

Perception in the Digital Age: Very Analog Experience of this Digital Intimacy

*cloud puff thunder heart fire water flow electricity
oceans puddles connect heartbeat chest tug body buzz
lost breath chemical reaction eyes eyes eyes movement
open a hand a palm a chest night to morning a sunrise
a hug a goodbye that lingers to become a hello a
beginning a pull a tug beauty and blooms and messages
in bottles or phones or carrier pigeons a plane that
won't take off soon enough and:*

How is it that I've come to feel these things
The world in my belly in my chest

How is it that you are inside me

This is digital intimacy

What? Staring into a pixelated black void and
convincing yourself you're lying next to another
human, looking into their eyes?

Yes, it works sometimes.

For ten days she and I shared physical space and
passing awkward conversations and an interconnectedness
flowing underneath in the cracks of a group dynamic.
Then we had one night. I opened my palm to her, and

with that a chest, wide and gooey. Then we left the
shared physical location, 737 miles apart.

For five days, we texted. Then finally we called.
Nervous, shaky voices. Then FaceTime. We stay up all
night talking, to fall asleep, to her slowing breath on
the other end of the line.

The talk that leads to touching, a natural flow.
She's breathing on the other end. Not the slow breath
of sleeping, but it's quickening, shortening. Losing it.

I couldn't sleep last night, so I laid in bed scrolling
through her Facebook photos.

How is it that a backlit arrangement of pixels can
burn me so deeply in my chest and stomach? How
does this image, no larger than 2" by 4", have the
ability to break me so?

Where were we? I was alone in my bed in Tennessee,
and she's alone in hers many states away. It'd take me
ten days to walk to her.

