



Université de Montréal

Virtual (dis) connectivities: Mobile Intimacy and Presence for women in long distance relationships

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Ce mémoire intitulé : Virtual (dis) connectivities: Mobile Intimacy and Presence for women in long distance relationships

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# Sommaire

Nous vivons dans une époque où la mobilité internationale est une pratique très courante; ainsi, de plus en plus de partenaires doivent maintenir leurs relations à distance. Le phénomène va de pair avec le développement des nouvelles technologies, qui introduisent de nouvelles formes et de pratiques pour maintenir l'intimité. Cela soulève des questions sur les pratiques de connexion (ou déconnexion) lorsque les couples sont séparés par la distance et le temps.

Ce mémoire propose d'explorer comment les femmes dans des relations amoureuses à distance utilisent divers modes d'expression (visuels, textuels, oraux et tactiles) ainsi que plusieurs sens à travers de multiples technologies mobiles, qui lui permettent de reconstruire la présence et l'intimité avec l'autre. Inspiré par le *new mobilities paradigm* (Sheller & Urry, 2006), ainsi que les concepts de *mobile intimacy* (Hjorth & Lim, 2012; Elliott & Urry, 2010) et la présence imaginée (Chayko, 2002; Elliott & Urry, 2010), je propose les notions de (dé) connectivité virtuelle, le lieu virtuel, ainsi que la présence/absence technologique. Utilisant une approche méthodologique mixte, venant des données d'entrevues semi-dirigées, de l'autoethnographie, de la recherche création et de journaux de bord multimédias, certaines pratiques de contrôle et de surveillance, des formes émergentes de travail, l'immédiateté et la réciprocité émergent dans une époque d'interconnectivité.

**Mots clés:** intimité, connectivité, présence imaginée, mobilities, lieu

# Abstract

Globally speaking, an increasing amount of people are on the move for many reasons; whether for work, studies, travel, emigration or exile (Elliott and Urry, 2010). These movements, or lack thereof, along with the development of communication technologies raise important questions around the ways people are able to connect, as well as disconnect, when they are apart. This thesis aims to understand women's perspectives and practices of intimacy and presence with their partners when they are separated by distance for extended periods of time. This thesis examines various practices of connection, through old and new technologies (mobile technologies), as well as the bodily senses that participate in intimacy and a sense of presence. Informed by the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006) as well as the emerging literature on mobile intimacy (Hjorth & Lim, 2012; Elliott & Urry, 2010) and imagined presence (Chayko, 2002; Elliott and Urry, 2010), I propose the notions of virtual (dis)connectivity, virtual place, and technological absence and presence to frame and analyze the practices engaged in by my study's participants. Through a combination of methods, including semi-structured interviews, multimedia diaries, autoethnography, and research creation, questions of the sensory practices of mobile intimacy, control and monitoring, emerging forms of affective labor, immediacy, and reciprocity are examined in an age of global interconnectedness.

**Keywords:** mobile intimacy, place, imagined presence, connectivity, mobilities

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**Chapter I/Introductory Chapter:  
Experiencing and Exploring Mobile Lives**





I.1. Mobile Relativity /Collage/Dania Habib/2014

The first side of my collage is inspired by Eli Craven’s works on “Screen Lovers”<sup>1</sup>. His series include film stills that are folded, cut and collaged together, in order to produce romantic and sensual images of two people from the screen coming together. The origami folding of my own work shows two silhouettes that are superimposed, as a certain form of togetherness, which can be a physical joining, imaginative, or part of a memory. Once the work is opened, these silhouettes are at each end of the work; the action of opening and closing the work comes to symbolize the transitions of being together and being apart. Moreover, this is also symbolized with the whale, which is inspired by the metaphor used by

<sup>1</sup> Eli Craven Official Website. Available at: <http://www.elicraven.com/screen-lovers/>

one of interviewees: “it’s like the humpback whale, we see each other once a year” (Johana). My collage displays some of the mobilities that are at play in remote relationships: for example, the airplane, the phone and the postcard involve forms of movement that allow for togetherness, intimacy, or maintenance of a virtual connectivity. It raises questions of virtual co-presence, and the ways mobile intimate practices may emerge from this sense of presence. There is a rupture with our conception of distance and place, which raises questions about the “meetingness<sup>2</sup>” (Urry, 2012) that is possible not only physically, but also across time and space. What roles do mobile technologies play and which practices create this sense of virtual connectivity, presence, and intimacy between two people separated by distance and time? And what are the implications (economic, social, cultural, political...) surrounding these mobile intimacies?

## **1. *Problématique and Research Question***

### **1.1. *People On the Move***

One type of travel that is central to my research on remote relationships is the movement of people. Along with the advancement of communication technologies, the past few decades have seen an important increase in people traveling. In 1950, it was estimated that there were 25 million legal, international passenger arrivals. This number went up to 700 million in 2005. At the time, predictions were that by 2010, there would be 1 billion legal, international passenger arrivals (Sheller, Urry, 2006, p.207) but in 2011, the numbers edged towards 5.4 billion passengers (Airports Council International, 2012), with a 4% increase during the following year (Airports Council International, 2013). More and more people are on the move, whether it is for work, studies, for pleasure, or due to labour force, migrant chains, or exile. The movement of people across borders has numerous other implications (economic, social, cultural, political) that shape and are contributing to a rise and

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<sup>2</sup> For Urry (2012), meetingness is possible when people travel to one another, which he explains may be difficult at times for those without network capital. I use this term here in a more open ended and flexible way that highlights other meetings that are possible through distance and time, and through other mobile technologies. This is resonant with the concept of rendez-vous, “as times, spaces, and participants are (re) negotiated on the move” (p.28).

intensification in all types of remote social relationships (e.g. family, friends, romantic, etc.). I propose to explore the ways in which these virtual connections across distance and through time allow for a certain “meetingness” (Urry, 2012) that goes beyond the physical and geographical. Moreover, how are intimate mobile practices constructed or made possible between two people who are not physically together?

### **1.2. To Be, Or Not to Be: Conceptions of a “Romantic Relationship”**

Here, I wish to elaborate on how I frame intimate relationships. A popular understanding of a relationship is the “state of being related or interrelated” (Merriam-Webster, 2013), which can refer to friends, family or lovers. I am interested more specifically in remote romantic relationships, those of romantic partners/lovers who are not in the same physical environment on a daily or regular basis. Using the terms “long distance relationship” together also raises questions about the definition of a relationship and about how distance or remoteness is conceptualized (see below).

The conventions of what a romantic relationship is, or should be, are presented starting at a very young age through a wide range of media. For example, Disney’s children’s movies introduce the stereotypical romantic relationship: boy meets girl, they fall in love (at first sight), and the relationship is “easily maintained and [is] often characterized by gender-based power differentials and they live happily ever after” (Tanner et al., 2012, p.366). However, one may come to realize that life may not be like a fairytale; there are high divorce rates, and these conventional gender roles do not necessarily apply. And so, with Berlant (2000), I also ask the question: “why, when there are so many people [in the world], only one plot counts as ‘life’(p.6)?” This compels me to question the normative conceptions of relationships, as these definitions may vary between cultures or generations.

One of my interviewees raised some questions and challenged my own assumptions about the limits and definitions of a romantic relationship. Alejandra has a relationship with someone she met online. They have never met in person before, and have a significant age difference. This made me consider the ways in which these age gaps, as well as bodily experiences, are tied into normative conceptions of what is or should be a relationship. They never discussed their relationship, and Alejandra told me they had been together for a year

when we exchanged emails before the interview. However, during the meeting, she told me that she did not really consider herself in a relationship per se, but explained that she regarded him as a mentor and enjoyed the conversations. This being said, are there criteria necessary to establish some kind of relationship “status”? I tried to resist the instinct to eliminate the interview; I re-listened to it and tried to see how it could be useful in other ways. It took me a while to realize that their relationship does not fit pre-established, normative categories of what is, or should be, considered a relationship. Moreover, her relationship did not quite fit the definition of a relationship I had in mind when I was recruiting for participants; or rather, was it that my definition or idea of a relationship was not open ended enough?

Accordingly, recent literature explores relationship types that fall outside the definitions of “conventional lovers relationships” (Holmes, 2004, p.181): labels such as “friends with benefits”, the open relationship; non-monogamous relationships; the polyamorous (Sheff, 2005); the “Living Apart Together” relationship (Holmes, 2004, p.181), the distant couple (p. 180), the dual-career relationship, and nowadays, the online relationship (Brookey&Cannon, 2009; Pettman, 2009; Ben-Ze’ev, 2004), are part of a wide array of relationships. Throughout this extensive panorama, I left the definition of a relationship open-ended enough, and not limited to a romantic relationship that was necessarily heterosexual, monogamous or “officially” exclusive. My focus is on intimate relationships in this broad sense, along with the intimate mobile practices that connect people and involve physical and emotional intimacy while they are apart.

### **1.3. (Long) Distance**

In his book *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, Farman (2012) contextualizes the *near* as referring to the local, the familiar and the intimate; whereas *distance* relates to that which is foreign, remote, and far away (p.66). However, using the term “long distance relationship” implies a duality: the word distance is put together with the word relationship. However, what is far is not necessarily unknown (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Farman, 2012).

With the increase in corporeal travel, the rise of remote, intimate relationships is a significant phenomenon. In 2005, it was estimated that 7 million couples in the United States

were in a long distance relationship (Long Distance Statistics, 2008). In 2012, these numbers doubled: 14 million couples claimed to be in a long distance relationship, including 3.75 million married couples (Long Distance Relationships Statistics, 2012). However, it is important to note that these statistics also carry certain assumptions of what is or no a romantic relationship. Using the term “long distance relationship” raises another important question: how far is far, or not far enough? How do we delimit whether a relationship is considered long distance or not? Is distance dependent on the amount of time a person needs to get from point A to point B? Or is it calculated in kilometers?

As I prepared for the recruitment of my participants, I found it challenging to define or to put a limit in kilometers or time between partners. Because of my own experience in a relationship with someone from another culture, I thought it would be interesting to have data that would allow me to explore different socio-cultural and linguistic experiences. These types of relationships that go beyond national borders also raise questions about the role of mobile technologies in the ability to stay in touch and “be close”. For Farman (2012), the intimate space between partners is not equivalent to a physical distance; rather, he explains it as an action (p.67). This action is facilitated by various practices and senses, which also participate in constructing intimacy and presence at-a-distance. What practices allow for a sense of presence and for intimacy? And what is the significance of place for these relationships? Here, I propose to consider the ways places may be relationally constructed through various intimate practices between people who are separated by time and space (Massey, 1991; Malpas, 2012). I argue that place and distance are not solely geographical, but rather relational; and this is where it becomes interesting to explore the practices that interplay with intimacy and presence.

#### **1.4. Mobile Technologies**

As little as 15 years ago, people primarily communicated by landline telephones, and sent and received everything by mail: letters, postcards, bills, invitations for birthdays or important events, etc. Today, within my generation and from personal observations on my own and others’ everyday uses, it is common practice to send text messages instead of making a phone call, to email a birthday card, to access online bills through various accounts, or to purchase items from around the world on the World Wide Web. Moreover, it is also common

practice to actualize our lives through social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, sharing statuses, thoughts, locations, and photos instantly with a wide international public, no matter where we are. All these new ways of circulating messages and images travel through a common portal: the screens of our myriad technologies, which are becoming more mobile than ever.

Studying and researching mobile technologies and the social changes surrounding them is particularly relevant given that the number of cellphone subscriptions is now as high as the number of people worldwide (“UN: Six billion mobile phone subscriptions in the world”, 2012). Elliott and Urry (2010) proposed the notion of *miniaturized mobilities* to describe mobile technologies that are intertwined with the body as a way to increase a person’s mobile capacities in a physical, communicative and virtual way (p.43). This builds on Marshall McLuhan’s classic assertion that media have become extensions of the body. Hjorth (2007) also builds on McLuhan’s perspective, arguing that the mobile phone “has become an extension of many body parts [...] of the ear and mouth (telephony), the eyes (camera phone), whilst also becoming an extension of the hand (texting)” (p.235).

This has led some scholars such as Pertierra (2005) and Proitz (2005) to argue that the mobile phone is the most accessible and popular form of mobile technology, contributing to a redefinition of intimacy (quoted in Lasén & Casado, 2012, p. 552). The mobile telephone blends old traditional forms of writing including letters, telegraphs, and the sharing of photos, with voice and audio forms of communication (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p. 478). However, it does not necessarily push older forms or practices aside, which is why I have not limited my research to the mobile phone. I believe that various mobile technologies contribute to the practices of mobile intimacy (Chapter 3) and a sense of imagined presence (Chapter 4) between two individuals at a distance, involving and interrelating different types of movements and travels. The new mobilities paradigm (Chapter 2) allows me to analyze mobile technologies and practices more broadly, along with their contribution to the dynamics and maintenance of long distance relationships. This resonates with the way Hjorth and Lim (2012) employ the term “mobile” not only to refer to the technologies themselves, but the ways in which mobilities play out through mobile media practices (p.477). Hjorth (2011) emphasizes the link and the role of mobile technologies with mobility, arguing that there has been a transformation and blurring of dichotomies through these technological practices, such



as work and love, here and there, virtual and actual (p. 37). Looking at mobile technologies in this open-ended way, involving various types of mobilities and travels, has allowed me to explore the ways in which my participants experience and negotiate daily or regular intimate practices with their distant partner through new and old mobile technologies.

### **1.5. Formulation of Research Question**

For the purpose of this research, I will refer to long distance relationships as those trans-national intimate relationships in which weekly or even monthly meetings are not possible. This type of relationship prompts individuals to reconstruct emotional and physical intimacies in their everyday practices through the use of mobile technologies. What is also significant and specific to these relationships are the other forms of (im)mobility that come into play and can become complex. Some specific examples involved in daily practices in these trans-national relationships are visa requirements, language barriers, culturally specific ways of interacting, and time differences. Holmes (2004) notes that little research has been done on relationships in which greater distances separate romantic partners (p.187). As such, there is a need for more research on women's mobile practices, as well as the other types of implications (such as political, economic, social, and cultural) involved in these types of relationships.

Elliott and Urry (2010) argue that although great distances separate two people, they can still be near, together and in touch (p.100). I am interested in exploring how people find ways to "be together" when the distance that separates them does not allow for physical presence for extended periods of time. How can two people, living in different parts of the world, still "be together" and maintain their relationship? How do new technologies and communication media come to challenge normative conceptions of intimacy (Berlant, 2000, p.3)? Furthermore, what is the pertinence of gender in these types of relationships? Brummer (2002), Hoschild (2001, 2003), Fortunati (2009) and other feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of women's perspectives in regards to technology because of the "arising and existing gender inequalities that stretch across many notions of mobility and immobility" (Fortunati, 2009, p.23). I draw on some feminist literature on mobile intimacy (e.g. Feminist Media Studies Journal), in order to contribute to that field and as a way to understand how

mobile technologies and women are interdependent. As a female researcher, my interest lies in investigating and understanding other women's perspectives and practices of mobile technologies with partners living in another country, in order to conceptualize and investigate the construction of intimacy and presence of the other along gendered and intercultural lines.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question used to guide my inquiry is as follows: How do women in long distance relationships use various modes of expression (visual, textual, aural, and haptic) through different **mobile technologies** in order to construct an intimate (relational) place and an **-imagined presence/absence-** of the other in their every day practices of **mobile intimacies** at a distance? What are the social, cultural, political, and other implications of these mobile intimacies and practices for these women and their distant relations?

In the section that follows, I will elaborate on my approach using multiple methodologies in order to gather data to answer my research question. The data that emerged from my interviews foregrounded three main concepts, which I have used to structure the following chapters: (im) mobilities, (mobile) intimacy and imagined presence/absence.

## 2. Methodology

Informed by recent works in mobile methods (Büscher, Urry, Witchger, 2010), I developed a mixed methods approach to my research question. Semi-structured qualitative interviews, multimedia diaries, and auto-ethnography served as strategies to explore women's perspectives and practices of mobile intimacies and the implications surrounding these mobile technologies. I also drew on elements of grounded theory, and used an arts-based research method, the collage, (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Vaughn, 2008; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009; Leavy, 2009; Simmons & Daley, 2013) as ways to synthesize my data and to develop complementary forms of reflexivity, representation, and interpretation.

### 2.1. Methodological Orientation

My initial interest in this research topic was rooted in my own mobile practices and experiences. My general curiosity about movements and travels, new technologies and remote

relationships emerged a few years ago, when I began to leave home for extended periods of time while working, studying, and/or living abroad. Over the years, many of my interpersonal relationships have crossed borders: that with my brother who studied in British Columbia for 3 years, the maintenance of friendships around the world acquired through my travels, that with my best friend who has recently moved to New York. Currently, I am in a relationship with my partner who lives in Lima, Peru. As such, all modes of communication, from postcards to email, phone calls or Skype, are significant on a daily basis for the maintenance of these various, distant relationships.

On the other hand, I also face the daily challenge of everyday life while the people I am attached to are not physically by my side. Moreover, this phenomenon seems to be increasing in my intimate entourage: more and more people around me are moving elsewhere, leaving family or loved ones in other countries. Many people, myself included, are in intimate relationships with a partner who is, in some cases, at the other end of the world. Based on questions arising from my own experiences, I was interested in understanding how other women negotiate emotions, intimacies, and presence with a distanced partner through their daily mobile practices. How do the various senses (haptic, visual, textual, aural) interplay with intimate practices and the construction of a sense of presence? What are some of the implications (social, economic, political, cultural, etc.) that affect these types of relationships? How are women from different parts of the world affected by these factors? In what follows, I will discuss my methodology and the mixed methods used to collect data, stories and multimedia materials in order to develop answers to these questions.

### *2.1.1 Participants and Recruitment*

During the first phase of my fieldwork, I conducted 7 qualitative, semi-structured interviews. My sample includes women over 18 years of age, living in Peru, and in Montreal who are in intimate relationships with a partner that lives in another country. I chose to focus on relationships that cross national borders. For example, language and cultural differences may affect these practices or interactions, as speaking about emotions and feelings in a second or third language can be challenging. Additionally, national borders may cause partners to see each other less frequently, for a wide range of reasons such as finances or visa requirements.

