch with others in a protected manner. It is clear that this method of interweaving relationships has spread worldwide in an epidemic way. People get to know each other on social networks, chat, fall in love online, exchange photos in private messages, keep “under control” in the Instagram/Whatsapp “stories”, break up by instant messenger. And all this, often, without even ever having met. Why does all this happen? How have technological devices changed the way we talk to each other? To what needs does this type of attitude respond? The questions could continue indefinitely, but the most important of these appears to be: is it possible to speak of a “digital pleasure”? To begin the examination, we must ask ourselves what we mean by “pleasure”. In addition to the common and widespread forms of courtesy that we often use in our convivial language (e.g. please to meet you, I was pleased, it was a pleasure) Treccani Dictionary defines it as the feeling of great satisfaction that comes from the fulfilment of desires, physical or spiritual, or aspirations of various kinds. This may support the hypothesis that where a behaviour is replicated and spreads like wildfire, this has the ability to respond to our need, manifest or latent. Pleasure is therefore not reducible only to what pleases us, delights us, or that meets our taste, but to a much more complex entity, which regards aspects that are not immediately visible. Pleasure is also linked to a dimension of fun, distraction, involvement, and in this sense the use of technological devices (mobile phones, smartphones, tablets, PCs) occupies more and more time in our lives. It has already

been highlighted how leisure and fun can play an important role in extending the time we spend in front of the screen, but it would be an understatement to imagine that at the base there is only this. Riva [1] spoke of “interreality”, to mean that hybrid social space in which we can make the digital world interact with the physical one, while Floridi [2,3] coined the term “Onlife” to refer to the new experience of a hyper-connected reality within which no longer makes sense to wonder whether you can be online or offline. As the statistics clearly show, every day we spend so much time on the Net that we cannot disregard how much this attitude affects our identity, whether it concerns its formation or its modification. The cognitive and relational reconfiguration induced for example by the advent of social networks, according to Riva [1,4,5], is based on three fundamental elements: removes the body from the interaction and the meanings it brings with it altering the ability to perceive and express emotions; modifies cognitive and social patterns of organization and implementation of action/ communication influencing our perception of the situation; makes “allocentric” (independent from me) the social networks of which I am part and “egocentric” (related to me) communications they generate. The smartphone has a deep ambivalent nature: it allows us to create infinite new interactions with others (of a virtual nature) and to interrupt relations with others at will (belonging to the real sphere). The mobile phone is a powerful distraction, sometimes even a destroyer, if we refer to interpersonal relationships. It is possible to think of the phenomenon of phubbing, term that comes from crisis between phone and snubbing (snub with the phone) which refers to the behaviour of those people who isolate themselves from a conversation/interaction with one or more real people, to chat (via messaging services) with other people or simply to surf online, committing to do something else. This behaviour has been the subject of research by the University of Kent, demonstrating that an increase in the level of phubbing corresponds to a deterioration in the quality of the relationship, making it unsatisfactory. Pezzica [6] reports that the authors of the study consider this attitude as a real form of social exclusion, which threatens, in those who suffer it, some basic human needs such as belonging, self-esteem, sense of accomplishment and control. As if the indirect communication that is provided to those in front of us was: “what happens on the Net is more interesting than you”. Obviously, I do not refer to the gesture of checking an urgent communication that maybe we were waiting for (or other important activities), but at the repetition of the attitude of those who find it more stimulating to check notifications or check what is happening “elsewhere”, than compared to communicating with those close to them. Another “facilitation” that we can obtain using the smartphone is the appreciation for our person. We can obtain a rapid discharge of dopamine simply by receiving compliments to a photo of us by perfect strangers, gaining appreciation for our post published, feeling “part of a group” because we shared a link in line with current thinking. We could therefore say that, after leisure, fun, modification of our identity and appreciation, a fifth element that the smartphone provides us is the control, or at least an “intriguing” perception of control, understood as the possibility of disposing of the Other at our leisure. Live and online. As Bauman [7] acutely points out, we live in a liquid society in which human connections have become more frequent and more superficial, more intense and shorter, so much so that they do not have the chance to turn into bonds. The proximity can be interrupted simply by pressing a button (think about how easy it is, for example during a fight, “block” a person on the phonebook to be no longer reachable). Easy to create, easy to truncate. This boundless freedom has profoundly changed both the relationality and the sexuality. We see daily how technological devices affect the “creation” of new couples, change the dynamics of those long standing and how the digital revolution has contributed to new forms of sexual experimentation. The feeling is that all modern relationships are pervaded, however, by a lack of boundaries and respect. They are not simply liquid, because impalpable and lacking in consistency, they seem to lack the “curious detachment” that would deserve the relationship with the stranger, meant as the Other, the different from me. The transparency society makes everything very clear, visible, but without charm. In techno-mediated dialogue (and as often happens also in the vis-a-vis one) there is less and less space for distance, the communicative structure is direct, you immediately seek confidence, the You, a reason to be united, as if to be coveted was a quick and reassuring proximity, but fake, contrived, mellifluous. The different from himself seems to live a double destiny: or to be refused/removed or to be immediately traced back to friendships. The lack of mystery removes much space to eroticism, which instead feeds on emotion, on tension, attraction to what is unexplored. Han [8] argues that through digital media we approach the Other to cancel the distance to the point of no longer enjoying his presence, but to make him disappear, to make him equal to us. Eros presupposes an asymmetric relationship with the Other. Without distance, without curiosity, we witness the erosion of the Other, which is reduced to a known object, always the same, easily available. In this way, it becomes an object of consumption, ready to use, of immediate gratification.