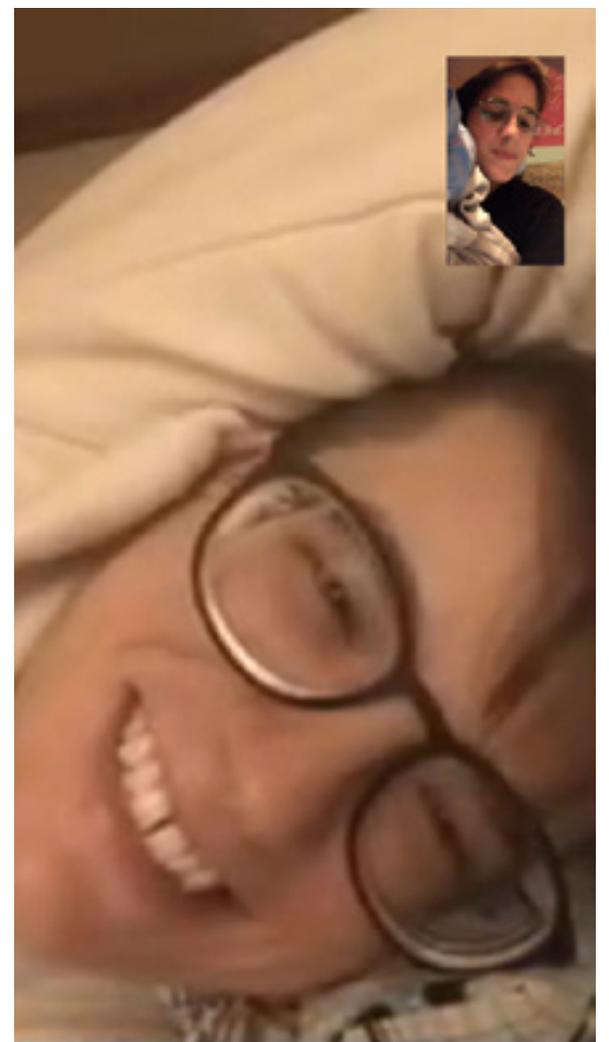
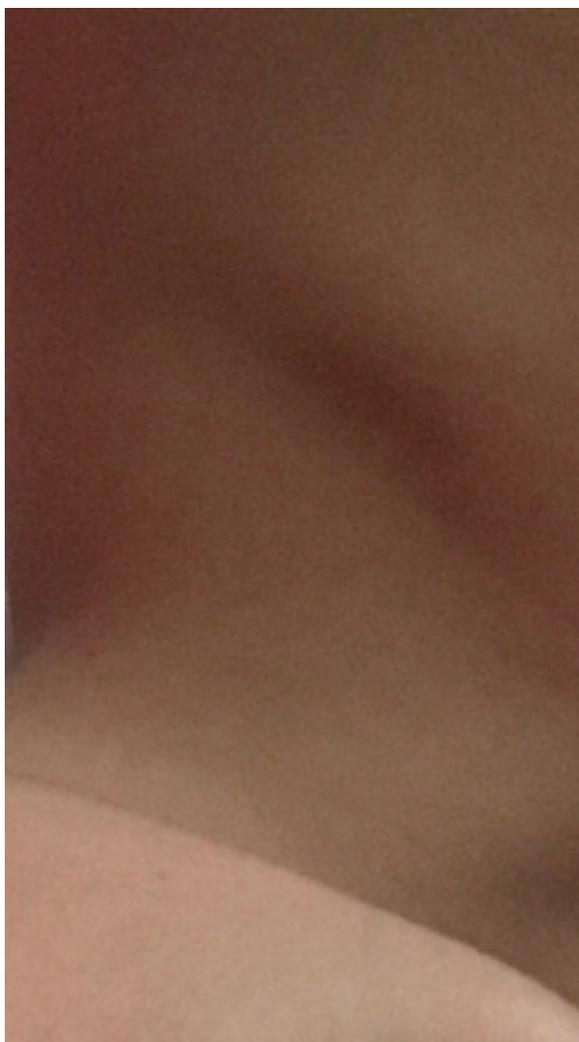
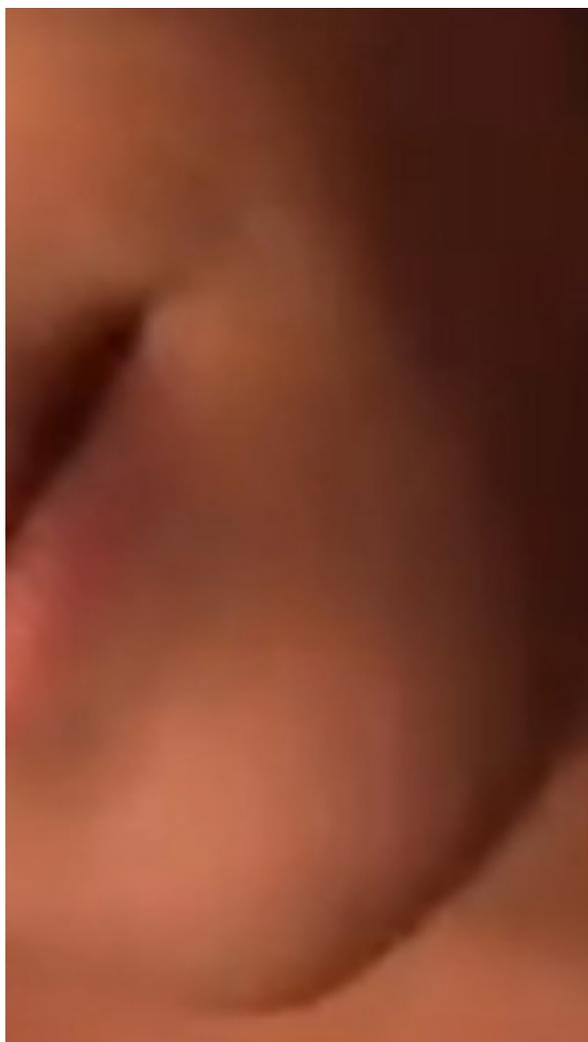
And what are we looking at? I'm looking at a glowing
iPhone screen, larger than my palm but not by much, and
she her phone. Both of us plugged into a wall, distracted
by our own smaller thumbnail hiding in the corner.

Sometimes you're fully there, sometimes you wander.
I guess that's like IRL (in real life).

Digitally, some electric impulse translates to her voice,
her breath, her moans on this end of the line. It journeys
to the sky and back (in my childlike understanding of
how this whole electronic communication thing works),
the kind of magic suited for two queers falling into Big
Feelings. Some invisible phone line connects us, just
as I swear there is some string tied inside my chest
that she tugs on, and I the same to her. Somehow,
while 99 percent of our communication has been
technologically mediated, I can feel her feelings,
through the screens, the lines, the space that
separates us physically.