Accordingly, I sought to find women with a partner living in another country (but that is not necessarily from another country). The only other requirement was that partners had been together for at least 6 months, as this allowed an appropriate time frame for partners to experience transitions from being physically together to apart. This also permitted interviewees to tell stories and give recent examples of their mobile intimate practices.

Originally, I intended to have a sample of women from Montreal, Quebec. However, because of my own familiarity with and travel to Lima, Peru, I had access to another field, which inspired me to also seek a sample of Peruvian women involved with a partner living in another country. I was interested in the ways women from different cultures negotiate intimacies with a distant partner and the differences between North and South America contexts with respect to experiences of access to mobility. This cultural dimension is interesting, as Probyn (2010) explains that the intimate may be different depending on “place, class, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality” (p.1). Having said this, I did not narrow down the socio-cultural contexts of these women to a specific group or category. Rather, I sought to find women from different backgrounds, with different stories and sexual orientations, and of various ages as a way to enrich my sample. This brings an interesting point of comparison because of the ways the intimate may be defined or practiced from one place to another, as there may be differences in regards to their access to mobile technologies, as well as the distinctive relationships one may have to various forms of (im) mobilities.

In order to recruit abroad, I used websites specific to Peru: Craigslist, Locanto and Anuncios Perú. After a few weeks, only one person had responded and we scheduled a date and time to meet. I used my resources from Montreal and Peru in order to search for other women in long distance relationships within their networks. It was through snowball sampling that I found other women (from Montreal and from Peru) to participate in my research<sup>3</sup>.

### *2.1.2. Participant details*

Johana is a 52 year-old Peruvian woman living in Lima. She met her partner online, a 34 year-old Peruvian man who lives in Canada. They communicate daily, through Skype, from

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for recruitment ads.

the moment she comes home from work until she goes to bed. They see each other once a year for a few days, when he travels to Peru to visit his family. They have been together for 3 years.

Natalia is an educated 28-year-old woman who lives in Lima. She met her American partner in Tarapoto in the Peruvian Amazon when he was working as an English teacher. After staying in the United States for 5 months, she came back to Peru in 2013 and their relationship ended after about one year together.

Alejandra is a 28-year-old translation student who lives with her mother in the city of Chiclayo in the north of Peru. She was the participant I recruited through an online website. In 2012, she decided to become vegetarian, and created an account on the website [veggieconnection.com](http://veggieconnection.com), in order to learn about vegetarianism. Through this website she met Tom, a 68-year-old retiree living in South Carolina, and they have never met in person. At the time of the interview she was unsure if they were “in a relationship”.

Carolina is 25 years old, lives in Lima and works as a supervisor in a company’s sales department. She met her partner at a previous restaurant job. Approximately six months after they started dating, the IT department he works for was relocated to Panama City. They have been seeing each other approximately every 2 months for the last three years.

Sophie is 21 years old and lives in the West Island of Montreal. She met her British partner while she was studying in Lyon, France. They see each other when school vacations and schedules allow, approximately every 3 months. They have been together for over a year and her partner will be studying at McGill in the fall of 2014.

Anna is 33 years old and is a PhD student living in Montreal. She met her (female) Japanese partner at a New Year’s party in Montreal about 4 years ago. They normally see each other once a year, when Anna goes to Japan for a month to visit her family and her partner.

Michelle is 20 years old and just started university this year. She met her German partner while they worked together in Sydney. She lives in the West Island of Montreal and has been with her partner for over a year. They see each other according to work and school schedules and vacations every 2-3 months, and the longest they have been apart was 5 months<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for a more detailed description of participants.

I met my partner in 2011 during a trip through South America. We stayed in touch through e-mail. When he came to visit me in Canada, we decided to start our relationship. We communicate daily, mainly through text and photo messages. However, we try to coordinate more phone calls and FaceTime interactions. We see each other every 3-4 months and plan to live together at the end of 2014, when I finish my thesis.

It is presumed that all of my interviewees' relationships are monogamous, however this was not discussed nor did it emerge during the interviews. Therefore, when analyzing my data, particularly when issues of jealousy and conflicts arose, my analysis was operated within a monogamous frame of reference.

Although all of my participants have smartphones, and access to mobile technologies, it is important to specify that not everyone in the world has access to these commodities. Anna is the only one who does not have 3G on her phone, but she explains that she regularly connects to Wi-Fi either at home or at school. I acknowledge that smartphones, newer technologies and mobilities are not equally distributed around the world, and that they may afford certain privileges such as quickness and ease of communicating with distant others, and this has a bearing on the data I collected.

## **2.2. Qualitative Interviews**

In order to gather information and generate data around the subjective perceptions of participants, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as “a more formal, orderly process that you direct to a range of intentions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 103). In addition to the questions that I prepared in advance, during the interviews and during the research process some questions emerged, were added, and modified, reformulated or completely replaced (Glesne, 2006, p.102). The qualitative interviews allowed for in-depth discussions and explorations regarding women's stories, and important details about the emotions, feelings, and intimacies involved in their relationships.

There was only one of the participants who knew that I was also in a long distance relationship before the interview. In most cases, I disclosed this to others towards the end of the interview. At times this generated additional data. As a woman in a long distance relationship, my personal experience was a secondary resource in creating a rapport and to

encourage dialogue, even more so during the second interview I conducted with the women who did the multimedia diaries. Here, I drew on feminist qualitative approaches in which rapport is established “not as scientists but as human beings” (Oakley, 1981, p.55), and at times it helped gather a richer sense of their practices of mobile intimacy and relationality.

### *2.2.1. Second Qualitative Interview*

After the first round of interviews, I asked my participants if they would be interested in partaking in the second phase of my research, which included a multimedia diary and participating in a follow-up interview. At first, I had three participants who accepted, but one of them withdrew her participation because she did not feel comfortable with doing the multimedia diary. The two other participants were from Montreal, and after the multimedia diaries were completed, we met for a second time.

The second interview was another opportunity to create a deeper, more productive space of exchange. It was motivating to go back to certain themes that were discussed during the first interview, and it was an opportunity to get more specific details about what they included in their multimedia diaries. Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) call this approach “interactive interviewing”, one-on-one interviews with the participants on more than one occasion. These types of interviews allow for an intimate comprehension of emotionally charged experiences and delicate matters (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p. 279, quoted in Ellis, 1997, p.121). Meunier (2010) refers to “recursive interviews” as those that “sustain a relational dynamic [between the researcher and interviewees] which participate to produce both spaces of intimacy and emotions” (p.38). The second qualitative interview was helpful in creating a space in which interviewees felt comfortable to discuss their experiences of intimacy and emotions, as well as their uses and practices of mobile technologies. It allowed me to collect more information and details about certain experiences or events, and it was productive to go into more depth (Oakley, 1981, p.44) about their mobile intimacies<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C for the interview guidelines.

### ***2.2.2 Notes and Transcriptions***

I kept three different types of notes during my research: my field notes, my methodological notes, and my personal diary. I would write my field notes within the first hours after my interviews and would include the key concepts that had emerged as well as the description of important events that were discussed, the important basic information of the participants and their partners, and more specific notes about some key conversations that came up during the interviews (Burgess, 1991, p.192). I maintained a separate set of notes, my methodological notes, in which I included “personal impressions of situations and personal involvement” (Burgess, 1991, p.192) as well as any difficulties I encountered during the research process, and certain aspects I needed to look out for or improve. Finally, I used a personal diary for all of my personal notes, which included my emotions, personal experiences, practices, and intimacies (see auto-ethnography section).

I transcribed all the interviews myself, and I usually did this the day after the interview. This allowed me to “gain some idea of how [I was] doing as an interviewer, what [I] needed to improve, what [I] have learned, and what points [I] needed to explore further” (Glesne, 2006, p.117). This was also an opportunity for me to rework my interview guidelines and to reformulate questions if I needed to do so, especially as I worked with three different languages. Additionally, doing the transcriptions allowed me “get to know” my data and my participants even more.

### **2.3. Multi-Media Diaries**

Before meeting with my participants for the second interview, I gave them the guidelines for the multimedia diary.<sup>6</sup> I attempted to leave these as open-ended as possible, in order for them to find the easiest and fastest way to put a diary together. The multimedia diaries could be written, typed, or recorded. The diary entries were timed-based, which means that they sought to document ongoing experiences or events within a given time period (Bolger, Davis, Rafaeli, 2003, p. 588-9). Rather than fixing times and days for diary entries, I wanted my participants to write when something relevant happened in their practices or during

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix D for Multimedia diary guidelines



their interactions with their partner. I asked them for at least two weekly entries, during a period of 4 weeks.

The context of the interview requires that interviewees remember events and emotions of the past within a short period of time. Because they allow participants to write about their experiences in the moment, multimedia diaries are a useful complementary method to the interviews. Harvey (2011) explains that diaries can be a useful tool to research that involves intimacy, and to “explore sensitive subjects or the ‘private’ sphere” (p.666).

As Adey (2009) also argues, “diaries, informal photos and notes can provide effective ways of representing everyday mobilities” (p.156). For these reasons, I also invited participants to incorporate, at their discretion, other types of media into their diaries. I gave them examples in the guidelines of what they could include, such as screenshots, photos, audios, letters and postcards, etc. The multimedia diaries also allow participants to capture relevant medias and reflect on their feelings, emotions, and thoughts about mobile technologies, intimacies, and their relationship that they might normally ignore.

I asked my participants to send me their diaries on two occasions. The first time, they felt like they had not gathered enough information, and they felt very busy with exams, work, and traveling to visit their partners, so they required more time. When I checked in with them a second time, they sent me their diaries; one arrived by mail because it was handwritten, and the other was e-mailed to me as a zip file. I met with them approximately three weeks after, which allowed me to prepare my interview questions for the follow up interview<sup>7</sup>.

### *2.3.1. Multimedia Diaries Feedback*

During the second interview, I asked Michelle and Sophie to reflect on their experiences of writing or putting together the diary. Michelle primarily included media in her diary: photos, a screenshot of a conversation and an audio recording of her explaining to me how she felt during a moment of conflict with her partner. She also explained that putting together the different media was a self-reflexive process: “Well, it made me think about my relationship a lot...it just made me reflect a lot on different things like how is he showing me

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<sup>7</sup> In order to thank the participants who did the multimedia diaries and follow up interview, I gave them a blank card in an envelope with a stamp, ready for them to send to their partner abroad.

his love kind of thing [...]” (1:02). On the other hand, Sophie chose to handwrite her diary. She explained that “some things obviously affected me, so I would write them down after, to remember, and then I would go back and see in my [text] messages” (55:42). She continues:

“I wouldn’t write the night of, I would write with a bit of perspective, in order to be sure. When I wrote something, it was because I thought about it a little more and because I thought it would be interesting. [I wrote] when I thought it was significant enough so that [you] could have a good idea of how we manage our “normal” couple situations, without seeing each other [physically]” (54:38).

I thought this was an important way to reflect upon her practices because she took the time to go back to her text messages and to write the details once her emotions (anger, sadness, etc.) had passed. The written diary was a good way to provide a self-reflexive process on her experiences (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p. 280 quoted in: Kiesinger, 2002; Poulos, 2008). For Sophie and Michelle, the guidelines and workload were fair: “It wasn’t too much, it was really fine twice a week [...] it wasn’t a huge load of work, it was really reasonable” (Sophie, 58:14). However, Michelle had more difficulties in finding the time to do it:

“The diary itself was not hard, it was just taking the time to do, I guess I just always had school things to take care of, which made me put off the diary for the first couple of weeks...but I know that if I had taken the time to do it in advance then it would have been no problem. I guess it’s just because I prioritized my school things before” (1:55 follow-up interview)

Although I attempted to leave the diary guidelines as open as possible, in order to allow participants to find a simple, fast way to put a multimedia diary together, this at times became difficult when work, studies, or everyday life got in the way. I also came to realize the difficulties of maintaining a diary, which I discuss in the section “Encountered Difficulties”.

#### 2.4. Auto-ethnography and Personal Diary

My decision to involve myself in the research process was inspired by auto-ethnography as “[...] one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p.274). Furthermore, this approach acknowledges that research can be inclusive of emotions, as well as personal and social phenomena, while also being theoretical and analytical (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p.283). As such, this offers a particularly relevant approach for the nature of the research I was conducting. Nevertheless, I chose to not place my personal thoughts and experiences at the center of my research, in which I focus primarily on my interviewee’s experiences. However, I did strategically include personal anecdotes and images that resonate with some of the other participant’s data, or that bring an alternative practice or perspective that is not mentioned by my participants. I found my life situation was resonant with the participants’, as a woman with a partner living on another continent. As such, this auto-ethnographic element was an essential and enriching resource for my research that helped me to problematize my research orientation and to formulate questions, reflections, and understandings.

Throughout my research, I maintained a personal diary, in which I included any multimedia practices that I thought relevant to my emotions, intimacies or experiences of presence/absence with my partner. In her article, “Intimate Reflections: Private Diaries in Qualitative Research”, Harvey (2011) explains that reflecting in a diary can be a productive way to explore daily intimate lives, for both participants and researchers (p. 665). This reflexive process was necessary for me as a researcher, not only in regards to my own long distance relationship, but also in regards to my fieldwork and my thoughts throughout the process. In her article, Punch (2012) explains that “reflecting critically on our own emotions, behaviour and role in the field enables us to understand the parallels between our experience as researchers and that of those we study” (p.89, quoted in Lee-Treweek, 2000, 128). My own inclusion in the research process and my personal diary foreground the ways in which I am also an instrument of research, engaging with my own subjectivity and my own emotions (Meunier, 2010, p.37).

In her text “Auto(erotic)ethnography” Blinne (2012) observes that “the inherent danger in sexual stories is not that they are told, but instead, *which stories should be told, for whom, and for what purpose?*” (emphasis in text, p.965). In my research, I have included certain parts from my diary that refer to sexual experiences and practices with my partner. In doing so, I chose to subject myself to some of the same levels of disclosure and vulnerability I had asked of my interview subjects. Here, I have attempted to highlight concrete examples that question the redefinitions of sex and the ways that physical relations are negotiated, especially through women’s practices of sex with a partner who is physically absent.

### **2.5. Collage as a complementary methodological and analytical tool**

The final complementary method that emerged from my research is the inclusion of collage in my thesis. The common feature of arts-based research is the creation of an expressive form (Leavy, 2009), which is not necessarily discursive. As Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999) argue, collage is a significant method that can enhance analysis and representation when pursuing research (quoted in Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, p.159). Picasso argues that in collage, the

“[re-contextualized image] has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that the world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring” (cited in Brockelman, 2001, pp.117-118; in Vaughn, 2008, p.31).

This sense of strangeness in my research and in the collage challenges various normative conceptions people have of relationships, love, partnership, monogamy, and physical place, as well as the paradoxes of the real versus the virtual. This strangeness also emerges in the juxtaposition of different images or texts together, which would normally not be mixed, such as the humpback whale next to the sun in my collage. However, the interrelatedness of things can also raise important questions and illustrate new perspectives. The collage offers openness to interpretation and represents both the ambiguous and the unambiguous; it is the “initiation

of a dialogue with self and viewers” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, p.160), which is also why I included it at the beginning of my thesis. My aim here is to evoke for those who have distant social relations (of any type and gender) their socio-emotional experiences of presence and intimacy.

The collage I made was a method that unexpectedly emerged as an element in my methodological framework as I was writing during the final phase of my research. It helped me as a researcher to “represent the whole [I am] attempting to explore” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, p.162), and to sharpen my concepts. Additionally, it constituted a reflexive process in itself that involves thinking through the senses (quoted in Simmons & Daley, 2013, p. 1). By juxtaposing words with images and integrating various media - like drawing and stamps - the collage provides a visual, haptic, and textual representation of my written work and my research question. Moreover, it simultaneously elucidates the understanding I have arrived at through my data (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, p.155-161; Vaughn, 2008, p.32), while and the same time leaving room for interpretation

As Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) explain, there are no specific guidelines to make a collage. Some may be more methodological and organized, whereas others may use a more flexible, intuitive collage approach (p.165). I began by building a sketch of the main themes, objects, intimacies, and mobilities that emerged from my data. Then, I gathered various magazines and cut out the images that reminded me of stories or metaphors that came from my participants’ or my own experiences. I started placing the words and images I wanted to include in different ways, creating a prompt of my collage. This process allowed me to make different connections while considering relationships and new ideas (Simmons & Daley, 2013, p.1) through these strange, displaced objects. I invited others to critique my sketch as a way to receive feedback and different interpretations of my collage.

I believe that this methodological and analytical tool was significant in “putting the pieces together” offering a synthetic and tactile form of thought. Additionally, the collage is a visual and tactile representation of the key ideas and themes in my research, but also opens the door to wider discussions for the past, present and future of social relations through time and space.

## **2.6. Ethical Issues**

With respect to ethical considerations regarding the participants who partook in my research, I obtained their informed consent before audiotaping interviews, as well as their consent to use the materials included in the multimedia diaries. They were also given the option to skip or refuse to answer questions and could withdraw at any time. All names have been changed in order to maintain their confidentiality. The diaries will be kept confidential and will be destroyed within the time period stated in the consent forms.

Because I am involved in this research as a woman with a distant partner, I am also involving a close, intimate other in my writings (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p.281). It is difficult to not involve my partner in my research, as personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings often relate to our daily interactions, our intimacies, and our mobilities. As Richardson (2001) emphasizes, one of the most important issues when writing is the involvement of others (p.37). I have attended to these challenges and maintained my partner's anonymity by not mentioning his name and by omitting characteristics that may risk his anonymity.

Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) explain that sometimes the involvement of a close other can be a problem once the research is completed, because one has to continue to live within these relationships (p.282). Since research is an ongoing process, I tried to be attentive to the ways that the relationship with my partner could be affected during the whole process. At times, I became more sensitive to certain things, or I asked myself more questions about our practices and our relationship. The solution I found was to not discuss my research in details while we were apart. We would have these discussions when we were together in order to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings about certain aspects and opinions.

## **2.7. Analytical Framework**

My analytical framework is inspired by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Glaser, 2002; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001), “a general method of [constant] comparative analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273), which produces concepts emerging from all the data (Glaser, 2002, p.23). In my case, this encompassed my data from the qualitative

interviews, the multimedia diaries, and my own diary. In my search for patterns, I used elements of grounded theory (in modified form) that enabled me to look at my data globally and allowed me to identify the emerging categories from this data (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p.167).