The smartphone gives us the possibility to have the Other between thumb and index finger. The fantasy of owning it and knowing it in its totality has to do with a dimension of power and not of relationship. The lack of boundaries, respect and tension towards what is different from me leads therefore to the atrophy of fantasy for the Other and consequently to the agony of Eros. An object always present, always homogeneous, always available loses its attractiveness, as if the digital revolution had transformed us into children constantly looking for the “new toy”, because we are no longer passionate about the previous one. In essence, where there is no absence, there is no desire. The “hyper” society (hyper-connected, hyper-visible, hyper-assimilating) seems to be much closer to the dimension of need than to that of desire, rather specifically to the creation of a need that must be immediately gratified. Hungry? There’s Just Eat! Want to meet someone? Download Tinder! Want to watch a TV series? Turn on Netflix! Alter [9] suggests that human behaviour is driven by a succession of reflections on costs and benefits that determine whether an action will be repeated several times or never and when the benefits outweigh the costs, it is difficult to avoid continuing to replicate an action, especially when it touches the right “neurological keys”. Those who create and refine technological devices know exactly what areas of our brain need to stimulate, what makes the instrumentation palatable, what content sounds and colours make irresistible consultation and reiteration of the behaviour. It is no coincidence that modern digital instruments can be easily used even by infants (as clearly revealed in the video “A magazine is an Ipad that doesn’t work” in which a one-year-old girl, after using an Ipad, unnecessarily clicks on a paper magazine, and later on his own leg, trying to start the multimedia contributions as happened a few minutes before with the interactive screen). Following this initial analysis, the scenario that seems to emerge is that of a demarcation between needs and desires, between immediacy and expectation, between quick enjoyment and tolerance of frustration. The need (product of modernity) seems to refer to a dimension of urgency, compulsiveness, immediate gratification; desire (result of experience) seems to call to a distance, a lack, that generates the search for the desired object. The link between eroticism, pleasure and desire risks therefore to remain stranded, stuck in the “dry” of comfort zone. It seems that the modern human being has developed a pleasure in typing rather than a digital pleasure. We touch the smartphone screen more than the body of the loved one [10]. The display has replaced the skin. We are so absorbed by the touchscreen that we are forgetting the beauty of “human touch”. Long-term couples do not differ much from singles. Little touch and little contact. Certainly, we can say that the relations of the new millennium are moving on unthinkable scenarios until a few years ago (just think that the first iPhone was presented by Steve Jobs in January 2007). Thinking of combining the concept of sexuality with the virtual world might seem an oddity, almost an oxymoron. In reality, the concept of virtual sexuality is only theoretically a contradiction in terms. We know that the erotic-sexual experience refers to the dimensions of corporeity, union and contact, while the virtual experience can be associated with those of distance, fiction and imagination. Paradoxically, sexuality and the virtual world are in close contact much more than one think, especially in recent years, where the consumption and enjoyment of sexual material online is growing dramatically, thanks to the possibility of using PCs, tablets and smartphones in every corner of our cities, an event that can occur either in a waiting condition (e.g. at a bus stop, in a medical office), or in a state of motion (e.g. while passenger of a train or airplane), emblem of a perpetually connected society. As evidenced by Cirillo and Scodreggio [11], sexuality on the Net foresees that the role of the body is central but ubiquitous; without body but with body: imagined, fantasized, photographed, videotaped, shown live or deferred, however involved, activated, excited, presentified. A body, as well as the relationship with the Other, which undergoes an idealization and a virtualization. The “indirect” relationship, that is mediated by technological supports, takes time away from the vis-a-vis relationship and allows the same person to feel connected with several people at the same time, without really being in a relationship with anyone. Even the body, as pointed out for modern relationships, seems to have turned into an ambivalent object, to be shown online but to hide the real presence, which can be “avoided” thanks to the technology. Let’s think about the use of some social networks where it is even possible to start a conversation with another user without ever being in contact with the photos of our interlocutor, but also to the use of the webcam during a chat, where the body of the Other is represented and viewable, but without the possibility of perceiving its posture, the movements or skin contact. The technological support eliminates distances, making “others” feel very close, but in but actually keeping everyone at a safe distance. A body reduced to an idea of presence. Being simultaneously “everywhere but nowhere” is also changing the way people perceive themselves in reality. The virtual encounter therefore replaces the physical-real one, with even harmful consequences, in fact there where the body was to give with its materiality the signs to decipher the quality of messages and