We talk and text and dream about the ways we
want to touch and fuck and cum and kiss. Our texts
become a call and response poem, what I am doing
to you/what I want you to do to me/what I will do
when I see you/what I am feeling right now/etc.

We imagine our bodies and how they touch each
other, how they move. I may interact with a pixelated
representation of her, which seems like more of a
boundary, a constraint, but then there is the freedom
of creating our bodies. My queer body touches her
queer body in some other space we create. Here, the
digital facilitates a queer potential: our bodies can be



all possibility in what they are, what they do, and how we communicate that to each other in this digital utopian hallucination of our relation to another.

I'm falling in love, but the words hang in my chest, pushing up my throat into my mouth, when we hover on the phone, breathing into each other's ears at such a distance. I hold the words, because I want to share them IRL. I want to keep them in my chest until the right moment. (This essay seems a risky endeavor.) I'm falling in love, but part of me needs confirmation from the IRL reunion. After all, after this month of digital interaction and exploration, what will it feel like in person? How will we be when we share physical space? When we finally touch? When we drop the screens?

I'm waiting with Big Words and Big Feelings boiling up in me.

"I'm all wrapped up in my chargers," she said.

I never felt such deep transcendent feelings mediated through technology. I'm supposedly a digital artist. How is it that digitally mediated art rarely entrances me the way this human has? Why is it so hard for me to fall in love with art on a screen?

Maybe this dance with our perceptions as some

gleaming, remarkable, honest, bizarre, careful, tough but mushy, calm, unique, , sweet,

at the end it says it's best not to rely on adjectives tho

i like that

i like the way it says it

Mmmmm cloud puff thunder heart
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phones or carrier pigeons a plane
that won't take off soon enough
and;

:)adsfjhkl w;)ow

i feel entranced by the way you just did that

it just came out of thin air out of you



hallucination of touching another body through digital sight and sound is the tension for digital art to embrace. The digital woos us into its utopia of possibility and potentiality, where we waver between falling completely into it, while resisting, holding out for some real aesthetic experience. A reality check pulls us out, only for the glow to entrance us once again. It is real and it is not real: like falling in love, with its strange and wonderful ability to radically shift perception.

After all, it is my Very Analog Experience of this Digital Intimacy that leads to these Very Big Feelings.

Sept. 6, 2017

Last night we talked around words. We talked around the words we aren't saying, the word that she accidentally let slip, retreated, found other words. I've been holding them in my chest, feeling them in my mouth, saying them in my head, over and over, and feeling them feeling them feeling them, but holding onto them. I told her a few nights ago that I had words and feelings in my chest and mouth that I wanted to give her when I saw her.

And that's just it. We sit with these words and feelings in our bodies and minds and hearts, and we're holding onto them, because the phone just won't do these words justice. Will it? Because for these words, I want to be facing her, looking into her eyes, not some pixelated, delayed backlit representation of her eyes. I want to be able to touch her hand and skin and face and hair, and I want to feel them push out of me with all the force and tension that's been building up as I work to contain them, hugging myself in fetal position

on the phone at night, feeling her throughout me.

The imagination, everything is possible, and everything is communication. But what will it be to hold a body that I've been falling in love with from afar?

Sept. 10, 2017

She sighs. We've been staring at each other. On our little backlit screens. "We gotta do something about these screens!" she says, frustrated. We return to our staring, oscillating between laughing, smiling, and serious expressions that I think mean "love." Sometimes we linger in one of these states. Then one of us breaks it and the other follows suits. I am feeling her feelings inside my body all over, and vice versa. I feel her through this small screen, and we've learned to place them in just the right position and distance, so sometimes we can convince ourselves we are lying in bed facing each other.

I laugh. "What?" she says. I say —"Imagine some being from space looking at us. Here I am thinking I am looking at you, feeling you, seeing you. I believe that I could kiss you right now, but then am pulled back to realizing if I did, the disappointment in my lips on cold hard glass, and not your warm soft flesh. But if someone saw us, how ridiculous do we look staring so longingly into our little boxes? I never thought I could feel this way for a phone."

Sometimes the medium dissolves. I do feel her. But we remember what it was like to touch and kiss IRL (in real life), and we hold on and pass the time until we do that again.

It's liminal. We do it in anticipation for "the real thing." We are waiting. This is tiding us over.