At first, I constructed maps of my interviews. I developed one page per participant, using key words and attempting to generate concepts. However, I found it difficult to link the data from different interviews to one another. I bought different colored post-its for each participant and I wrote the words of the participants directly on them, with page number references in order to find the exact quote in the transcripts.



1.2. Photo of Categories, 2014

This allowed me to merge my data, giving me a visual way to recognize my participant's stories. I made three different attempts to create categories with my data using these post-its, which helped me to "see new relationships between events or interactions" (Lianputtong et al, 2002, p.196). This took me more time than I had anticipated, as I would come and go from my categories, sometimes leaving a few days before coming back to them. This made me realize that time for reflection and patience is important, with both myself and the data (Hunt et al., 2009, p.132).

By the time I received the multimedia diaries and conducted my second interviews, I had already made some attempts to organize categories. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), refer to

*theoretical sampling*, as a way of “going back to the field to gather specific data to fill gaps within categories, to elaborate the analysis of these categories, and to discover variation within and between them” (p.168). While I did not follow the protocol detailed line by line for coding methods of grounded theory, I drew on principals of theoretical sampling in order to build emerging concepts and clusters. As mentioned earlier, the second interview facilitated a more in-depth exploration of the women’s experiences, and also a return to things that were discussed during the first interview or that were part of their diaries. This generated more data I was then able to integrate. Through this process of theory-building from the data, I arrived at three key conceptual clusters: (im) mobility, mobile intimacy, and imagined presence/absence (see chapters 1-3).

## **2.8. Encountered Difficulties**

I encountered several challenges during my fieldwork: speaking another language, formulating probing questions, technical challenges, the instinct to discount interviews, and keeping my own field diary were some of the main challenges I faced.

The first qualitative interviews I conducted were in Peru and were in Spanish, which is my third language. During the interviews, I found it challenging to ask follow-up questions or probing questions, and I found myself struggling over the correct formulation of my questions. As a result, some of my questions were not as open ended, or unintentionally suggested responses to my participants. On a few occasions my interviewees understood something different than my original intention. This demonstrates the importance of formulating questions, because the way the question is worded and asked can affect the response (Patton 2002, quoted in Glesne, 2006, p.106). I soon realized that “asking questions and getting answers is a task that is much more difficult than it first seems to be” (Myers et al., 2007, p. 5, Quoted from: Fontana &Frey, 2000, p.645). As I got more comfortable with my questions, these challenges were easier to manage and look out for.

I also had to confront my instinct to discard two interviews. One was an interview that had a weak recording; the echo and Alejandra’s speed of speech made it difficult to transcribe the interview. However, I wanted to discard it because she was not sure if she was with her partner at the time of the interview. Rather, I used this interview to pose questions about the



normative conceptions of what a relationship is and how it may or may not be considered normative. The other interview I wanted to discard was with the participant who separated from her partner a day before our meeting. The aim of my research was to explore how women use various mobile technologies in their practices of intimacy and presence, and as such it had never occurred to me to question the practices of disconnection, or of breakups, which are also an important aspect of relationships and of communicational tasks. I found that these types of interviews can also be learning experiences and can also raise new questions and ideas. These interviews taught me something about my expectations of the field, and consequently, they broadened the pre-established views I had. I believe that these two interviews constitute rich data and raise other questions about long distance relationships, which is why I ultimately decided to include them.

The last important challenge I faced was the maintenance of my own multimedia diary. In the beginning, I found it difficult to find a way that was fast and easy for me to write. I started writing in a Word document and included my personal experiences. Later on, I found an application for Mac computers called “Dream Diary”, which I started using because it was easier to include images, and it also had a small calendar, which allowed me to keep track of my logs. Then certain questions emerged: how often to write? And what do I write about? I started writing only when something would happen in my relationship; I soon realized that my diary had become a way to release my frustration when my partner and I were having arguments or when I felt angry, sad, or irritated. Throughout the research process, the diary helped me realize this and also brought a balance “between embracing [my] emotions and not over-indulging in them” (Punch, 2012, p.91). In order to balance my entries, I started also including moments that made me happy, and focused on the practices that would participate in our intimacy at a distance, or the practices that made me feel like he was present. I started taking more screenshots of text message conversations or saving images that highlighted our practices and my feelings. Generally, I would write at least once a week, or more if I found examples, experiences, or moments that were relevant. This also made me realize the labor and the difficulty of keeping a diary and made me reconsider the initial requirements I had set for my participant’s multimedia diaries.

Probyn (2010) emphasizes that there is a need to rethink how the intimate is researched (p.2). My research on the intimate uses a mixed method approach that is interdisciplinary and

that focuses on my participants' subjective experiences. I see this combination of methodologies as a collage in itself (Vaughn, 2005, p.42); the juxtaposition of semi-structured interviews, multimedia diaries, and auto-ethnography has allowed the exploration and conceptualization of a social phenomenon specific to remote, romantic relationships. Moreover, my own reflexivity through auto-ethnography and the collage have allowed openness, as well as a visual and tactile representation of my written work.

## Chapter Overview

Inspired by the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), I have organized my chapters thematically based on the three key conceptual clusters that emerged from my data. Chapter II, (im) Mobilities, will explore the various forms of mobilities that are part of contemporary mobile relationships. I explore the ways that two people may be brought together (either physically or through other multimedia practices), as well as the impediments to these travels and movements, such as visa regulations, health and disability, or access. My data also raises questions about the ways people disconnect. For example, conflicts and breakups are part of my participants' realities, and this data sheds light on the tensions and difficulties that are part of a range of communicational tasks within relationships. In this chapter, I propose the notion of virtual (dis) connectivity, which interrelates various forms of movement, senses, practices, and emotions that participate in constructing intimacy and presence across time and space.

The following chapter, (Mobile) Intimacy, explores the ways that intimacy may be practiced while partners are apart. Inspired by the notion of mobile intimacy (Hjorth & Lim, 2012; Elliott & Urry, 2010), I argue that intimacy is relationally created between partners; it is an intimacy that is on the move (Berlant, 2000). I explore the ways mobile objects, such as postcards and letters are set into motion due to their affective content and tangibility. Here the senses are also emphasized through a wide range of practices including images, text messaging, and real time exchanges. Through my data, questions around sex and its virtual practices also arose, which I explore as moments and experiences that are both positive and at times negative. I argue that these mobile sexualities have shifted from physically bound locations to more spatial, relational ones. Throughout these intimate practices, emerging forms of affective labor are discussed, with experiences that shed light on the ways women practice caring, monitoring, and control at a distance.

Finally, in the final chapter, Imagined Presence/Absence, I explore the notion of imagined presence (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Chayko, 2002) and its relationship with various senses. Through my fieldwork, I came to realize that it was necessary to discuss moments of absence as well as the transitions from being physically present to absent. Emerging from my data, I propose the notions of technological presence and absence, which raise important

questions around immediacy and non-reciprocity in different types of exchanges. I explore the ways that a virtual place is constructed and made possible between partners. Virtual place is not bound to geographical locations (Massey, 1991; Malpas, 2012), but is constructed through the interrelatedness and the exchange of these multimedia practices. Like the humpback whale, these virtual forms of place are effervescent, constantly in motion, but no less significant or emotionally charged for these practitioners of mobile intimacy.

## Chapter II: (im) Mobilities

In thinking through and researching long distance relationships, questions about the ways travel and movement interplay with mobile practices of intimacy and of presence inevitably arise. This chapter considers the new mobilities paradigm, which involves theoretical and empirical investigation of various scales of (im)mobilities of people and objects. When people are not physically co-present, practices arise that are negotiated relationally. These physical and virtual meetings need to be ‘micro-coordinated’ (Larsen, Urry, Axhausen, 2008). Through an examination of visual, aural, and textual practices, a range of factors modulating transnational relations are explored: these include linguistic, cultural implications, emotions, mobile conflicts and breakups, as they evoke the ways in which mobilities are also something that people are moved by.

### The New Mobilities Paradigm

My research on long distance relationships engages with the new mobilities paradigm as a key framework through which to understand and explore the subjective experiences of women in these types of relationships. Many different types and scales of movement are part of everyday lives, organizing social life across distance and through time (Büscher, Urry, Witchger, 2011, p.5). Consequently, mobilities are not individualized; they are relational (Elliott & Urry, 2010, p. 101). It is therefore important to understand the ways people make the world physically and socially through the movements and mobilizations of people, objects, information, and ideas (Büscher et al., 2011, p. 112).

According to Peter Adey (2009), mobilities can be divided into two categories. He refers to big mobilities, which include airplanes or cars, and things such as pollutants that participate to the growth and expansion of society. For him, smaller mobilities may be invisible to the naked eye; something that seems completely still has microscopically small atoms moving within it (Adey, 2009, pp.7-10). Mobility “is ubiquitous; it is everywhere” (Adey, 2009, xxviii). Consequently, there is a need to distinguish the different types of mobilities and

explore the ways movements and practices emerge within these social relations. How do they allow for a mobile relationality, which includes intimacy and presence with a distant other?

In order to explore these questions further, I will more closely consider aspects of the relevant literature in mobilities research. According to this approach, there are five types of mobilities, or forms of travel, that have been identified by scholars (Büscher et al., 2011; Elliott & Urry, 2010) as interrelated processes of movement. Primarily, as previously mentioned, corporeal travel involves the movement of people for work, pleasure, family, migration, and escape. Secondly, physical movement of objects includes the sending and receiving of presents and souvenirs, and the (re) configuration of people, objects, and spaces as part of dwelling and place-making. Thirdly, imaginative travel is “effected through talk but also the images of places and peoples appearing on and moving across print and visual media” (Büscher et al., 2011, p.5). Fourthly, virtual travel allows real time presence and action, transcending geographical and social distances using mobile technologies. Finally, communicative travel is achieved through the contact between two individuals via embodied conduct, messages, texts, postcards, letters, telegraph, and fax. However, it is important to emphasize that these different mobilities are complexly interdependent with one another (Büscher et al., 2011, p.5). I will use this typology of mobility to structure my own analysis in this chapter in order to analyze the ways in which women physically and socially create their worlds with a physically distant partner. In this way, the mobilities paradigm will continue to be engaged in the subsequent chapters on intimacy and on presence.

## **2. Corporeal Travel and Physical Movement: (im) Mobile Implications**

Mobility includes the movements of people and objects; and it is a resource that is distributed unevenly, and that may have different barriers. Significant forms of (im)mobility were discussed and emerged during my interviews. For some, visa requirements made it difficult to visit a partner in another country. Financial resources could limit their mobility across borders, as plane ticket prices can be expensive; for others, health and disability could impact the amount of times partners are able to travel to visit each other. Another form of corporeal and physical travel is that of objects, which offer a cheaper and easier alternative form of movement, and will be discussed in the chapter on Mobile Intimacy.

## 2.1 Visas and (im)Mobilities

While international travel increases, many governments place laws and policies that may affect people's international mobility. As Sheller and Urry (2006) have questioned, "what brings person to person? When? How often?" (p.217), or, as I ask, what prevents a person to get to another person? Neumayer (2006) explains that international travel and mobility is "highly unevenly distributed across people with different nationalities" (p.73). Additionally, the facilitation of the mobility of some can be achieved at the expense of others, who cannot move as easily (Neumayer, 2006, p.73; Elliott & Urry, 2010). The women from Canada and from Peru have different access to mobility, which also depends on their financial status, class, health, and nationality.

However, most of my interviewees did not require any visas to travel to visit their partner. This facilitates their movements across borders, allowing them to purchase plane tickets whenever they please without having to pay or request a visitor's visas. For instance, the Canadian women were all able to travel to Europe, Japan or South America to visit their partners. Anna explains: "it's easy to travel between Canada and Japan, we can both get visitor's visas for 3 or 6 months" (p.2). In their study, Lawson and Lemke (2011) found that Canadians are able to travel to 56.15% of the world's nations without any visa requirements (p.21). However, their study notes that Peruvians are more limited, and can travel to 18.18% of the world's nations without any visa requirements (p.24). Only one of the Peruvian women I interviewed (Carolina) did not need a visa to visit her partner in Panama, as she was able to enter using her Peruvian passport. In Natalia's case, she applied for a visa to the United States, and was granted a 10-year visa allowing her 6 months per year as a tourist (p.9). This allowed her to live with her partner for 5 months in 2013.

Johana had a very different situation than the other two Peruvian women because she was not able to visit her partner who lives in Canada. All applications for a temporary visitor visa to Canada are done online or in person at the embassy, with a 100\$ CAD application fee, without guarantee that the visa will be granted (Government of Canada, Visas and Immigration). Even if the applicant's documents are complete, additional information such as a medical exam or a police report may be requested. The applicant may also be called in for an in-person interview (Government of Canada, Visas and Immigration). Johana explains that she never tried to apply for the visa, because she knows it would be impossible for her to obtain it:

“I would like to go. I cannot go. Because here, they say.... I don’t know, I have never applied for a visa to the United States even less for Canada, but what I have heard is that if you are in debt, and when you do not pay your debts then you fall into the red zone, then, you cannot have credit and you cannot do anything. This is why” (p.9).

Canadian visa requirements indicate that foreigners/non-Canadians are inadmissible for a temporary visitor’s visa if: “they are unable or unwilling to support themselves and their family members” (Government of Canada, Eligibility). Although Johana is working and can support herself and her daughter, her debt and lack of credit have put her in the “red zone”, which will not allow her to obtain a visa to visit her partner in Canada. Johana’s personal experience sheds light on the ways visa requirements can affect these types of international relationships. Moreover, because of her citizenship, she has less control over her own mobility; rather, the authorities, laws, and regulations are able to exert control on where she can or cannot go. The examples in this section demonstrate that not everyone has an equal relationship to mobility (Skeggs, 2004, p.49; Morley, 2000; Massey, 1993 quoted in: Sheller, 2012, p.258, also see: Neumayer, 2005), and that it may be out of one’s own control and power to move easily or freely from one place to another. This is significant for those in relationships that go beyond borders because it raises important questions around the emerging practices of intimacy and presence when they cannot physically travel to see one another.

## **2.2. Financial Barriers to Mobility**

As previously stated, Johana cannot apply or obtain a visa to visit her partner in Canada because of her financial situation. Additionally, her ex-husband did not allow her to work for years, constraining her to the home and reinforcing her immobility. Once they separated, he did not contribute much in child support and she acquired an office job, which did not favour her finances and her current line of credit. This has made it impossible for her to obtain a visa, and limited her access to travel.



Sophie also shared with me her financial preoccupations because her and her partner are students: “It’s expensive a flight for England every time, and it’s not only that, it’s at least 200-300\$ while you are there [...] it’s like, all the outings we don’t do while we are apart, we do in two weeks...so it gets expensive” (p.7). As an alternative, her partner suggested they share the costs of flights equally: “it’s a question about not having one of us that paid an extra trip [to visit the other]” (p.11). This solution brought an equal division of their finances; making travels more accessible for both partners, as they do not have to pay big amounts at once for plane tickets.

Similarly, Michelle also discusses the expenses related to visiting her partner in Germany. She explains that if she could change something in her relationship, it would be to have less costs associated with visits: “... for the meantime if there would be like...I don’t know a cheaper way to get to one another that would be helpful. Because I can’t pay like a grand and a half every time I want to see him [...] I don’t know...it’s expensive” (p.17). Anna envisions a tunnel that could bring her to Japan to see her partner: “a magic tunnel between here and there...yea...like the thing on Star Trek where like you just beam yourself somewhere” (p.16). In this way, the finances related to these international relationships were an important factor that most women mentioned. In most cases, it was an element that determines the amount of time partners spend apart, which consequently affects their mobile practices.

### **2.3. Health, Disability, and (im) Mobility**

As previously discussed, the physical displacements and movements of people across borders may be limited by regulations such as visas or governments, as well as personal finances. However, being immobilized can imply physical impairments, raising questions of health and disability.

Davis (2000) makes a distinction between the terms “impairment” and disability. The former refers to a physical limitation, which can be due to a disease or a chronic illness, such as HIV or paraplegia. The latter is defined as the social and political conditions that place barriers in the way of that impairment, for example the absence of curb cuts or ramps (p.210). Scholars in disability studies recognize a wider range of disabilities that are interwoven with

other social categories such as “class, ethnos, race, gender, sexuality, age”, that go beyond the medical definition of disability (Goggin & Newell, 2005, p.71). They seek to understand the cultural dimensions of disability (Goggin & Newell, 2004a, p.412). With the rise in communication technologies, scholars are increasingly focusing on understanding the social implications of technology and disability (Goggin & Newell, 2004b, p.309). This is significant for my purposes in exploring the ways in which different forms of mobility and immobility may interact at various levels, such as physical, virtual, and communicative forms of travel. The social and political implications of these disabilities also need to be considered, which raise questions about conventions, normativity, the physical body, and the mobile practices that may emerge through people’s experiences.

In addition to Johana’s other barriers to obtaining a visitor’s visa, both she and her partner are not physically able to travel. She told me that she suffers from chronic arthritis, which often is very painful and debilitating. Her partner, a Peruvian who lives in Canada, had a work accident during the last year. More importantly, he had two operations for a tumour that has been growing in the bones of his knee. Being temporarily disabled, he consequently requires crutches and bed rest. His medications can only be taken at the hospital and he must also do chemotherapy. Due to his health conditions, he is unable to visit his family and Johana in Peru, constituting another form of immobility and inability to travel that affects their relationship.

This section has examined various forms of mobility and immobility, and my participants’ experiences shed light on the ways different forms of travel and movement may interact at various levels. What brings two people together? But what may also keep them apart? Laws and visa regulations control the coming and going of certain persons from one place to another, demonstrating the unequal relationship people have with corporeal mobility and international borders. This is important for people in long distance relationships as it may affect the amount of time partners can travel to visit one another. Additionally, the economics of travel may also increase the time partners spend apart. Questions around corporeal and physical forms of travel raise important questions about the way practices may emerge between partners that are physically apart, and the ways that partners find to be together: how are these physical and virtual reunions and practices coordinated?