intermediaries, today in most exchanges the vastness of possible communication intentions undergoes a strong level of impoverishment. To witness, for example, the pervasive adoption of the iconic language in the exchanges of messages in chat: emoticons are now the “faces” with which to interpret the richness and nuances that are hidden behind our broadcaster, its punctuations and its sighs. So, we’re talking about a body that needs to feel reachable, accessible, but that at the same time fears the Other, which must be kept at a safe distance, and that can be removed from itself simply by disconnecting. Showing yourself to the other person through retouched photos that promote a self-image that lives up to expectations, is much easier than it is to reveal one’s “imperfections” in the real encounter. The use of digital sexuality, including sexting, could therefore represent a protective strategy towards narcissistic fragility, where the need for valorisation and reflection takes on greater importance than the pleasure of physical encounter with the Other. What is sexting? This neologism comes from crisis between the words sex (sex) and texting (sending text messages) and refers to the action of sending erotic-sexual messages, which may also include photos and/or videos of naked/semi-naked or portraying the person in sexually explicit attitudes (e.g. masturbation, sexual intercourse, foreplay with a stable or occasional partner). It can therefore concern an exchange of messages within a chat between (mainly) two people in which they can be: communicate their erotic fantasies; built and fantasized sensual-sexual scenes to be realized together to be made together with the interlocutor; show images of yourself (or taken from the web) that have a clear passionate connotation. The interaction described serves to stimulate one’s own (or reciprocal) desire or to increase and amplify the sexual excitement of the participants in the conversation. This type of erotic dialogue can affect both teenagers and adults, young and not. So, I try to outline the four possible scenarios in which in which sexting is usually carried out [10]:

- Within a stable, dated, established pair (can be experienced as a game, a novelty, to give vitality and new life to the relationship);
- Within a couple in formation, who may have already met live or is about to do so (can be used for example for three reasons: to experience the level of “tuning” and compatibility in the sexual field; to fight for the fear of possible sexual encounter with the other person and to enter into contact with the body of the Other in a “filtered”, becoming a defensive ploy to avoid possible “disappointments”; to “test” the erotic preferences of the interlocutor and provoke him, in order to understand how far you can go with him/her);
- Within an exclusively “digital” couple, who knows that they do not have a “real” future (can be used as a “diversion”, e.g. in people already engaged, sexually bored by their relationship couple but they do not want to question/endanger their stable relationship. Another hypothetical scenario may be characterized by users who have met through a social network or application and chat from different cities, putting in advance into account not to never meet;
- “Coercive” sexting (involves sending a sexually allusive comment or photo of their genitals without the least warning and without there is agreement between the people involved. It can also be done against people absolutely unknown, put in place exclusively for the sake of provoking and shocking the interlocutor).

So why is sexting done? What needs does it allow to satisfy? Being able to propose all the motivations involved is not easy, also because it is not easy to compose a complete mosaic that can embrace in a transversal way all the ages that implement this behaviour. It is possible, however, to say that a recurring element is that of experimentation. Whether it is a teenager approaching early erotic experiences or adults who already has a sexual life initiated, sexting allows you to get involved, to explore unknown terrain, to test oneself with images, with the body and above all with words. The experience of stimulating one’s own and others excitement can be a powerful moment of personal gratification, which can lead to the willingness to put into action again this type of practice. You can do sexting because the ability to write from behind a screen facilitates the lowering of inhibitions and allows the expression of terms and fantasies that you might be afraid or ashamed to externalize; this way also becomes more convenient to introduce topics of sensual character and sexual, confess their own tastes, fight shyness, flirt, show their own your body and increase the chance to “impress”. Sometimes you agree to sexting with a partner or another contact/user simply because it is asked, to consent to an explicit request of the interlocutor and not “disappoint” expectations; other times it is proposed to “melt the ice”, where simple sending a “chaste” photo can actually become an excuse to start a

conversation and then have a more intense conversation. Sex in chat also allows some people to have a confirmation of the pleasantness of one’s physical appearance and of having an injection of self-esteem according to based on the comments of the interlocutor (a reinforcement in some cases even stronger than the amount of “like” you received, because the feedback could not only include the fact of pleasing someone but also to excite him). Sexting is also implemented to reach more people simultaneously (especially for single people who use dating apps, this gives the opportunity to trace a profile that comes close to your “identikit”) or to seduce and feel desirable (this mechanism can also trigger in people who are romantically engaged, but who do not feel desired by the partner and seek attention elsewhere). As pointed out several times, the simplicity and convenience of the digital medium represents a great ally in creating and facilitating this type of connections, even in the also in the sphere of sexuality. So far, we have talked about a consensual sexting and mutual sexting, but we know that it is not always so. It can happen in fact to receive sexually explicit images, such as the photo of the genitals, without prior notice and without having provided their consent, even by complete strangers. Usually we talk about cyberflashing to refer to that exhibitionist practice of sending their intimate photos to an interlocutor who does not expect it. This can happen either in an online conversation where you are talking about something else or choosing in a totally random way the recipient of the images (using features like Bluetooth or even Airdrop - which allows Apple device owners to share files with other Apple smartphones nearby - and sending unsolicited images to other users, e.g. on trains or other public transports). The photos often portray their penis, to the point of being called “dick pic”, but not infrequently it happens that to send shots without warning are also women (in that case we talk about “clit pic”, referring to the word clitoris).