### 3. Practices of ‘Micro-Coordination’ and Mobilities [Communicative Travel]

In their study, “Coordinating face-to-face meetings in mobile network societies”, Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2008) explore the “coordination technologies” that facilitate travel and that ensure in-person meetings. They examine how phone calls, text messaging and emails are used to coordinate face-to-face meetings. Through my interviews, as well as my own experiences, it is evident that practices of coordination are central when partners must coordinate not only physical travel to visit one another, but when they also have to coordinate other types of interactions, such as phone or video calls.

#### 3.1. Coordinating visits

Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2008) use the term ‘micro-coordination’, which is “a mobile practice that enables flexible coordination of meetings in the *near* future” (emphasis in text, p.644; see also Ling, 2004). For my interviewees, one of the main coordination practices is that of purchasing a flight or scheduling when to do so. For Carolina, she usually visits her partner in Panama every two months, or two months and a half. She explains that she “always buy[s] it [flight] a month, a month and a half before going” (p.12), because then, there is a comfort that is found in the fact that “we know we will see each other soon” (p.11). Similarly, Anna always buys her flight around the same time of the year: “I usually buy my flight [to Japan]...for the Christmas holidays in early October” (p.14). She also highlights the importance of knowing the date when she gets to see her partner again. For her, the coordination of flights is something they have done “virtually together”:

“She started looking for her ticket to come here for February [...] we...were kind of going through the process on Skype together, and bought her ticket and she forwarded me her ticket right away... ummm...yea so that helped me, that she already has a ticket, that there was already this fixed date when we would see each other again” (Anna, p. 14).

The coordination of physically traveling to visit the other is something that the women highlighted as important, and something they always look forward to. Meeting (in-person) was also very dependent on work and school schedules, vacation time and

finances. This practice of coordination was necessary to decide who can travel, when it is possible for both partners to take vacation, and for how long they will be together. Moreover, this corporeal form of travel is dependent on other mobile practices, such as phone calls or Skype/FaceTime interactions. This demonstrates the interrelatedness of the various forms of mobilities and the ways some mobilities (virtual, communicative) may enhance others (corporeal).

### **3.2. 'Micro-Coordinations'**

The article by Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2008) does not focus on intimate relationships, nor does it consider the coordination that may be necessary for people to have other forms of co-present interactions, like those possible virtually. Sheller (2012) explains that mobility is not only locational, but also imaginative and ideational that is linked to virtual technologies of media (p.262). Therefore, in this section, I will explore practices of 'micro-coordination' that involve these other forms of travels described within the mobilities paradigm and that allow for meetings that are not solely physical and geographically bound (Urry, 2012).

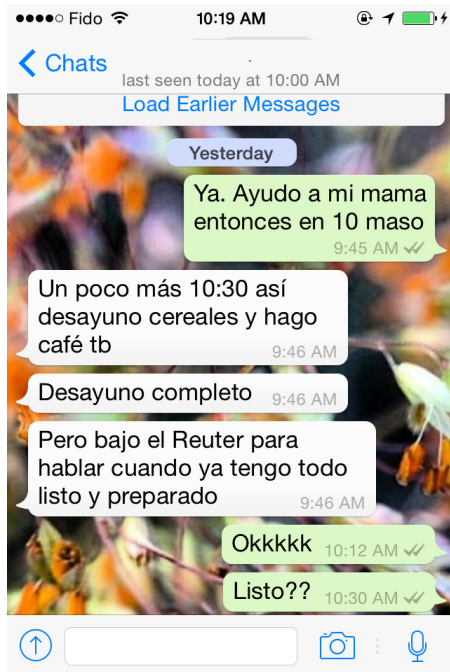
My interviewees explain that through their practices, there is a constant 'micro-coordination' of when they can virtually interact, or "meet" (Urry, 2012). Applications such as Skype and FaceTime require that both partners have access to Wi-Fi or Internet, as well as a computer, laptop, or mobile phone. For my participants, these media were all accessible. However, this may not always be the case for other people around the world, as media or access may be more limited.

Micro-coordination practices were necessary in order to determine when real time interactions could occur, especially when partners need to keep in mind different time zones. Sophie explains that her practice of coordinating Skype conversations was normally done through text messages or through phone conversations: "Sometimes I ask, sometimes he asks. One of us basically says 'do you want to Skype tomorrow', then we will see what his schedule is, what mine is, and we try to find the gap that fits best" (p.6). She explains that conversations over Skype usually need to be scheduled, which sometimes means that one of the two people

needs to stop what they are doing in order to turn their computer on. Similarly, Michelle also coordinates FaceTime conversations with her partner in Germany:

“[...] the night before we ask each other you know ‘what are you doing tomorrow’ and...according to what we say, we try to find like a time so ‘okay, we can talk at this time’ or he will say ‘call me when you wake up I’ll be home’ [...] So we kind of just like let each other know what is our schedule and try to work something out” (p.5).

Michelle and Sophie’s coordination practices demonstrate how partners negotiate scheduling to speak over Skype/FaceTime with their partner. This is also important, as some practices may depend on other practices in order to occur. Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2008) explain that mobile phones may allow for flexibility and a more mobile meeting culture, which is not reliant on physical spaces, fixed appointments, or the fixedness of clock-time (p.643). My own coordination practices through text messaging also exhibit this flexibility and mobility. Usually, my partner and I do not fix a time to hold Skype/FaceTime conversations, because schedules tend to change throughout our days. A practice we have developed during the last 2 years includes sending text messages in order to coordinate approximately when we will speak over Skype or FaceTime.



Ok. I am going to help my mom then, so in about 10 [mins].

A little more, like 10:30 that way I can eat cereal and make coffee also.

Full breakfast

But Ill bring the router down so I can have everything ready

Okkkkk  
Ready?

2.1. 'Micro-Coordination on-the-move' / Screenshot/Dania Habib/ May 24th 2014

This screenshot from my multimedia diary shows how text messages are used between us to coordinate other interactions. My partner suggests we speak over FaceTime. In this exchange, we coordinate when we will speak according to what we are doing: I need to help my mom so I suggest in about 10 minutes, and he negotiates for more time so he can prepare breakfast. This example of micro-coordination through text messaging highlights that our practices of coordination are constantly “negotia[ted]on the move” (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen, 2008, p.643).

Conversely, coordination is not always necessary, since over time some practices became part of the women’s daily routines. Johana, Carolina and Sophie gave examples of certain practices that were part of their communicative routines. For example, Sophie has the habit of calling her partner when she is done work “and the time it takes for me to get home we will talk on the phone, and then he goes to bed” (p.3). She also explains: “I also have the habit, that when I wake up on weekends I will call him right away, I will still be lying in bed half asleep and I will call him...it puts me in a good mood” (p.6). These practices are not coordinated in advance, but become part of their daily communication rituals.

The coordination of visits, as well as Skype or FaceTime interactions is a regular part of my participants' practices. For some, a time is set in advance that fits both partners' schedules. For others, coordination is done "on the move" or practices become part of their routine. This raises questions about the role of mobile technologies in these types of coordinations, and how Skype or FaceTime may be dependent on other coordination technologies in order to occur. For example, the practice of text messaging may be essential for partners to visually and aurally converse over Skype/FaceTime. Moreover, these practices are significant because they allow for a certain 'meetingness' (Urry, 2012) that facilitate the bridging of distance and time, bringing partners together.

### 3.3. Navigating time differences

All of these different practices of coordination are usually done through mobile phones, text messages, or during phone calls. Nonetheless, women and their partners must also take into consideration an important factor that is specific to transnational relations: time zones. They become significant in these coordination practices, as schedules are sometimes conflicting. Accordingly, "communication days" are cut short, as Sophie explains: "When he goes out at night, it will shorten our days" (p. 3). Michelle makes a similar observation: "with the time difference, you know there's 6 hours, so... it doesn't allow much time for us to communicate" (Michelle, p.5). Anna, who has a 13-14-hour difference with her partner in Japan, explains that there is a continuous misalignment in their day-to-day interactions: "because we go through emotional cycles during the day [...] your state of mind is different in the morning, in the middle of the day in the evening, and we are never aligned like that. We are always at different times of day from each other" (p.8). Anna emphasizes that they need to be more aware of these time zones, especially when it comes to discussing important aspects of their relationship (p.10):

"...think about the time difference as if we talk, it's usually at a moment where like one of us is getting more awake, and one of us is getting more tired... so we are moving in opposite directions. To talk about serious things, like relationship issues, and decision-making [...] she'll be wanting to talk

about more and more serious things, have a more and more engaged conversation and I need to wind down and I think like, I think I've thought to myself 'I need to make sure we avoid those situations' where it is 2am my time and like we are talking about these serious things and like my brain needs to shut down to go to sleep [...]" (p.10).

Anna's experience with managing different time zones is essential in understanding the coordination that is necessary not only in her mobile practices, but also of her discussions about certain themes. Anna explains that this is because her and her partner are never on the same daily emotional cycles (see chapter 4). This highlights the socio-emotional implications of these mobile practices that allow not only for communication on the move, but new forms of coordination and networking on the move as well (see Sheller & Urry 2006; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). For example, through practices of micro-coordination, partners must find a time and place that allows for 'meetingness' (Urry, 2012). These meetings on Skype/FaceTime go beyond physical encounters, and involve mobilities that may facilitate other forms of travel. The importance of taking into consideration different times zones also raises important questions about place and the ways mobile technologies may allow for a relational place that bridges time and geography to be coordinated and created (see chapter 4).

#### **4. Talk and Images on the Move [Imaginative and Virtual Travels]**

Most of the women I interviewed shared some examples of misunderstandings in text messages or during real time exchanges with their partners. This seemed to be more present when one of the partners was speaking in their second or third language. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations of words and their cultural connotations were discussed in the interviews with my participants. As it is conceived in the mobilities paradigm, imaginative travel is "effected through talk but also the images of places and peoples appearing on and moving across print and visual media" (Büscher, Urry, Witchger, 2010, p.5). My research results show that phonetic and language games through talk and text messaging were also a practice adopted by women with their partners. Additionally, the exchange of images was an important



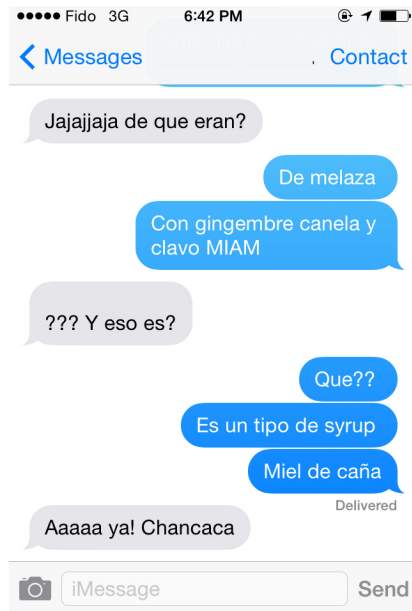
part of imaginative and communicative forms of travel. I will offer a deeper analysis of these visual mobilities in the upcoming chapters on *Mobile Intimacy* and *Imagined Presence*.

#### 4.1. Word (dis) Equivalencies

Some words may be difficult to translate into another language; in these cases, partners may invent new words, or play phonetic games to be used as terms of endearment. For my interviewees, these linguistic and cultural experiences were an inevitable part of their communicative realities.

Language differences will be highlighted in two specific cases; Anna's and my own. For Anna, language differences are an important element in her relationship. She and her partner speak a mix of Japanese and English, and she explains that at times, it can be difficult to choose the right words in another language: "...we don't use the right...words...like....we utter something in the second language. And we don't realize the cultural connotations that come with it ..." (p.8). Anna expresses the challenges she faces speaking Japanese with her partner, which is their default language. Moreover, she explains that they switch to English when she does not have the vocabulary to continue a conversation: "I have been trying to make an effort to switch to English [...] one of my faults or one of my weaker points is that I tend to push in Japanese, to the point where I am just speaking jibberish, so I have tried more often to just switch to English when its over my head" (p.9). Anna's explanations about her word choices also highlight that words cannot always be translated literally, because of different cultural connotations they may have in the second language and the risk that they might be misinterpreted.

Linguistic misunderstandings are also part of my daily communicative challenges. The main language I speak with my partner is Spanish, which is my third language. On a regular basis, while we exchange text messages or when we speak on the phone or Skype/Facetime, I need to search words in the dictionary, or I need to ask my partner to explain what a word or expression means. This also happens the other way around: I will search a word in the dictionary in order to complete my sentence and sometimes my partner will not understand the word I used. For example:



“What are they of?”

“Molasses”

“With ginger, cinnamon and cloves,  
YUM”

“??? And what is that?”

“What?”

“it’s like a syrup”  
“sugar cane”

“Ohhhh ya. Chancaca”

2.2. Word (dis) Equivalencies/ Screenshot/Dania Habib/June 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

After sending my partner a picture of the cookies I made, he did not understand what they were made of. Here, the word *molasses*, when I searched in the dictionary is “*melaza*” in Spanish. When I wrote this word, my partner did not understand what I was referring to, in which case I needed to describe the word to him: “it’s like a syrup, from sugar cane”. His answer was a complete different word, which is used in Peru to refer to molasses. This example demonstrates the cultural linguistic negotiations that come into play because words may vary not only between different languages, but can also vary between different cultures that speak the same language.

This resonates with what Wierzbicka (2009) emphasizes in her study: that the description of experiences are often presented differently from one language to another. She also explains that words that refer to emotions are not necessarily equivalent in two languages or more (p.3). My experience sheds light on these linguistic challenges. Since Spanish is very dependent on the context of a situation or experience, some words or verb tenses that I might choose are interpreted differently than my original intention. The same goes for my interpretation and understanding of words and sentences, through talk or text messages. Anna’s experiences with word choices also highlight the cultural connotations that words may have using English or Japanese. These experiences raise questions about the cultural,

emotional and linguistic implications of word choices, their translations into a second or third language, and how certain practices may enhance, diminish, or negotiate understandings (e.g. using the dictionary, or more elaborate descriptions).

#### 4.2. Phonetic games

Anna was a participant who gave several rich examples in her interviews that underline the linguistic aspect of her relationship. One of these was the phonetic interplay of words with her partner, especially for terms of endearment, which she explains as “phonetic games”:

“...that are not like really Japanese, not really English...um...we have nicknames for each other, well its kind of a game, like in Japanese, often...part of a name...usually the second half, or the end, the last syllable of the name is removed, and replaced with a term of endearment, ummm...like a typical one is -chan [...] But instead of using those established...suffixes, ummm...we make up our own [...] I mean they are just ah...they don't have meanings they are just phonetic games [...] we have like half a dozen different syllables that we tack onto our first names...”  
(p.11)

Another interesting linguistic game is the creation of their own words: “...we have like alternate words for like goodnight and good morning and to me, in my head, part of the meaning to those made up words is like, not only goodnight and good morning, but like ... goodnight to you good morning to me simultaneously...” (p.11). What is interesting and very rich in this particular example is how partners use a mixture of English and Japanese to create their own alternate words. The creative linguistic interplay of words has an important contextual and emotional meaning for Anna: it highlights her interpretation of the emotional experience (Wierzbicka, 2004, p.7) tied to being in a long distance relationship, including dealing with time differences and opposite day cycles.

The linguistic negotiations examined in this section raise questions about the mobile practices surrounding intercultural and cross-linguistic communication: which practices are adopted in order to facilitate understanding? Some of the practices I have explored include: searching for words in the dictionary, giving more elaborate descriptions of words, and switching between languages when conversations become too complicated. The women and their partners all needed to be attentive to these subtleties in their forms of expression, in order to understand and to be understood. One of the practices highlighted was the creative linguistic play and the invention of words, which connect to larger questions about emotions and understanding between partners who are separated by distance and time.

## 5. Emotions on the Move

Hjorth and Lim (2012) consider the ways in which the notion of mobility is also tied to emotion (p.477, quoted in Lasén, 2004). The coming and going of people around the world, and all the other forms of movement made possible through various mobile technologies raise questions about the ways emotions may also be on the move. This is resonant with what Peter Adey (2009) suggests: “mobility is something which may be moved and something we might be *moved by*” (emphasis in text, p.162).

The emotions involved in long distance relationships came up frequently in my interviews. The data I collected highlights the ways emotions are mobilized and how they travel differently between two people living in different parts of the world. I will explore these emotions through various practices that may be connective, like emoticons, or disruptive like conflicts and breakups. The socio-emotional implications of these practices raise several important issues around reciprocity, gender, and control that will be discussed.

### 5.1. Emoticons 😊

With advancements in communication technologies, emotions and icons, popularly known as *emoticons*, have become a common practice. Park et al. (2013) consider how “emoticons are a critical part of nonverbal communication, taking the place of body language and facial expressions in text-based media” (p.474). Smartphones and applications such as Emoji, allow for a wide range of images that can be integrated into text-based communication.

For instance, Sophie states that her use of the application Emoji allows for an easiness in the ways she expresses her emotions by text message: “I have more of a facility to express myself, to express my emotions by text message than I did before. My messages are more clear and because we know each other better now, I also know what I have to say so that he understands how I feel” (p. 14).

Anna and her partner use an application called Kakaotalk to send messages, which includes animated emoticons: “...the emoticons are really like...we have this whole universe” (p.6). However, she also stresses their different interpretations of the animated icons: “we have also realized at different points we were using certain emoticons for a long time without realizing that they had very different meanings for each of us” (p.6). When I asked her for a more concrete example she elaborated:

“[...] I always thought the cat looks like she is turning away from you, I thought it meant that like when you send it to someone, you are showing them that they made you cry, like you are turning away from someone. And she thought the cat was turning towards someone for help, for emotional support. So it’s very opposite understandings of that image” (p.6).

Park et al. (2013) have found that “a vocabulary of different symbols with subtle emotional distinctions emerges especially across different cultures” (p. 466). This sheds light not only on Anna and her partner’s different understandings of this emoticon, but also their different uses of it and the emotions they associated with it. Moreover, this highlights the cultural implications in the use of certain images in order to represent an emotion, which may differ across different cultures. In Anna’s example, the use of the same image has a significant impact on its interpretation and understanding, and these cultural practices needed to be negotiated and clarified through other types of interactions - in this case, through Skype.

## 5.2. Mobile Conflicts

In addition to words and emoticons, emotions may also travel through other types of practices such as text messaging or Skype/Facetime. Some of the women explain that a

difficult aspect of being apart is not knowing what the other person is doing, or with whom. At times, they may result in “mobile conflicts”.