So why do some people choose to suddenly send these nude photos? Some, as pointed out earlier, do it simply as a source of excitement and to increase their chances of finding a partner to share erotic fantasies with. However, what seems to discern coercive sexting, which takes the form of harassment, from consensual and shared sexting, appears to be a view based on a misconception (o wrong belief), that is to assume that people get excited at the sight of other people’s genitals. This kind of opinion, often male, assumes that simply showing body parts can necessarily be a pleasant and stimulating element for our interlocutor and that this type of communication will then lead to sexual contact in real life. Showing an erect penis can also represent a need to show off one’s virility, to impose control over the relationship, claiming a sort of supremacy over the other person. Instead, it could conceal the very fear of not feeling up to it and of having to show their “strong side” looking for an appreciation. This attention to the image, to concreteness, overshadows the aspect of emotions, which appear to be a neglected element within erotic chats, whether it is a sought-after interaction or one actively undergone. When sexting is lived in a playful spirit and pleasantly shared with a partner it can create feelings of excitement, curiosity, understanding, experimentation, self-awareness, while if the conversation or sending photos is not in line with our desire and we feel forced or forced to come into contact with obscene images and speeches, one can experience feelings of embarrassment, pain, disgust, anger, helplessness, disappointment, humiliation. coming into contact with erotic images in an unwanted way can contribute to important repercussions on contact with the sphere of sexuality. In this sense, it becomes necessary to open a parenthesis on the phenomenon of grooming, better known as underage solicitation. The use of this word has a particular story, in fact in English the word groom initially referred to “boy”. Subsequently the term recalled “a man of an inferior position; a domestic, a servant and, in particular, the person in charge of taking care of the horses”; while starting from the beginning of the last century, grooming has been used in the field of ethology in reference to “an animal behaviour of reciprocal cleaning, taking care”. Only in recent years the term became to be used to indicate “approaching friendly and trying to influence (a child), for the purpose of sexually abusing him”.

Article 609-undecies of the Italian penal code defines solicitation (of a minor) as “any act aimed at gaining the trust of the minor through tricks, flattery or threats implemented also through the use of the Internet or other networks or means of communication” and since 2012 it has been configured as a crime, i.e. since the Lanzarote Convention (law 172) was ratified. The comment on grooming allows us to underline the obvious difference between a “reviving” sexting, which performs the function of awakening, reviving, stimulating the relationship and which is experienced as a moment of knowledge and sharing of one’s erotic imagination, and a “predatory” sexting,

where the Other is perceived as an object to prevaricate, invade, use, manipulate. In the first case, the pleasure is experienced in two and built together; in the second, erotic chats take on tones of morbidity and arrogance. Another sensitive issue concerns “revenge porn”, a term that defines the act of sharing intimate images or videos of a person without his consent, implemented both online and offline and can be considered in all respects a “non-consensual pornography” but also a “sexual abuse through images”.

To be considered revenge (for Italian laws), the presence of an ex-partner is therefore necessary, who (following the conclusion of the sentimental story between the two) publishes intimate images that should have remained private in the name of revenge. I appreciate the clarification that was made on the term by Caletti [12], who speaks of revenge porn as a “controversial neologism”, underlining that the secondary and non-consensual distribution of the material in question can take place regardless of a desire to revenge (i.e. “revenge” by the person who spreads). Furthermore, the word “porn” can generate a further source of victimization of the person who suffers this injury to the personal sphere.

Other legal systems have therefore tried to formulate different definitions: some maintaining the terms, such as “non-consensual pornography” or “involuntary porn” (United States); others by renouncing them in favour of other words such as “image-based sexual exploitation” (Australia) or “image-based sexual abuse” (England), not so much to create sterile terminological debates as to better place certain conducts in specific areas of punishability. To sum up, the essential characteristics of revenge porn are: “the consensual creation of intimate or sexual images within a couple context; the non-consensual publication of the same by one of the members of the couple (in Italy generally men are used to); the aim pursued by the former partner who publishes the images to take revenge following the breakup - often stormy (“vicious breakup”) - of the sentimental relationship”.

When intimate and sexual contents are therefore disclosed to harm, mock and persecute, we place the Other in a condition of inferiority and weakness. Placing his most private part in front of the “public pillory/shaming rack” denotes a lack of empathy and above all hides the need to cancel the other person to feel stronger, however exploiting violence and oppression.

The pressure to which the victim is subjected is often not only moral, but goes beyond the boundaries and turns into economic demand: we talk about sextortion, contraction of sex and extortion, sexual-based extortion. On the Internet, more and more people are doing these ruthless actions to extort money from the victims of blackmail or, in cases of bullying, to attack and frighten them. This type of practice represents a very linear cybercrime: the extortionist simulates an online identity, contacts the victim (e.g. on a dating site) and establishes a virtual relationship with the person. Once the victim’s trust has been won, he convinces her to share erotic images and videos or have sex on webcams, and then threatens to spread content on social networks and offline and ruin her social reputation. In exchange for silence, the blackmailer demands monetary compensation. These practices have little to do with pleasure and represent a dangerous drift of the digital world, of which we should be more assiduously informed. There has been talk of dangerous drifts in the area of online sexuality, but another important issue related to the relationship with smartphones is the so-called “pathologies” of hyperconnection [10]:

- Nomophobia (neologism that puts together the terms no mobile, no phone and phobia, fear), which describes the uncontrolled anxiety and concern to remain without the cell phone (or without battery) or not having the opportunity to use it and feel consequently cut off from the world. A fear so deep-rooted that it leads some people to use or consult their mobile phone even at inappropriate times, such as during religious services or even during their sexual activity (10% in the meantime, 35% immediately after, according to a survey of 10,000 American couples quoted by sex therapist Maureen McGrath). Many people even suffer from the phantom vibration syndrome, which means that they mistakenly think that the phone is vibrating in their pocket, indicating the arrival of some message or email. A phenomenon that occurs when the phone is constantly in contact with the body until it becomes part of it, perceiving and exchanging for cell phone vibrations those that are actually small muscle spasms;
- f.o.m.o. (fear of missing out, the fear of losing something, of being cut off from the lives of others) or f.o.n.k. (fear of not knowing, the fear of not knowing), a behaviour that drives people to constantly check their social media profiles (e.g. Facebook or Instagram) or

status updates of their friends and contacts for fear of missing out on something interesting about their activities. The unceasing online connection places these subjects in a vicious circle: the more time they spend connected, the less time they can dedicate to their existence in a satisfying way. The continuous stimulation that also comes from colleagues, friends or relatives who send particular videos, catchphrases and memes via instant messaging can reinforce this need not to miss any news. The more easily you are distracted, the more the “seduction” that comes from the visual and sound stimulus that comes from the phone can become strong (in an Italian documentary, a person talked about the page of a book as if it were “dead”, that is, without external links and without the liveliness that can have a device connected to the Internet). In addition to notifications, an incentive also comes from fashion: in fact, a hi-tech bag has been created that connects to your smartphone via bluetooth to make sure that the handles of the bag can send a vibration signal for each message received;