In her study on mobile technologies amongst couples, Lasén (2011) explains, “as the relationship advances, disagreements and confrontations are more common, as is the need to manage negative emotions and conflicts” (p.89). However, what are the implications of these conflicts and how are they negotiated when two people are separated by distance and time? Michelle makes the distinction between conflicts that arise when she is physically co-present with her partner, or when they negotiate conflicts through mobile technologies. She explains that conflicts that occur when her partner is in Germany more easily lead to a rupture of contact/communication:

“[...] Like, he could hang up on me at any time, which he has done, so it’s like...not the same thing. Unless he is there, and he has to talk to me, unless he chooses to walk out the door, but then I can chase after him, you know. (p.4)  
[...] it’s such a different feeling [...] like maybe the problem won’t be fixed  
[...] I have the worst thoughts, ever [...] But with the distance factor it’s like...well I’m not gonna see him. So...is it gonna be okay?” (p.4).

Michelle’s experience underlines the qualities of mobile technologies that allow seeing the other on the screen, but that may afford certain ease in disconnecting with others (e.g. hanging up the phone, not responding to messages, etc.). This raises significant questions about the connection or disconnection afforded by mobile technologies and how this is negotiated between partners. In the case of “mobile conflicts”, moments of dis-connectivity or non-responsiveness can increase worries and questioning, like Michelle’s: is it really resolved?

On two occasions Michelle mentions that after a fight: “I don’t feel like the problem is solved” (p.5). At the time of the interview, I did not really understand the feeling that Michelle describes. It was only when something happened in my own relationship that I understood what she meant: “We have talked about it [the conflict] more than once, and it is supposedly solved. But I have this feeling, like there is this grey zone, this floating bubble of unknowingness, and things are not the same and they still feel unsolved” (diary, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2014). The aftermath of a conflict, whether through text messages, the phone, or Skype may

at times involve the feeling of the grey zone I describe in my diary, and require that partners negotiate these emotions and conflicts. How are mobile conflicts managed through different practices? And how do these practices participate in resolving - or not - these conflicts?

Anna explains that there are many barriers that complicate the understanding of each other's emotions. She discusses the linguistic side, but also the cultural side and the time differences that can be barriers to a proper translation of meaning and emotion: "all these things can....can...further....complicate understanding, can further, can further um...confuse meaning...so to me I think we have to be as direct, like in the words we choose, we have to be as clear as possible because there are all of these things already working against ...against understanding each other" (p.10). The different implications that have been discussed earlier in the chapter, like those of (im)mobility, navigating time differences, and the cultural ways of interacting show an unevenness and a constant re-negotiation of practices that transmit and produce emotions and feelings that are also "on the move".

### **5.3. The (Mobile) Breakup**

The original aim of my research was to explore the ways in which women in long distance relationships practice intimacy and presence in order to virtually connect with their partner. This section is prompted by the fact that one of these relationships ended the day before the interview. As Berlant (1998) puts it, "intimacy was supposed to be about optimism, remember? But it is also formed around threats to the image of the world it seeks to sustain" (p. 288).

This section is important as it highlights the less optimistic implications of relationships; it brings a balance to the ideal tone of communion in some of the material that emerges from my data. Moreover, breakups are also a form of communication act that is negotiated between two partners. Rather than only looking at the ways partners attempt to connect, this section raises important questions around possible ways to disconnect as well: What are the implications of these mobile breakups, and how are they practiced?

### *5.3.1. Media ideologies and idioms of practice*

In her book “The Breakup 2.0”, Gershon (2010) describes that there are distinctive *media ideologies* within everyday media practices. She explains that there is a constant development of these ideologies through comparison, as a technology’s qualities are constantly compared and contrasted with others (p.28-9). Natalia explains to me that from the start, her and her partner’s views about which technologies to use in order to stay in touch were very different:

“I think that I would have preferred that we communicate with messages during the day, and a conversation of about an hour at night. I mean, that would have been my ideal scenario. But for him, he is not really a fan of Whatsapp or messages...I would write to him, and would wait for him to answer, but he would only answer a few hours later... when I would write to him it was because I wanted a message right away, like a text message. But for him, when he wanted to talk to me, it wasn’t through Whatsapp, I mean, his way of communicating was different from mine” (p.5)

Natalia and her American partner have divergent ways of communicating, or preferences of one media over another. They were having difficulties negotiating the ways in which they were to connect and keep in touch and, later on, in ways to break up. Gershon (2010) explains that people may not share the same media ideologies, and therefore they may not agree on which medias they should use to connect or disconnect with one another (p. 34). Along with these media ideologies, there are also idioms of practice which partners develop together; this means that they relationally find ways to use certain media to communicate (Gershon, 2010, p.39). Natalia explains that they tried to do this during their relationship: “It was about trying to find a balance in our last few months, it was to increase Whatsapp on his part, and for me to diminish it” (p.5).

### *5.3.2. Breaking up at a distance*

It was the second time that they had transitioned from being together to physically apart. The first time, he had left Peru and gone back home to the United States. He had been



distant and not very communicative, which Natalia explained was hurtful. After her 5-month stay with him in the United States, she was worried that this would happen again as they transitioned from physical presence to absence a second time. He told her: “Natalia, this time it will be very different, I will be there for you, I will be constant and present” (p.12). However, upon her arrival in Lima, she soon realized that this was not going to be the case:

“I realized that he was doing the same thing as the first time and so I said, no, I will not wait another 3 months for him, if he will distance himself, then I will also distance myself from him. That is what I did when he started distancing himself again, I blocked him, I deleted him from Whatsapp, and I did not answer him for about a week” (p.13).

Subsequently she received an e-mail in which he ended the relationship. Natalia replied and asked her partner to send her the photos from her 5-month stay in the United States. They exchanged a few e-mails and finally they decided to speak over Skype. She explained to me the importance of being able to speak to him rather than continuing the e-mail exchanges:

“I wanted to speak with him, at least to say goodbye, like decent people. To say goodbye, and to say “you know what, the relationship is over, we are not together, and that yea, it’s over”. I don’t like not talking about it because then you never know what happened and you are left with doubts and the feeling that this or that happened. I wanted to at least end on good terms” (p.13).

Here, Natalia and her partner’s media ideologies are also divergent. He chose to write her an e-mail, but she wanted to have a conversation over Skype in order to understand why he was breaking up with her. In her study on mediated breakups, Gershon (2010) explains that:

“Part of the reason people are privileging face-to-face breakups as the ideal way to end a relationship is because they want to know why; they want a reason that can sufficiently explain why the breakup is happening. They

believe that face-to-face communication can lead to the conversations that will provide this and that other media are often inadequate to this task” (p.101).

For Natalia, speaking over Skype was the best way to speak about the breakup; it was the closest to a “face-to-face” conversation, and it was more immediate than exchanging e-mails. They had two Skype conversations after their breakup, and it was during this second conversation that they really discussed their problems and some of the things that did not work out in the relationship. The day of the interview, which was the day after this intense Skype conversation, the effects of the breakup were apparent not only because of her tears, but because of the ways she was trying to process and reflect on what had been said and the things that happened during the last few months of her relationship<sup>8</sup>.

As Gershon (2010) explains, “breaking up by Facebook, or texting, or instant messaging is very real—the breakup conversation can have the real effect of ending the romantic relationship” (p.79). In the end, the emotional implications of a mobile breakup may involve rejection and disconnection through mobile technologies. Moreover, these “mobile breakups” raise important questions about the wider ideologies people have regarding mobile technologies, and the practices of virtual (dis) connectivity that they may afford.

### **Conclusion: Reflections About Movements and (dis) Connections**

During her interview, Johana said to me laughingly, “it’s like the humpback whale, we see each other once a year” (p.8). Johana’s metaphor is significant as it raises questions about the physical displacements of people from one place to another. Furthermore, it raises questions around the other forms of movement, senses, and practices that participate in transnational connections; they are analogous to the humpback whale’s communication through waves and sounds with its distant others during yearly migration. What is fundamental for my interviewees are the ways various issues of movement and mobility, or immobility, are central to their contemporary lives (Sheller and Urry, 2006). The movements across countries and

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<sup>8</sup> Thank you to this participant for sharing your stories, feelings and tears with me.

borders, or lack thereof, centrally affect the various practices, movements, and emotions in these relationships.

In exploring the corporeal travel of people and the physical movement of objects across borders, several factors were considered that could render people immobile, including governmental regulations and visa requirements. This returns us to questions as to how mobility is unequally distributed, who sets laws and regulations, and who can move freely across borders. Finances, health, and disability were also explored as impediments to mobility, and affected when and where partners could meet in person. Matters of corporeal travel raise important questions with regards to the body and emotional states, as well as the transitions involved in these mobile relationships. Is physical contact necessary in order to be intimate and present with a partner? When people are separated for longer periods of time, what are the practices that are relationally developed in order to connect or disconnect?

#### Virtual (dis) Connectivity

These questions and observations around physical, corporeal travels allowed me to explore other forms of travel including imaginative, communicative, and virtual, which involve a wide range of practices. Emerging from my analysis of the interviews, I would like to propose the notion of virtual connectivity. My data sheds light on connections that go beyond the physical that involve many forms of (im)mobility and various senses. I will use the notion of virtual connectivity throughout the following chapters to refer to these non-physically co-present forms and practices of connection. Virtual connectivities are unattached to a single geographical place and interrelated with movements and emotions that participate in intimacy and a sense of presence at a distance. For instance, the cross-linguistic interplay of words demonstrates that these connections and emotions are practiced across time and distance. There was a significant emphasis on the words that are created in these trans-national relations as a way to represent the emotional experiences of being apart and dealing with time differences, and as a way to virtually connect with a partner. I learned that practices of coordination did not only occur while planning visits to see each other, but also occurred in micro-coordinating phone calls and Skype/FaceTime interactions, which also afford a type of meetingness (Urry, 2012) across time and space. The mobile phone was an important tool in creating virtual connectivity in completing the tasks of coordination and negotiation on the

move. Likewise, my participants' experiences demonstrate how mobilities and practices are interdependent at different levels in order for virtual connections and interactions to unfold.

Virtual connectivity may also support instant accessibility to continuous contact through a wide range of practices, presupposing immediacy and reciprocity. As I explored mobile conflicts and the breakup, I came to realize that it is also important to acknowledge virtual connectivity's antipode: virtual dis-connectivity. My data around mobile conflicts shows that as much as mobile technologies can be praised for the possibility of connecting with others, they may also facilitate these instances of disconnection. Michelle explains this through her experiences of being hung up on, or not receiving responses to her messages or calls. Natalia's experience of breaking up with her partner sheds light on the various and sometimes conflicting media ideologies regarding connections and disconnections. Through these examples, the notion of virtual (dis) connectivity raises important questions around immediacy and (non) reciprocity. The practices discussed in this chapter involve different forms of communication: textual, aural, and visual. They raise questions about the ways the senses interplay with these forms of connectivity, and in the feelings of intimacy and presence. How is a virtual (dis) connectivity made possible through different forms of travel, practices, and through various senses, constructing a sense of intimacy and presence of the other?

# Chapter III: (Mobile) Intimacy

In the preceding chapter, I explored various forms of travels and the ways these movements affect mobile relationships. I also discussed some of the practices that emerge and how they may participate in a virtual connectivity (or dis-connectivity) while partners are apart. In this chapter, I focus on how partners create or maintain intimacy through various practices, mobile objects, and senses. The central question this chapter considers is: how is intimacy constructed and made possible when the other person is not physically present?

## 1. Intimacy

The word intimacy derives from latin, *intus*, which means “within”, and from *intimare*, which means “to make known” (Weingarten, 1991, p.2). Boym (2001) considers the intimate to be inflicted with qualities of interiority (“innermost”, “pertaining to a deep nature”, “very personal”, “sexual”, p.251) and communication. Similarly, in its popular understanding, intimacy is understood as: “a close or warm friendship or understanding; [a] personal relationship” (Collins, 2013).

For others, intimacy can refer to self-disclosure, egalitarianism, and reflexivity (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998). For Jamieson (1998), the disclosure that intimacy offers is the revelation of one’s inner thoughts and feelings, which may be enhanced by bodily intimacy: “it is an intimacy of the self rather than an intimacy of the body, although the completeness of intimacy of the self may be enhanced by bodily intimacy”(p.1; also see: Thien, 2012, p.193). Some of my interviewees’ descriptions of intimacy are resonant with these approaches. For example, Michelle explains intimacy as the deep understanding of the other, with the quality of self disclosure: “[...] you know the expression of being completely naked in front of the person, having them know exactly who you are, how you react, being intimate can also mean, obviously there’s the physical factor [...] (p.16). For Sophie, self-disclosure is primordial: “[...] intimacy is when you let someone into your personal universe...there are limits and certain things that I let others know and when you pass one of those limits, well then it becomes really intimate and personal [...] and it’s when you go beyond that limit that it’s intimacy” (p.22).

Lauren Berlant defines intimacy as a mobile process of attachment that is captured by collective fantasies that make some lives more intelligible than others. Berlant (2000) claims “to rethink intimacy is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living” (p.6). Although my participants share the aspiration for an intimacy in the conventional form, their experiences and practices underline that the intimacies in their daily lives are not so conventional. Their intimacies involve various forms of travel and movement (Chapter 2) that participate and influence a wide scope of practices, helping individuals make sense of their circumstances. They each participate in an endeavour to create new intimate spaces across large distances and through time.

Berlant (2000) describes intimacy as follows:

“...at its roots, intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others [...] Usually, this story is set within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipating kinds of love [...] This view of “a life” that unfolds intact within the intimate sphere represses another fact about it: the unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions [...]” (p.1)

Here, Berlant (2000) highlights another less seamless side of relationships: the “unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions” (p.1). While mobile conflicts and breakups were discussed in Chapter II, some of my data highlights other aspects of relationships that involve possible troubles: questions of control, power, trust, and jealousy are also part of the socio-emotional implications of the intimate practices between partners. In her study, *An equal distance? Individualisation, gender and intimacy in distance relationships*, Holmes (2004) explores new ways of relating at a distance for those that live between 2-5 hours away from their partner. She describes the “new gendered constraints with bodily and emotional consequences” for these women, for whom being intimate may suggest “alternative formulations of gender and power” (p.180). Here, I am interested in exploring the ways certain practices of intimacy may be gendered: what forms of labour appear through practices of

intimacy between partners? What are some of the implications of power, control, and monitoring in long distance relationships that emerge through mobile technologies?

### 1.1. Intimacy without the haptic

What is specific to trans-national relationships is that there is no physical presence or contact during certain periods of time. My research sought to understand the interplay between mobile technologies, practices, senses, and intimacy: which practices and which senses participate in an intimacy that excludes the haptic? Or is the haptic necessarily excluded from these practices?

For Anna intimacy is *a relationally constructed emotional space*, in which states of mind are synchronized:

“...mmm...that’s so complicated. (50:19) I think...(Silence)...off the top of my head, part of it is like being in this sort of like synchronized state of mind, like having our emotions sort of like... (Silence)...entering this emotional space...(50:47)...(Silence)...where we are simultaneously sharing this ...state of mind together...umm... where we get caught up in a rhythm together...umm....so I think the language stuff works for that... in like this world of like emoticon characters that we have works for that” (p.11).

Anna’s statement raises several important questions in regards to the ways that connectivity and relationality interplay with mobile practices and intimacy. This sense of constant virtual connectivity emerged strongly from my data, both expected and afforded by mobile technologies. Additionally, it often becomes expected that the other person be available and reachable at all times, presuming immediacy and reciprocity in interactions. This raises several questions about the socio-emotional implications of these mobile practices and intimate spaces of interaction.

Deborah Thien (2012) focuses on the spatial logic of intimacy and demonstrates the ways in which intimacy is a spatial affair (p.192): “Intimacy as distance, intimacy as difference, offers a flexible intimacy, reflecting the ambivalent and elastic spatialities of

women's emotional landscapes" (p.201). For Farman (2012), the intimate space that is created between partners is an action, not just physical distance (p.67). He refers to "distant intimacy" as the ways people connect through their devices, which offers an "embodied and spatial experience with one another" (p.134). This raises questions about the ways that various intimate practices (and actions) allow for the creation of intimate spaces/places that make possible the sharing of emotions, intimacies, and sexualities when partners are separated by distance and time. Significantly, this suggests an intimacy that goes beyond the conventional or normative forms of intimacy, invoking other senses that may participate in this "distant intimacy".

In order to answer these questions, I have drawn on the concept of *mobile intimacy* (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Hjorth & Lim, 2012), because it encompasses various issues around emotions, emerging forms of labor, mobile technologies, and co-presence (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p.478). Through interviews and multimedia diaries I was able to explore the ways intimacy is practiced and maintained through distance and time in these mobile relationships (Elliott & Urry, 2010), involving various forms of travel and different senses routed through mobile technologies.

## **2. Mobile Intimacy**

In *The future of Nostalgia*, Boym's (2001) term "diasporic intimacy" may seem to be paradoxical; how can there be intimacy in dispersions?

Lisa Reicht refers to ambient intimacy as a way to "keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy" (quoted in: Hjorth, Wilken, Hu, 2012, p.57). Reicht also adds that this expected regularity and intimacy might not be accessible "because time and space conspire to make it impossible" (ibid.). Although it can be supposed that mobile technologies allow a sense of regularity and presence, other factors may become barriers to their use or to the expectations they tend to generate of regular, constant contact. What happens when time, space and/or access may be barriers to this expected, regular communication and to these intimacies?

In their chapter on mobile relationships, Elliott and Urry (2010) explain that people are increasingly on the move, and that traditional relationship structures and forms of intimacy



have been transformed and have shifted from territorially fixed designations (for example the home or the bedroom) to more individualized and mobile ones (p.87) through a wide range of practices. They identify the concept of mobile intimacy, which “involves relationships across distance and through space and is spreading to many social relations” (Elliott & Urry, 2010, p.90). These intimacies are particularly relevant to partners in long distance romantic relationships as they “become flexible, transformable and negotiable” (Ibid.) because of the various forms of mobilities surrounding them.

The notion of mobile intimacy, of being intimate through distances and time in an age of mobile technologies, allows us to reflect on this new mode of intimacy on the move (Berlant, 2000, p.4). The notion of mobile intimacy encompasses questions of emotions, presence/absence, diaspora, mobile technologies and “emerging forms of affective, social and emotional labor” (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p.478). For their part, Hjorth and Lim (2012) define mobile intimacy as:

“... [the] multiple cartographies of space in which the geographic and physical space is overlaid with an electronic position and relational presence, which is emotional and social. This overlaying of the material-geographic and electronic-social is what can be called mobile intimacy” (p.478).