- Vamping, by vamp, vampire, refers to the tendency to stay up late at night to devote time to the relationship with online activities (chat, listen to music, watch videos on Youtube). This is a behaviour that mainly affects teenagers, but is also spreading among adults and young adults (especially thanks to the spread of binge watching, or the binge of episodes of TV series, especially on Netflix). The reduction or deprivation of sleep obviously has negative repercussions on intellectual performance, there are in fact poor attention and productivity at school or work, increased nervousness and irritability, widespread fatigue and weakness, dizziness and headaches, alteration of the sleep-wake cycle. One aspect that is little stressed is that some of these symptoms are caused by prolonged contact with the blue light coming from the screen. The new light sources (e.g. LEDs and low-consumption light bulbs) emit a greater amount of blue light than the traditional light sources of the past and nowadays this type of lighting is emitted by all screens of PCs, tablets, smartphones and TVs. Overexposure to “high energy blue light” can contribute to the appearance of redness, dryness and irritation to the eyes (also due to the lower frequency of blinking) and an increase in insomnia caused by the alteration in the secretion of melatonin (the electronic devices activate and stimulate the neurons of the brain following the modification in the lack of production of the hormone involved in the regulation of the sleep-wake cycle). To limit the consequences of excessive exposure to the blue light of the displays, it is advisable to take visual breaks, detaching the gaze from light sources or using goggles, with special lenses capable of filtering rays harmful to the eyes. One last factor to consider is the lighting of the room in which you are located, especially in the evening hours the blue light of the device should not be the only source of lighting. The continuation of this behaviour can have several negative consequences for our sight. Contemporary culture appreciates and promotes speed and readiness, but never disconnecting becomes an inexhaustible source of stress. This continuous pursuit of time helps to make it more difficult to know how to cut intervals, breaks, break to devote to us, both in the relationship with yourself and with others: there is always a phone ringing, a Whatsapp message to answer, an urgent email that arrives a few minutes before the end of the working shift. It seems increasingly difficult to find moments of silence and spaces for decompression. Some devices are even not turned off even at night, in some cases by practical order (e.g. the alarm clock is not activated if the phone is not working) but often also for the fear of not reading/ responding to communications in time. The smartphone therefore seems to have become a “digital transitional object” for all ages, its material presence reassures us, reassures us (in psychology the term transitional object was coined by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott and represents a physical object, which provides psychological comfort to the child, gradually replacing the mother-son bond: the most common examples are dolls, teddy bears or blankets). Holding it in your hand, touching the screen, being in touch with the external world made of links or virtual contacts gives us the impression of never feeling alone, reinforcing on the contrary our exclusion from the surrounding world. Nomophobia can become a real addiction to smartphones when the “simple” fear leaves room for manifestations that make suppose a real behavioural addiction. It is possible to begin to consider it as such at the moment when some clear changes occur, summarized by the psychologist Mark Griffiths[13]: the pre-eminence (behaviour becomes the most important activity in the person’s life, and tends to dominate thoughts, feelings and actions); the influence on mood (the emotional consequences on the behaviour of the individual, which is often a way of dealing with problems and is described as a very exciting or relaxing experience); tolerance (the need to intensify behaviour and therefore also spend more time to achieve the desired effects); withdrawal symptoms (characterized by moods and/or unpleasant physical

consequences such as agitation, irritability and mood instability, resulting from not being able to act on behaviour); the conflict (given by the discordance between the need of the person to realize the behaviour and the incompatibility: with himself, given by the feeling of losing control; with other people close to him for excessive involvement in behaviour; with other important activities such as work, social life, hobbies and interests); relapse (the presence of repeated relapses in undertaking behaviour disproportionately after periods of increased control). This type of addiction (renamed new addictions) has a “sneaky” nature, they are in fact constituted by socially accepted attitudes and their negative consequences can therefore remain unnoticed for a long time. The fact that many people spend most of their days communicating through screens, instead of doing so through face-to-face interaction negatively affects the ability to relate in person and especially in the ability to read and understand the emotions of others. Apps and social networks are also used to find and seduce new partners and allow the proliferation of “escapades” that lead to relational situations not well defined, that cause misunderstandings with respect to an actual sentimental involvement by one of the two. There is no need to resort to specific dating apps, the ability to use private messaging of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram allows many users to talk to each other and start chatting and flirting. Online chats are now part of everyday life, most likely there are no days when there are no exchanges of messages with someone who belongs to the narrowest circle (e.g. family, friends, partners) or extended (colleagues, contacts on social networks) of each. In this case, however, I want to emphasize the use of online dialogues put in place solely to court someone. I try to summarize and report some of the distinctive features of the chat, which could lead people to prefer them over courtship in person [10]:

- Disinhibition: online it’s easier to tell, to confess, to dedicate oneself to arguments or speeches that would be difficult to undertake;
- Process of Idealization: it can occur with extreme ease and constitutes a risk, since you can frequently transfer to the interlocutor a set of qualities that you actively seek in a partner or would like to find in a new acquaintance;
- No time limit: it is possible to chat at any time of the day, especially at night (in some cases until falling asleep with the phone in hand), without the need to make trips at times that would make it much more difficult to meet;
- No limit of place and distance: you can write while you are everywhere (e.g. at work, on public transport, at the gym, waiting for a course at the restaurant);
- More time available to reply: during a chat you have much more time to think and process a response (e.g. deciding the words to be used, calmly articulating the sentences, having the possibility to correlate the communications with an emoticon despite not reflecting the real mood of the sender);
- No embarrassment: the ability to speak in the absence of the corporeality of the Other allows a dialogue free from resistance, more fluid and less awkward;
- Courage: the disinhibition that emerges online helps to make even shy people more inclined to pull out and express their thoughts more easily;
- Intimacy: talking for a long time, with the same person, confiding and telling parts of himself, creates that climate of “familiarity” that in the long run makes the exchange of jokes confidential and confidential;
- Ability to talk to multiple people in parallel: unlike live meetings that require physical presence and exclusivity, the fluidity given by the connection allows you to chat with multiple people at the same time or on the same day without having to give up any “flirting attempt”;
- Possibility of showing himself better than he really is: being able to expose himself in small doses and in a “reasoned”; way in really making himself known, allows the initial idealization to continue;
- Confidence: the distance from the other person and the inability to see the reactions in real time allows you to go further, also to test the replicas of the interlocutor and verify his liking for what is communicated;

- Convenience: apart from the “premium” versions of some apps, chats are mostly free and easily accessible;
- Reversibility: messaging services provide the possibility of deleting messages even after sending them, for example, making some unhappy jokes disappear and preventing the other person can read it even after having “spoken”;
- Sense of protection: the chat is experienced as a welcoming refuge, in which the Other can play the role of the reassuring element, at their disposal, which can be used in times of need;
- Little emotional and temporal investment: you perceive not to risk anything if a flirtation fails you can quickly disconnect (often without even having to give too many explanations).

The feeling is that a society is being created that is reinforcing a dangerous vicious circle. It is no coincidence that Bauman points out that modern man describes himself as immersed in networks, connections, networks instead of relations and relationships. The network symbolically and concretely indicates a context from which you enter and exit with relative ease, in which you keep connected but at the same time using free navigation, you connect and interrupt communications at will. Virtual relationships seem sparkling, cheerful, light and characterized by disengagement, but, according to the Polish sociologist, the ease of setting up and the interruption at the request of the same does not reduce the risks, simply distributes them differently (along with the anguish). The “hit-and-run” relationships spread quickly, those based on rapid acquaintance, as well as their epilogue. The impression is that even in relationships we are witnessing the logic of the “buffet”, or the possibility of having a large number of courses of which you taste a bit of everything, remaining temporarily satiated but never satisfied. It is not by chance that we have previously talked about the devouring mode, that is, a consumerist attitude towards relationships. We see the spread of relational structures based on lack of commitment and emotional involvement, with ways of relating focused on a hybrid aspect halfway between love and friendship, such as “friends with benefits” or “situationships”. Friendships that involve a mutual sexual attraction but never borders on a stronger emotional investment. This type of interaction, based on a free sexuality released from the “burden” of the affective sphere, therefore represent those situations in which the friendship relationship is enriched with a new guise, linked to a playful sexuality and free from the component of exclusivity (jealousy is banished), or from situations arising as a result of a sexual attraction that over time turn into a bond of friendship. Usually “friends with benefits” make it clear that what they will do will be sex without feeling, just to protect themselves and defend themselves from all the “complications” that a love relationship can involve. So modern relationships are in danger of becoming so liquid that soon pass to the “gaseous” state, quickly evaporate. Who never really engages in a relationship, it’s also denying the possibility of growing up and risk getting stuck in a self-reported phase: the relationship exists until it can bring me something positive, as long as it is useful to me, as soon as some nodes will come to the surface, you will “go outside the net” and will let go even before having to face the difficulties and the commitment that a relationship requires. If we consider the existence of “Homo Digitans”, we should also talk about “Digitans Couples”, all the new relations who were born and grown up on the Net in the last decade. Bauman’s warning was that when a relationship between two people is driven only by the desire, the relationship follows the model of shopping. Likewise other products, is made to be consumed on the spot, its essence is to be able to unpack without any problems. If cars, phones and PCs in perfect condition and still working are thrown away without remorse as soon as new and updated versions are placed on the market, why “digital modern” relations should make exceptions to this “rule”?

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