As such, I am interested in the ways mobile intimacy, inclusive of various bodily senses and emotions, is relationally constructed between partners through virtual presence. How can one be intimate across different time zones and across borders? Where can we locate these intimate spaces across distance?

### **2.1. Women and Mobile Intimacy**

The notion of mobile intimacy, which several scholars have framed as a feminist issue (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p.477), allows for a deeper analysis of women’s daily intimate practices. In what ways are mobilities and intimacies gendered and bound up with power relations? Historically, there was a tendency for men to criticize women for their use of the landline telephone as they discussed daily events to maintain social bonds (Ann Moyal quoted in:

Crawford, 2009, p.255). These practices were often perceived as pointless and costly (Crawford, 2009, p.255). Yet, scholars have argued that the phone “play[ed] a particular role in creating affective connections” (Sawchuk & Crow, 2012, p. 496). Similarly, in what ways and through which practices does mobile intimacy create affective connections across borders?

Many feminist scholars argue that technology and gender are closely interrelated or co-constructed (Ellen van Oost, quoted in Fortunati, 2009, p.26); Brunner (2002) has termed this the “feminization of technology/telephony” (quoted in Hjorth, 2011, p.43). Fortunati (2009) has called for research to explore the practices, meanings, and representations of technologies from women’s experiences (p.23) as a way to understand “how men and women co-construct the different technologies in a specific way” (p.26). Similarly, Sheller (2012) emphasizes that gender must be put on the agenda when discussing mobile technologies, as well as physical mobilities and internet-based networking (p.262). The links between technology, mobilities, and women are particularly important for research exploring long distance relationships, as practices and experiences of intimacy occur mostly through these mobile technologies, and it is within this body of literature that I situate myself and wish to contribute. For the purpose of my research, my interviewees’ partners (who are mainly men, except in one case) were not interviewed. My aim is not to compare how men and women experience intimacy; rather, my aim is to understand the subjectivities, practices, and experiences of intimacy constructed by these women in their remote relationships.

Inspired by these approaches to mobile intimacy, I will be using this as a key concept that brings together various forms of intimacy possible through distance and through time. Mobile intimacy allows for the exploration of travels and movements that are part of these trans-national relationships, along with the numerous other practices that afford an intimacy not fixed to a specific geographic location. The notion of mobile intimacy is also closely tied to notions of virtual connectivity and spatiality, raising issues around reciprocity, accessibility, and monitoring. Mobile intimacy allows for the explorations of a wide range of practices, linking emotions, social, political, and cultural implications with old and new technologies. All of these factors participate in the maintenance of mobile relationships in an era of global interconnectedness. Significantly, the notion of mobile intimacy as something not fixed to a concrete space and constructed relationally raises several questions: how do intimacy and

distance influence one another? How do mobile technologies serve to enhance or diminish women's experience of mobile intimacy and presence at a distance? And finally, what are the cultural and social implications of these types of relationships and practices with respect to questions of power, control, and different forms of labor?

### **3. Practices of Mobile Intimacy**

The semi-structured interviews and the multimedia diaries conducted in this study allowed me to further investigate the ways in which these mobile intimacies emerge through women's daily or regular uses and practices with respect to mobile technologies. In what follows, I will be unfolding three key sections that have emerged from my data. These include intimate practices constructed through mobile objects, virtual activities, and other multimedia practices.

#### **3.1. Mobile Objects**

Through the discussions with my interviewees, I learned that the movements of objects like letters, postcards, and presents are frequent among couples. Almost all partners send and receive some of these mobile objects. My participants explain that they value the letters more than a text message, especially because of the process they require to be sent: "it's the trouble of going to mail it, buying the stamps and everything, it is more thoughtful I find" (Sophie, p.20-21). Michelle also mentions this: "Well, it makes me think that he took the time for this, you know, the thought, he went out of his way to deliver this letter, he went out of his way to go buy me something, to prepare this package for me" (p.12-13).

In my interviews, letters were often automatically compared to text messaging. Hjorth (2011) argues that they recreate earlier practices of 19<sup>th</sup> century letter writing traditions that allow for co-presence and intimacy (Hjorth, 2011). Although all my participants frequently exchange text messages with their partners, in discussions about letter writing, they attribute a special value to the letters they send or receive because of the emotions that are bound to them. Michelle explains that sending a letter can demonstrate affection: "it's more special than like a message on Whatsapp. It's like a better way of him showing me his love" (p.12-13).

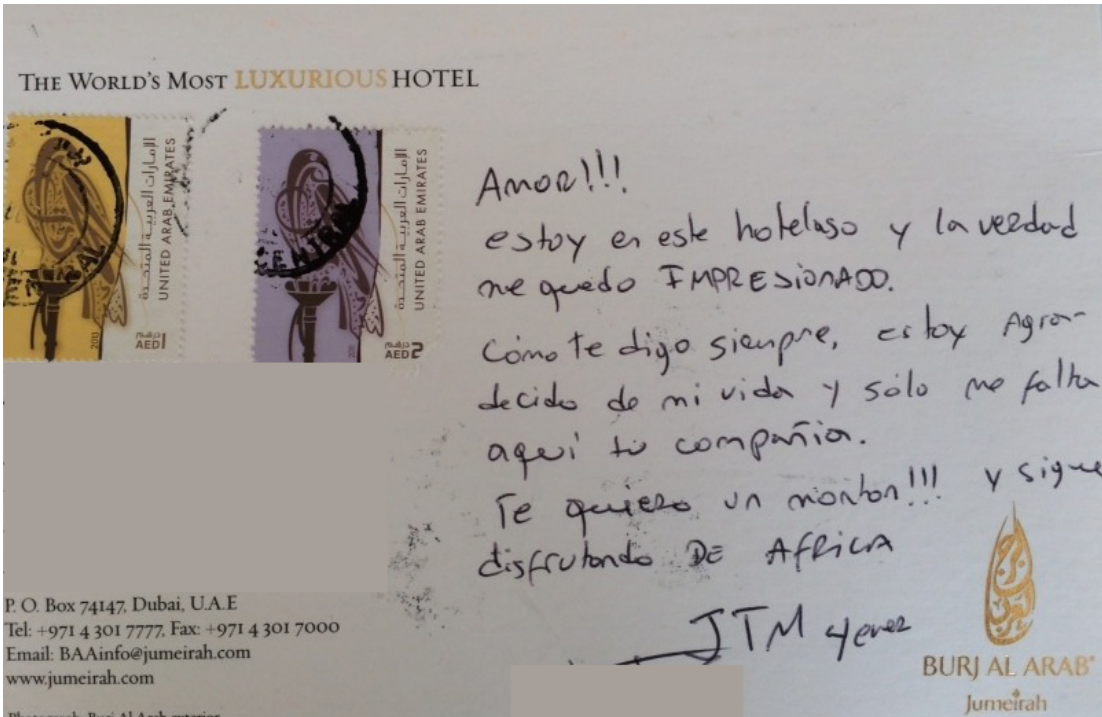
Similarly, Anna highlights the emotions that are transmitted through these letters and how they are central to an intimacy that is (physically) mobile:

“Well, you write things in a letter that you...like she would write things in a letter that you don’t write in a text message when you are texting 20 times a day... you know things like “you are the person that I want to be with for the rest of my life”, or like “I am so happy that we are still together”...like those emotional things” (p.16).

The emotions described by my interviewees in receiving of letters/postcards are further evidenced in a postcard I received from my partner:



Love!  
I am at this hotel and I am truly  
**IMPRESSED.**  
As I always tell you, I am  
grateful for my life and the only  
thing missing here is your  
company.  
I love you so much, keep  
enjoying your trip in Africa  
  
Je t’aime, forever



3.1. Postcards/Multimedia diary/Dania Habib/August 2014

The reception of this postcard during the summer of 2014, made me understand further how my participants felt when they receive something by mail; I was touched by his words. There is a certain affective content and emotions that are shared through the postcard I received. Additionally, I particularly enjoyed seeing his handwriting, which I do not see very often, and appreciated the cross continental travels this postcard had gone through in order to deliver the written message to me.

In her multimedia diary, Sophie also highlights that this emotional content is something that she values more through letters than text messages. Additionally, she raises the tactile aspect of receiving a letter, which I was able to relate to as I received my first postcard:

“[...] the letter was wonderful. To have something tangible in your hands, something from your boyfriend, rather than a phone call or a text message or over a computer screen is a thousand times better. I was really touched by what he wrote, more than if he would have texted it” (Multimedia diary, Sophie, Feb.14<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This excerpt raises questions regarding the materiality of these objects and how they can also allow for other senses to be activated that participate in a virtual connectivity. For Farman (2012), it is through our senses and through our interactions with objects that we can be connected as beings in the world (p.26). Therefore, there is a significant emphasis on these mobile objects, such as letters and postcards, and their materialities that integrate various senses and allow for an intimacy that is mobile.

For example, in her multimedia diary, Sophie explains the sense of smell that is activated as she receives a letter from her partner in England. She writes: “he even put his cologne on the letter! Ah ah” (multimedia diary, Feb 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014). In the follow up interview, she explains that when her and her partner would part, she would always spray his cologne on a t-shirt and keep it with her, but the smell would eventually fade away. However, the letter and the envelope kept a strong smell of his cologne, which allows her to open it and smell it once in a while and it “brings back nice memories” (Sophie, follow up interview, 25:14min). For Sophie, it is through the tactility and olfactory experiences of receiving a scented letter that she can virtually connect with her partner based on the ways in which sense, memory, and affect are activated by these mobile objects. This also raises questions about the ways that mobile objects and our senses participate in intimacy with a physically absent other, especially as it interplays with memory.

Anna gave me an example of a (mobile) drawing project she had with her partner, which started approximately a year ago:

“She was making these little drawings of us on post it notes with like a ballpoint pen. And they were really, really pretty...this kind of cute and silly...they looked like children’s drawings but...umm...(Silence)...like she was drawing these things like up to my visit there, a year ago, and like envisioning all the things we would do together [...] So when I went there, I scanned all of them, and then I had them all in Photoshop files and I was like “I’m gonna make a book”, like a zine out of these [...] I scanned everything I digitized everything I did the bits and image adjusting, and then I printed it all out, like on just black and white photocopier, and....umm...made a blank, booklet the size with the number of pages I thought the zine would have and then cut out all the drawings and sent them to her in an envelope, and told her to

order them, like to decide on the sequence [...] So...we kind of had this art project that was partly digital, which we could transfer back and forth, but also partly physical. So like, I mailed it to her ...she got this physical thing she had to work on” (p.16)

When I asked her the meaning of this type of project, she explains to me that for her: “mailing things back and forth I think...well it’s like this physical connection” (Anna, p.16). Both individuals touch the paper and then it travels from one part of the world to the other. Sophie and Anna’s examples emphasize an important sensory aspect associated with the traveling of objects and the ways materiality and tactility participate in a mobile intimacy. During the exchange of letters, postcards or objects, there is an overlaying of the material and the geographic and of the social, electronic, and virtual; for some this makes “things more real” (Sophie, p.21). The haptic and olfactory qualities included in these mobile objects bring a connection between individuals separated by time and place, as the objects physically travel as an index for the other person’s body. The materialities as well as the emotions that are tied up with the letter also return us to questions regarding other senses and mobile practices that allow for a non-bodily intimacy and presence at a distance.

Farman (2012) describes the sensory-inscribed bodily space as a space that is understood through the senses. He argues that in order for interactions to become spatial, they must produce a sense of movement (p.134). I have shown here how mobile objects physically travel from one person to another and allow for sensory experiences of touch and smell that participate in an intimacy that can be cross-continental. What other practices and other senses may participate in this mobile intimacy?

### **3.2. Virtual Activities**

So far, I have explored the ways intimacy can extend beyond physical locations and the physical body through mobile objects and the senses. The previous example of the drawing project that Anna and her partner sent back and forth by mail is an example of a shared physical and mobile project between partners. However, through discussions with my interviewees, other forms of “sharing” or “activities” emerged that are made possible through

other mobile technologies. I will refer to these forms of sharing and exchange as *virtual activities*. Many virtual activities are done simultaneously through real-time exchanges, over Skype or FaceTime: eating, watching television, doing workouts, and helping each other academically such as correcting cover letters or reviewing for exams<sup>9</sup>.

Anna explains that what she misses the most when she is away from her partner in Japan is sharing meals:

“One thing that I really miss, being apart, is not being able to share meals together [...] if we are eating everything is shared, everything is cut in half. We taste twice as many things because we share everything... ummm...but often we will talk on Skype while we are both eating...but we are not sharing the same food...umm...so we will talk about food” (p.11).

Michelle also explains that she eats over FaceTime with her partner in Germany: “we eat lunch together, or...we eat at the same time...” (p.11). Although eating, tasting, smelling the same food is not possible through Skype/FaceTime, eating at the same time, “together” over the screen is something very visual and social. My participants explain that this virtual activity participates in the intimacy and connectivity they create relationally. Correspondingly, Anna describes that the sharing of activities or projects online is an important aspect of her long distance relationship:

“I think that when you are with someone [physically], and you experience things together, you go through those experiences by talking about them...but we don’t have shared experiences most of the time now, so...we...(Silence)...have to kind of have these...quasi-shared experiences, like sharing these little pictures with each other” (Anna, p.7).

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<sup>9</sup> All of my participants and their partners had good Internet access (through WIFI or 3G) and laptops in order to have Skype/FaceTime interactions. However, I understand that it is not everyone in the world who may have this access.



The “*quasi-shared experiences*” that Anna describes represent what I term virtual activities that are jointly constructed through distance and time. The activities are partly shared because they involve the senses and exchanges. However, there is no physical presence or tactility, as in Anna’s example of eating meals over Skype. These virtual activities are nevertheless very immediate, as they occur (for the most part) over Skype or FaceTime. In my own diary, I highlight this sense of virtual connection and intimacy during a simple real-time interaction:

“The type of Skype session like we had today, are those I sometimes need. Just being on the screen, both in our beds and acting silly and laughing hysterically. I feel like this allows us to reconnect somehow, and it's almost like he is there with me. The conversations were not intense or personal, but simple, light, and fun, like when we are together. We were making jokes and just laughing until our stomachs hurt. And I believe that this is also something that participates in the intimacy we have at a distance” (March 25th 2014).

Here we have an overlaying of the material, electronic, social and virtual that constructs an emergent space to create a virtual intimacy not bound to physical space. Rather, it exists in the interrelation between the senses, practices, and the affordances of these technologies. These virtual activities and experiences allow partners to connect as beings in the world (Farman, 2012), strongly contributing to a sense of virtual connectivity. Anna’s example of such virtual activities like sharing images suggests that several types of practices and senses may participate in intimacy between partners at a distance, and offer immediacy and reciprocity of these practices.

The “distant intimacy” (Farman, 2012, p.134) I mention in my diary is made possible through the embodied and spatial experience afforded by mobile technologies, allowing people to connect at great distances. For Farman (2012), virtual connection between people is made possible if spaces, bodies, movement, and social interactions are present and experienced (p.134). In this way, such experiences of virtual activities invoke virtual, communicative, and imaginative forms of travels for the body and the senses (visual, aural).

As Michelle explained to me during these virtual activities: “[...] I feel more connected. I feel like he is more there, like we are doing something together, but virtually...” (p.11). These citations vividly demonstrate the notions virtual connectivity and mobile intimacy I have proposed, closely interrelated with mobile practices and sensory experiences. However, the presuppositions of immediacy and reciprocity that are afforded by Skype/FaceTime raise other important questions: what happens to intimacy and virtual connectivity without this immediacy? What other ways do partners virtually connect to construct a sense of intimacy?

### **3.3. Multimedia Intimate Practices**

In what follows, I will explore different practices of intimacy that emerged from my interviewee’s experiences of mobile intimacy. Mobile intimacy is also made possible through other types of sharing, including sending photos, audio notes, music, and videos, mostly through mobile phones. Several scholars argue that the mobile phone is a technology of propinquity that allows temporal and spatial proximity (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p.477). Smartphones<sup>10</sup>, integrated cameras, and applications such as Whatsapp, Viber, and Kakaotalk allow the free exchange of a wide range of media (audio, images, text, etc). In order to explore some of these other practices of virtual connectivity, I will discuss my interviewees’ textual and aural practices of intimacy.

#### **3.3.1. Textual Discourses**

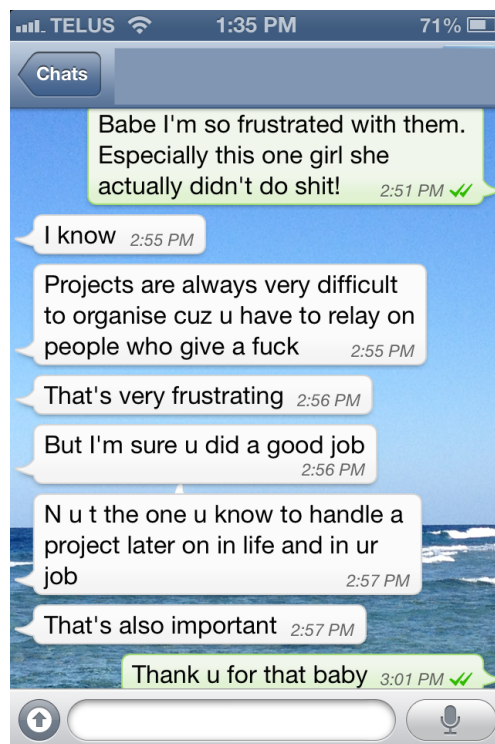
As I considered at the beginning of this chapter, letters and postcards are often compared to text messages that are sent between partners on a daily basis. Yet, the textual discourses of instant messaging are also an important part of my interviewees’ daily realities. Hjorth (2005) explains that there has been a significant increase in text messaging and that it plays “a pivotal role in maintaining everyday relationships” (p.51), and a key role in daily practices of intimacy. Anna explains: “the constant text messages I think is like our biggest form of intimacy” (p.11). Moreover, she describes that the rhythmic linguistic interplay of

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<sup>10</sup> While all my participants and their partners had smartphones, and access to Wi-Fi or 3G, it is important to keep in mind that not everyone that has the same access to mobile technologies and to Internet.

words as well as emoticons are key ways that she and her partner practice a daily mobile intimacy and virtual connectivity (examples in Chapter 2).

Accordingly, text messages contribute to the creation of a private space that allows partners to communicate. For example, Sophie prefers text messaging when she is on the move, like on the train or the bus, because it bothers her to speak in front of strangers. For her, “it is more private by message” (p.16). This intimate space is created during these immediate real-time textual discourses. This mobile intimacy is not fixed to a specific location and allows expansion into public and private spaces through “the various forms of mobility across technological, geographic, psychological, physical and temporal differences” (Hjorth & Lim, 2012, p.478). On the one hand, text messaging is also perceived as more practical (Michelle, p.6), yet at times, it can also be a space for sharing emotions and personal experiences. For example, in her multimedia diary, Michelle includes a screenshot of a conversation with her partner:



3.1. Screenshot of conversation over Whatsapp/Michelle/Multimedia Diary/No Date

She writes: “I was stuck working on a group project worth 50% of my grade all by myself. I felt down and frustrated. What Mike wrote me made me feel a lot better. He understood how I felt and supported me which was what I needed” (Multimedia diary, Michelle, no date).

This example demonstrates the intimacy and sharing of emotions that is possible between partners through textual exchanges. This example also demonstrates the emotional support that can be provided through an immediate exchange of messages. At times, this practice is preferred because, as some of my participants explain, text messaging does not need to be coordinated like Skype or phone calls, as the latter practices are more dependent on time zones and schedules (Michelle, Anna, Sophie, myself). The intimate practice of text messaging raises questions about the demand for immediacy and reciprocity so as to maintain a continuous textual exchange resembling a conversation. Maintenance of this virtual space of sharing and intimacy also sets into motion a range of expectations of responsiveness, which I discuss further in Chapter IV.

### *3.3.2. Aural practices*

Some practices do not include visualities. Several of my interviewees discussed aural practices that also participate in their practices of intimacy with a distant other, such as the sharing/sending of music and voice notes.

Carolina explains that she uses the application “Whatsapp” and its voice note feature<sup>11</sup> to share music with her partner: “if there is a song on the radio, I record it with the voice note and I send it to him” (Carolina, p.24). Sophie also shares music with her partner, using the same feature: “[...] sometimes when he is out partying he will record music and send it to me (laughs). Or, I went to see a band the other day...and... I thought he would like it so I recorded like 15 seconds and sent it to him” (p.22). The sharing of music over Whatsapp can also offer an aural lens into the other person’s place or moment.

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<sup>11</sup> Whatsapp’s voice note feature allows users to hold a button and make an audio recording. As this button is released, the recording is sent to the other person.

I have found that my own practices also include the sharing of music. At times, we use the same feature on Whatsapp that Sophie and Carolina do. However, my partner and I mainly use an application called Shazam. When you open the application, you tap on the screen and after a few seconds the application will identify the track you are listening to. It will then list the artist, year, album, title, etc., of the song. Additionally, the application allows you to share the song via social media, or via e-mail, and since its last update you can share it through text messages or Whatsapp<sup>12</sup>. We usually e-mail each other songs that remind us of the other, and a direct link allows the other to listen to the song:



3.2. Music through E-mail/ Screenshot from my Gmail/Multimedia diary/Dania Habib/ Feb 16<sup>th</sup> 2014

Having received this song in my e-mail inbox, I wrote about these musical exchanges in my multimedia diary:

“I was really happy to receive it [the e-mail with the song] because it is a song we listened to during the holidays when we were together, and the lyrics are nice. He sent me this at 1:20am, which is after I had gone to bed...more than this, is also the fact that no matter what, he was still thinking of me, at

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<sup>12</sup> I noticed this May 12th as I wanted to send a song to him and saw that there were more sharing options than before (Multimedia diary May 12th 2014)

the other end of the world, while he was on a beach, with his friends” (diary, Feb 16th 2014).

These aural and musical practices demonstrate the emotional ties and memories that are associated with the recordings sent from one person to another. Moreover, this demonstrates the ways that music can also create a virtual connection and an intimate space of sharing. This also raises questions about the ways that the imagination, memories, music, and aural practices interplay with presence and mobile intimacy between two partners at a distance.

The same feature on Whatsapp is not only used for the sharing of music, but also for sending and the recording of one’s voice to the other. This became an “in between” practice for my partner and I. It brought a balance between sending an innumerable amount of text messages, and rarely speaking over the phone or over Skype/FaceTime. The aural quality of this practice is important in hearing the other person’s voice, which can participate in intimacy, and in the presence of the other. It offers the interplay of an additional sense that goes beyond the visual. Several participants mentioned voice notes. Sophie explains the ease in sending these types of voice notes: “We do it because it’s super easy, you click on the button and it’s at the same spot to send it. So you hold your finger on the button, and it will record. So it is very easy. So yea, sometimes we do it. Also, it’s always nice to hear his voice. It’s less complicated than to call just to say goodnight” (p.22). The ease and speed of sending voice notes that Sophie expresses raises questions regarding the technological presumptions of such mobile practices, as well as questions of access that some might have more than others. Additionally, such ingrained uses of text, photos and voice messages indicate how quickly such technological affordances can become transparent and self-evident in people’s everyday media ideologies in an age of global interconnectedness.

The virtual activities and intimate practices that have been discussed so far demonstrate the different ways that my participants use mobile technologies, objects, applications and real time interactions as ways to create an intimate space. Some of these practices return us to questions regarding the presumptions of immediacy and reciprocity in order for these practices to create an intimate space that I will address in the final chapter. I have also discussed the different ways the senses participate in mobile intimate practices. Some practices are more

visual such as text messaging, Skype/Facetime; while others are haptic or allow for an olfactory experience of the other through mobile objects. In this final section, I am interested in exploring the ways intimate spaces, mobile technologies, and the senses may also participate in another facet of intimacy with a distant other: which practices do women adopt to construct mobile sexualities and sexual practices at a distance?

#### 4. Practices of Mobile Sexualities

Looking at intimacy as a relationally constructed space also opens up the possibility of other types of practices of intimacy to occur. During the interviews I conducted, I prepared a set of questions around sexual intimacies in the event that participants brought up the subject themselves. Most of them did of their own initiative. In what follows, I propose to analyze this data that highlights and exemplifies practices of sexuality in long distance relationships ranging from the sharing of sexually suggestive photos and messages to real time sexual exchanges.

##### 4.1. Sex and the Screen

In “Sexed up: Theorizing the Sexualization of Culture”, Attwood (2006) poses an important question: “when we say sex, what *do* we mean?” (Emphasis in text; p. 79). She argues that there are “new forms of sex that are taking place and that are disrupting previous conceptions of the place and status of sex in society” (p.79). For instance, sex has shifted from the domestic, private space of the home or the bedroom to a more flexible, virtual place that is negotiated relationally and on the move. These practices of sex also challenge normative conceptions and comparisons between the “real” world and the virtual world (Saraswati, 2013, p.587; Farman, 2012, p.22). For Plummer (2008), there is a need to examine such “cyber sexualities” the more we conceive of our societies as entering an age of cybersex (p.19).

One of the key practices emerging from these cyber sexualities is “*sexting*”. As a very general definition, it is understood as the exchange of sexual content through text-based communication technologies. For Agustina & Gómez-Durán (2012), “sexting” is a social phenomenon that involves the “sending, posting, receiving, or sharing of a sexually suggestive message to someone using electronic media” or “involving a self-nude or semi-nude

picture/video” (p.1327). Some scholars have put significant emphasis on the risks and consequences of sexting, especially on teenage girls (Lenhart, 2009; Ringrose et al., 2013). Quantitative researches seek to calculate the motivations of sexting based on relationship satisfaction (Parker et al. 2013) or on attachment theory (Impett et al., 2008; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). For example, Drouin and Landgraff (2012)’s research was conducted as an online survey, which presupposed many ways of sexting, but did not explore the subjective experiences of the people in these relationships.

Hasinoff (2012) argues that sexting should be viewed as a media production practice in order to challenge the negative connotations and biases of some research and to encourage that researchers to pay attention to its productive and connective dimensions. Research related to sexting and “its role in sexual [mobile] relationships” (Hasinoff, 2012, p.458) is relevant particularly due to the many types of media available at hand, and because more people are on the move. However, there seems to be a lack of qualitative research that investigates the meaning of these types of behaviours for individuals in relationships, and more specifically for women in these long distance relationships. How do adult women practice these mobile sexualities? What are the significance and the implications of these exchanges for women?

#### **4.2. Photos and Texts of Desire**

Mobile technologies have made possible the development of different forms of cybersex, produced and circulated by individuals themselves (Attwood, 2006, p.81). Döring (2000) suggests that the features of digitally mediated communication make it easier both ‘to explore one’s own sexual desires and to critically reflect on the experiences associated with them’ (quoted in Hasinoff, 2012, p. 457). Throughout the year of my research, as I kept my own diary and observed my own practices, I realized that some sexual experiences were expanding into other practices and spaces. For example, I noted in my diary that the exchange of text messages or speaking over the phone can at times, “motivate or trigger the imagination” because “talking and verbalizing, or texting these types of desires, with him, somehow intensified these desires...” (Diary, April 23rd 2014). Similarly, Carolina explains that speaking over the phone about sex sometimes resulted in real time sexual exchanges with her partner over Skype, as they visually performed what was discussed over the phone. This



raises important questions about the ways visibility, textuality, aurality, and sexuality can interplay differently through various practices of sexual intimacy.

For Farman (2012), phone sex and sexting are convincing examples of the ways embodied space is constructed and practiced when two people are apart (p.21). For him, embodiment does not need to be located in a fixed physical space (p.21), but occurs when partners are able to use imagination, their senses, and practices to construct an intimate space. Sexualities may be enacted across distance and come to constitute a practice of mobile intimacy. The sending of sexually suggestive photos is one of the practices mentioned by some of my interviewees. This is usually done through mobile phones, as smartphones now have integrated cameras and applications in which various media (audio, visual, video) can be produced and shared instantly (through Whatsapp, Viber, Kakaotalk, for example). I will now consider some of my interviewees' experiences of sending and receiving sexually suggestive photos to raises questions around (non) reciprocity, desire and emerging forms of affective labor.

Michelle's motives for sending photos are twofold: on the one hand, it is a way to maintain a certain form of sexuality and desire in her long distance relationship: "... Sometimes I send him sexy photos, just to keep...some of that going" (p.13). She explains that it is important to their relationship, even occasionally, because "at least it's something, rather than ignoring that we have needs for 5 months" (p.15). On the other hand, Michelle sends her partner photos of herself because in return he will complement her, which she explains is rare: "like when he sees it, he will then like...give me compliments, or just say something nice" (p.15). This example suggests that through messages and images, desires may be communicated to the other. For example, Michelle notes that in response to her photos, her partner might "sext" her back, which is a way for him to demonstrate his sexual desire for her: "maybe he will even like, talk a little bit dirty, which to me is like better than nothing, you know" (p.15).

However, Michelle recounts her consequent expectation that she should receive a photo in return. Yet, her partner has never sent her one, which has consequently reduced the amount of photos she sends: "On one hand I am reluctant to doing it because I am like where the hell is my picture...but...on the other hand I want to make him happy..." (Michelle, p.16). This example is important not only because it raises questions about (non) reciprocity, but

because it raises important questions and implications regarding forms of sexual-affective labor. Michelle's statements exemplify the effort she puts into taking and sharing these images of desire; they are a way to maintain sexual connection, which results in in her partner's sexual arousal and satisfaction - but not necessarily her own, as her practices are not reciprocated the way she wishes.

Out of my interviewees, Michelle was the only one to explicitly mention requesting photos from her partner. Some of the other participants did not request images; and they received sexually suggestive photos from their male or female partners. Anna and Sophie explain that receiving these photos makes them laugh and do not necessarily have an erotic outcome:

“You know, it's cute, it always makes me laugh, I find it a little funny and it puts me in a good mood. It doesn't make me [...], horny or anything. I laugh, I find it fun, it can be flattering in a way...but if the objective is to make me horny, then it doesn't work [...] I think that he enjoys receiving photos of me more than the other way around” (Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, 44mins).

This raises questions about the necessity of visibility in sexual exchanges. Johana argues that there is a difference between men and women in this regard: “[...] I am going to be honest with you, I prefer in reality [...] Because men are visual, but we are more kinaesthetic, that we like it when we are touched” (p.13). This highlights the importance of other practices and other senses to come into play in order to give partners a sense of a sexual, virtual intimacy. These examples demonstrate how - through texts and photos - an intimate place is constructed in which desires and eroticism can be shared at a distance and through time. However, it is interesting how the sometimes non-erotic effect of certain visibilities may still participate in a mobile intimacy and virtual connection between partners, as a private form of sharing.

#### **4.3. Skype Sex: A Practice of Mobile Sexuality**

As I have shown thus far, along with the development of new technologies, sexual texts have also proliferated. This creates new possibilities for sexual encounters: “phone sex,

email affairs and cybersex” are part of a contemporary “repertoire of sexual practices” (Attwood, 2006, p.80). As discussed previously, sexual images are also included in this repertoire of practices’ as a new form of (sexual) media production (Hasinoff, 2012). However, various forms of “cybersex” using real time applications such as Skype or FaceTime are also practices that allow a mobile sexuality between partners. Ben-Ze’ev (2004) refers to the term “cybersex” as:

“[...] a social interaction between at least two people who are exchanging real-time digital messages in order to become sexually aroused. People send provocative and erotic messages to each other, with the purpose of bringing each other to orgasm as they masturbate together in real time [...] these messages may be of various types – video, audio, and text-based” (p.5).

In his book “Love Online” Ben-Ze’ev (2004) mainly focuses on text-based messages. Conversely, I will be largely focusing on the real-time exchanges. During the interviews, my participants refer to “Skype Sex” when sexual exchanges occur over real time interactions. My aim here is not to focus on behaviours over Skype/FaceTime, but rather to explore the meaning of these types of interactions and explore the ways they participate in partners’ sexual intimacies through distance and time.

Carolina describes her sexual practices, which include various modes of expression and more than one mobile technology in order to experience her sexualities over the screen:

“Stronger is the fact that we talk, in respect of intimacy, so like ‘ah, I want to do this to you, I want you to be doing this to me’ things like that and then actually doing them on Skype things like that. And so this physical part at a distance, so to speak, is always there” (Carolina, p.17).

Carolina’s practices here are multi-sensorial: her and her partner discuss over the phone, speaking of their desires in order to perform them through a visual and real-time medium (Skype). The overlaying of senses and practices here is successful in creating an

intimate place of exchange, and in doing so perhaps intensifies desires and allows for these experiences to unfold.

When I asked Johana to define intimacy, she immediately referred to her mobile sexualities. She goes into more explicit details about the ways they “do sex” over the screen: “One new year I bought myself a baby doll, I also prepare him surprises” (p.13); “so I give him a whole show”(p.14); “I try to not be repetitive [...] I need to feed it with games, with things no...” (p.14) and “like the last time, we filmed what we did” (p.14). “And so that is the way that we do intimacy” (p. 14). Johana highlights two important things: the creative, visually stimulating ways she finds to perform sex over the screen, as well as the efforts she puts in creating a sexual intimate space (e.g. games, lingerie).

These practices raise interesting questions around a form of sexual-affective labour. Johana feels like she needs to maintain sexual practices and her partner’s satisfaction. During the interview, she shares a certain worry that without these mobile sexual practices, her partner might search for satisfaction elsewhere. She feels the need to feed this intimacy, in the fear that another woman might: “I have to feed the intimacy, because if I don’t, imagine, there will be another that will come and touch him and will get him up” (p.13). Here, Johana clearly states her preoccupations and the importance she associates with maintaining sexual intimacy with her partner. However, she is also preoccupied with maintaining a form of control. Johana believes that if her partner is sexually satisfied with their interactions, he will not search for this elsewhere. Holmes (2004) argues that “much of the responsibility for maintaining togetherness falls on women” (Holmes, 2004 p.197). Based on Johana and Michelle’s experiences, I ask: to what extent does sexual maintenance and togetherness at a distance also depend on the affective labour of women?

#### **4.4. A Sense (or lack thereof) Touch**

Throughout this chapter, I have examined the various senses that participate in an intimacy that is mobile. For example, instances of textual discourses, photo exchanges and virtual activities are part of an array of multisensory practices. For some individuals in long distance relationships, like Johana and Carolina, “sex may be an out of body experience, very

intimately performed across time and distance” (Attwood, 2006, p.79). However, for others, their experiences with Skype are not as effective as others. Anna describes it as “awkward”:

“(…) that doesn’t really work... (Silence)...because of like those silly cameras, the webcams that ...like seeing each other’s body is difficult, and like I don’t know there is no physical contact...ummm...so that...isn’t something we do very often. I think we just do it when we are super desperate like when we haven’t seen each other for 6 months” (p.12)

Here, Anna emphasizes the absence of tactility, which is important to her with regards to mobile sexuality with her partner. This example also raises questions about the more negative experiences related to attempts of be intimate, and the practice of different or newer forms of sex through mobile technologies. In my own multimedia diary, I reflect on a negative experience during an attempt at Skype Sex with my partner:

“Wow... The quickest most unsatisfying experience tonight... And that's scary because I was not turned on... Just not into it...I had my phone between my legs, and I couldn’t see anything... He was talking saying things like what would you want me to do right now and I was just not inspired [...] And even though to me it seemed like the most unsexy and unsatisfying experience...To him it may have been the opposite. What is the significance of this type of interaction for me, and for our relationship?” (Multimedia diary Feb 16<sup>th</sup> 2014).

In their book “Sex, or the Unbearable”, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman (2013) define: “sex, for us, whatever else it may signify or be made to figure, denotes an encounter with otherness that attains the stability of knowable relation only by way of an optimism that erases its negativity” (p.1). Here, the otherness I describe in my entry is the strangeness and the anxiety of not enjoying the moment and environment my partner is trying to create (e.g. by verbalizing things that could be done). For other women, these experiences were awkward, or even humoristic. Such examples are significant as they raise questions about not only the positive feelings generated around sexual desires and arousals, but also the negativities, as well as the

strangeness in some of these encounters. My experience as well as Anna's raise important questions about the visual emphasis of many mobile technologies, and whether or not visualities are necessary for all women in order to experience these virtual sexualities.

An interesting recent development to consider, which was not mentioned during the interviews with my participants, are emerging technologies/applications that do offer tactility. Private companies are increasingly attempting to recreate this sense of touch at a distance. For example, Pillow Talk ("Internet-enabled pillow 'connects long-distance lovers'", 2013) is an Internet-enabled pillow that includes a bracelet, an application, and a pillow. It allows the user to hear the other person's heartbeat, and the pillow lights up when the other is lying down on theirs. Other companies have focused more specifically on sexual experiences at a distance between partners. Vibease<sup>13</sup> and We-Vibe 4 plus (Benessaieh, 2014) are two examples that are currently on the market. The products offer a vibrator that is specifically made for women, which can be controlled by their partner through an application. These products raises several questions about the tactility afforded by certain mobile technologies, and whether or not this sense is necessary for women to practice intimacy through distance and time. Additionally, these products are directed at women's desires and sexual arousal, but raise significant questions and issues around the control women may have of their own body, sexual pleasure, and desire as well as the commercialization and monetization of mobile desires and intimacies. To what extent are these technologies reinforcing gendered relations and a certain power and control through mobile sexualities?

#### **4.5. Remote, And Yet on a Leash**

These issues emerged in my data in two distinct ways. Some of my interviewees' experiences and practices raised issues around control, monitoring, and power within these relationships; especially in the ways practices are negotiated or (not) reciprocated at a distance. Lasén (2011) explains that the mobile phone has created a sense of constant accessibility between partners. She argues that the mobile phone allows for different modalities of control, including attempts to control the other, wanting a constant (virtual) connectivity, and knowing a partner's whereabouts (p.96). In what follows, I will explore two

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<sup>13</sup>Vibease Website. Available at: <http://www.vibease.com/>. Accessed Sept. 2014.

examples of socio-emotional labor that emerged through my data: staying at home, and Facebook.

#### *4.5.1. Staying at Home*

Johana and Michelle both explain the ways they adapt their own social practices in order to maintain their relationships and avoid conflicts. I have identified these as forms of socio-emotional labor, as they would often choose to stay at home to reassure their partner of insecurities and jealousy. Michelle explains that at the beginning of her relationship, her partner did not trust her and she found ways to reassure him: “when there were the trust issues on his part towards me, I would do everything after the whole fiasco, to make sure he felt ok, to make sure he felt that he could trust me, [I would] go out of my way to make him feel good” (p.9). Michelle chose another practice to regain her partner’s trust: she sent a love letter, a material, tangible affective object to Germany. Additionally, she changed some of her daily social practices: she went out less and stayed at home more, and she stopped communicating with others she had previously slept with, as this particularly made her partner jealous. These actions are steps she took to maintain her relationship. However, these decisions were never imposed or requested of her. These actions demonstrate that the labour of “caring continues at a distance” (Holmes, 2004, p.189). Michelle’s practices indicate that she attempts to demonstrate that she cares and to diminish her partner’s worries and jealousies. When the situation was reversed, when she started having insecurities, Michelle explains that her partner did not reciprocate with his actions to reassure her the way she wanted, or like she had previously done for him. Moreover, she adds that he would get angry and not want to talk about the subject, which made her feel like “the relationship is on his terms” (p.16). The non-reciprocity of practices and actions of trust in Michelle’s examples raise important questions of control: her partner sets certain terms, and she feels disempowered and has to yield to them. Michelle’s efforts show the socio-emotional labour involved in her practices, like sending a letter to prove her love and her decision to limit her own social interactions and stay at home to maintain her relationship.

#### *4.5.2. Facebook*

In their study on jealousy and Facebook, Muise et al. (2007) find that Facebook generates and publicizes information about partners that would not be available otherwise. This may create or enhance feelings of jealousy, as well as concerns about one's relationship (p.443). For Michelle, the affordances of social media, especially Facebook, raise issues of trust and jealousy. She recounts one specific event that brought these insecurities:

“what do I see on Facebook? A picture of him and his sister and her friends at a club...so...I was like wow [...] I even called him when I finished work at 6, I called him after like I have a feeling he is awake, but he didn't answer. And when I tried calling him after I saw this picture, he didn't answer...and...eventually we spoke about it and he admitted that he lied, he ended up going out and he didn't want to tell me because he is scared of my reactions” (p.7)

If it were not for Facebook, this information would not have been available to Michelle. Gershon (2011) explains that Facebook tends to show both too much information, and at the same time, not enough, which can easily cause misinterpretations. The constant display solicited by Facebook offers the possibility of monitoring a partner's activities, as well as others: “And...ummm...I know this sounds stupid but she likes every single one of his pictures on Facebook except for the pictures of me and him...” (Michelle, p.8). The fact that Michelle notices that someone “likes” all of her partner's pictures except the ones she appears in raises important questions of monitoring. Facebook becomes a way to follow her partner's activities, his localization, and whom he is with. As she explains, the openness of Facebook increased her insecurities and mistrust. She attempts to control these practices by requesting that her partner always tell her when he communicates with his female friend from college: “I was like when you have communication with her can you please like just let me know, I want to know like what's going on...just wanna be kept up to date with your contact with this girl because it really makes me feel uncomfortable” (p.8).

The mobile phone and Facebook have opened up accessibility to information and have increased the expectations of instant accessibility between partners at any time of the day.



Moreover, these examples shed light on the ways some practices may be requested by partners and the ways some women take the initiative to adapt certain social practices and limit their own social interactions in order to maintain their relationship and to avoid jealousy and mistrust. This raises important questions around the expectations generated by mobile technologies and their affordances of an instantaneous, constant virtual connectivity with the other, as well as the ways that practices of control or monitoring are developed, and the ways mobile technologies and social media may create the sense of being “always on a leash” (quoted in: Hjorth 2005, p. 1).

### **Conclusion: Labors of Love**

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to explore the various ways my participants use mobile technologies, practices, and their senses as endeavors to create a space for mobile intimacy and sexuality across distance and through time. The initial question posed was: how is intimacy possible when the other person is physically absent? This chapter has put significant emphasis on the sensorial experiences afforded through mobile technologies; and it is here that the senses and interactions allow for these virtual connections to open up intimate spaces created at a distance (Farman, 2012, p.26).

My data has shown - and I have emphasized - intimacy that is unattached to a specific location; it has shifted from the bedroom to more flexible and indefinite spaces that are on the move. Practices of mobile intimacy include a wide range of media and creative practices: mobile objects, text messages, photos and videos, voice notes, and real-time interactions. As such, mobile intimacies raise questions around immediacy and reciprocity of practices, and there is an increasing expectation of continuous contact between partners.

As such, distance brings about new ways of being intimate. It can bring two individuals closer, as it can also tear them apart (Holmes, 2004; see breakup section in Chapter II). As noted by Berlant (2000), there are unavoidable troubles and implications surrounding intimacies and relationships. For example, through my interviewees’ experiences, there are important questions that emerge around gender, power, monitoring, expectations of reciprocity, and different forms of labor. Hjorth (2011) shows that intimacy, both online and offline involves various forms of social, creative, and affective labor (p.37). Fortunati (2009)

argues that mobile phones facilitate all aspects of immaterial labor (communication, civil/political engagement, interaction, affects, love, and sex), and therefore are “a strategic tool of social labor” (p.31-32), especially for women. How, and through which practices, do various forms of immaterial labor emerge when partners are separated by distance and time? Some examples of (immaterial) affective labor were discussed, such as limiting one’s own social activities in order to reassure a partner, or monitoring the other through social media.

Another form of labor emerged from my data, which I have mentioned a type of sexual-affective labor. Some of my participants felt as though they needed to feed the sexuality in their relationship while they are away from their partners. They did this by sending sexually suggestive photos and through real-time interactions in order to maintain their partner’s interest and to feel desirable. For example, Johana shared her concerns about her partner going to “get his satisfaction elsewhere” if she did not maintain it with games, lingerie, and toys. This raised the question of whether sexual togetherness at a distance is dependent largely on women’s practices. It also touches upon issues that could explore gender, control, sex, and media for future research.

As this chapter has examined, intimacy is defined, practiced, and constructed in many ways by this study’s participants, through a wide range of mobile technologies such as letters and postcards, photos, text messages, and the phone. The sensory experiences involved in aural, textual, visual, affective practices are crucial to the ways intimacy is constructed and maintained between people who are physically separated by distance and time. I have examined and analyzed non-geographically bounded intimacies through the concept of mobile intimacy, suggesting an intimacy that is on the move and not fixed to a single geographic location. They also raise an important question that will be central to the final chapter: how is mobile intimacy practiced through the construction of different forms and levels of presence and absence?

## Chapter IV: Constructing Presence/Absence

When I started my master's degree, I had also entered into a long distance relationship. Being apart from a romantic partner was something I had never done before, especially for extended periods of time. I bought an iPhone, and downloaded all the applications that I would need to keep in touch with my distant partner. I believed that all of these different ways of communicating, sharing photos and videos were going to make communication and connections much easier. I soon realized that our practices consisted of continuously sending text messages, music, links or photos with our mobile phones, and reaching out to one another through social media such as Facebook or Instagram. For a while, I believed that it was thanks to the multiple ways of staying in touch across a wide range of media that it was possible to feel a sense of presence. I thought that my partner and I would compensate for being physically apart with an overlaying of socio-technological-virtual presence across time and space. Moreover, the immediacy of responses, the continuous contact, and the multiplicity of practices had me convinced that he was really present in my day-to-day life. As time went by, and our practices changed and diminished, I started asking myself: was it really this multiplication of immediate practices that made me feel like he was more present? I had originally proposed to use the concept that Licoppe (2004) calls "connected presence". Connected presence is that "in which the (physically) absent party renders himself or herself present by multiplying mediated communication gestures up to the point where co-present interactions and mediated communication seem woven in a seamless web" (Licoppe, 2004, p.135). However, after conducting the interviews with my participants, I came to realize that this feeling of presence was not always necessarily linked to practices of constant connectivity. There was much more involved in the construction of this feeling of presence, which is what I attempt to explore in this chapter.

Interrelated with the previous chapters on mobilities and on intimacy, questions of presence and propinquity are central in an age of mobile intimacy. We generally tend to think of presence as the physically co-present other. Yet, how does one go without the other? How can there be intimacy, when the other is not physically present? The presumption of a

“metaphysics of presence” assumed in several of the social sciences suggests that the immediate presence of others is the “real” basis of social existence. However, this metaphysical presumption is called into question in an age where mobile technologies are predominant, especially when many connections and relations are not propinquitous (Büscher, Urry, Witchger, 2011, p.5) in an age of increasing global interconnectedness with others.

In this final chapter, I will attend to the ways that the women in long distance relationships experience and/or construct a sense of their partner’s presence/absence. Additionally, I will discuss moments or events of transition between physical presence and absence as well as the practices associated with the construction of a presence that is imagined.

#### **4.1. Feelings of Absence**

Although I originally intended to focus on the concept of presence, I realized that it is unavoidable to raise questions about absence. I was curious about long distance relationships and understanding how, during long periods of physical absence, partners seek to maintain various practices of intimacy. Two instances underline some of the difficulties that emerge with a partner’s physical absence. The first is when the women start to forget the sensations or the feelings associated with the physical presence of their partner. The second is when in addition to physical absence, there is also “technological absence” of the other.

##### **4.1.1. Forgetting sensations of propinquity**

“Like when we are together, there is this sensation of being together, like the sensation you get from holding someone’s hand, from always having physical, not just sexual, but like just physical contact with another body [...] like after we separate, I remember that there was this amazing sensation when we were together, but I can’t remember what that sensation felt like...”

(Anna, p.12-13).

In this excerpt, Anna emphasizes the bodily sensations that she associates with her partner's physical presence. After spending one month together in Japan, they spend the rest of the year apart. As time goes by, Anna attempts to imagine or remember what those sensations feel like. This is resonant with what Elliott and Urry (2010) call imagined presence, which may have numerous forms and can shift between a present and distant other. As they argue, "...when there is absence, there may be imagined presence" (p. 15). When I asked Anna what she does to try and remember or imagine these sensations, she explains that she looks at photographs, or reads her diary entries, but "that still doesn't carry for any tangible thing" (Anna, p.13). Imagined presence, although accompanied by visual supports or real time interactions, does not give Anna the bodily sensations of holding her partner's hand. Nor does it help her remember what those sensations feel like; she can only try to imagine them. However, this raises important questions with regards to a sense of presence in the absence of tactility, and how people use different practices to create a sensory experience or contact afforded by mobile technologies. How is an imagined presence made possible through various intimate practices involving senses other than the tactile?

Similarly, Michelle explains to me that after five months away from her partner, she becomes unsure what things feel like between them: "[...] going back to long distance for five months that was...insanely brutal because, I wasn't even sure what it felt like to kiss him, and I wasn't even sure, like, I didn't feel like this passionate love for him [...] like I didn't really feel him" (p.14). This excerpt foregrounds the forgetting of the bodily sensations associated with her partner's physical presence, like kissing him. Michelle expresses her concerns about her own feelings towards her partner, her hesitations about her love for him, and not feeling this "passionate love". Anna and Michelle's preoccupations with the absence of tactility and the bodily sensations associated with their partner's physical presence provoke questions about the ways in which mobilities, new and old technologies afford or limit these feelings of absence and presence; and how they may in turn shape various intimate practices.

## 1.2. Days of "technological absence"

Bodily and emotional sensations associated with the physical presence of a distant other may become vague or blurred by long periods of physical absence, as Michelle and Anna

express in the previous examples. However, my interviews with participants, as well as my own experiences, revealed a second type of absence at play. I chose to refer to this as “technological absence”. This occurs when the other person is not reachable through mobile technologies, such as the phone, picture/text messages, or social media. For instance, a battery may run out or 3G and/or cellphone access in certain areas may be limited.

At times, these days of disconnection may provoke awareness of practices that have been routinely adopted. This may also give partners different perspectives on their daily uses. The multimedia diary exercise allowed Sophie to reflect upon this. She writes that for the first time in their relationship, access did not allow them to talk for the weekend. She was away at a cottage where she had no signal on her mobile phone for two days:

“It allowed me to realize to what extent I need those text messages/calls/Skype calls...[...] Although at times I feel like these communication technologies make me feel far away from him, today, they made me feel very close to him. After all, it’s a million times better than nothing at all ”  
(multimedia diary, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014).

As Sophie mentions here, being disconnected and not having any cellphone signal or Internet allows her to realize the importance she associates with receiving anything from her partner during the day. She appreciates and prefers to have a “technological presence”, to complete absence (both physical and technological).

This concrete example could be considered a “planned disconnection” because it was possible for Sophie to let her partner know in advance that he would not be able to reach her for the weekend, that she would be technologically absent. Yet, what of those unplanned moments when a battery runs out, a phone gets lost or forgotten somewhere? Increasingly, though not everywhere around the world, there is a possibility to reach the other person at any time of the day, and most of my participants praised current technologies for their capacity to keep in touch: “technology helps so much” (Johana, p.19), “for me, technology is a hit” (Carolina). However, what happens when there is no response at the other end of the line? Carolina recounts the time her partner had forgotten to let her know that he was going away for a weekend, and that he would not have cellphone reception. She explains to me: “I got

angry. I told him ‘you could have died and I wouldn’t have any news from you. You always have to warn me’” (p.9). I can recall something similar happening to myself in November 2013. I had no news from my partner until 9pm one evening and was worried about what had happened the previous night. As I wrote in my diary: “I knew that my partner had partied the night before. I knew that not answering a text message around noon meant that he was still sleeping. But when the clock hit 9pm, I got worried. Worried because something bad could have happened. I knew he had his car that evening [...] what if he got into an accident?” (Multimedia diary, November 1st, 2013).

In both cases, for Carolina and myself, our worries of not knowing our partner’s whereabouts made Carolina request that her partner notifies her at all times. I ended up discussing with my partner about drinking responsibly, and not letting his nights get out of hand. Carolina’s request to be notified also demonstrates a certain control that she wants to exercise, as she explains: “we cannot be so much time without communicating... without knowing that despite the distance, I have him here (showing her phone)” (Carolina, p.8). These examples not only raise questions about the ways absence, presence and distance are negotiated between partners, but also address control, monitoring, jealousy, and trust. There was a need for Carolina to know what her partner was doing, his whereabouts, and her need for his notification of “technological absence”. Moreover, these two situations demonstrate how easily worries around unresponsiveness to text messages or calls arise in a context of continuous connectedness. They highlight the ways in which immediacy and reciprocity of responses become part of everyday media ideologies, seen as crucial in reassuring and monitoring the other. I will pursue the questions these issues raise further throughout the chapter.

## **2. Transitions between physical presence/absence**

The corporeal travels of people from one place to another also entail transitions between physical presence and physical absence in these mobile relationships. In the coming section, I will attend to these moments of transitions and the emotional cycles or curves that my participants associated with them.

## 2.1. Alienating Airport Moments

When I asked my interviewees about transitioning from being apart to together and vice versa, Anna, Carolina, and Johana spoke about their reunions at the airport. I was not expecting the airport moment to have such significance, perhaps because I assumed that all (or most of them) experience similar feelings to myself when they see their partner at the airport: delight, enthusiasm, and relief to be in the same physical place. However, some of the women framed this airport moment as strange or alienating. As the women recounted these transitions, I came to further understand the airport as a (relational) place (Massey, 1991; Adey, 2006) and a transitional place/moment in itself. Although it may be easy to forget the sensations associated with the other person's physical bodily presence, the airport moment is significant since it is the liminal point where screens and images become three dimensional and tactile. Yet, my data also shows how several of the women considered the airport moment to be transitional and sometimes alienating.

Johana was the only one of my participants who met her partner online. She recalls the first time seeing Orlando in person, and describes how he did not match what she had imagined, or what she had seen over Skype: “the funniest thing is that you see a person on a camera, and then you see them [in person], they are totally different! I thought that he was darker skinned, more native looking, and then I was like no... he was better”<sup>14</sup> (p.6). Although they had come to know each other over several months before meeting in person, there were no bodily sensations that she associated to physically being with him. Johana explains that there was a certain strangeness: “[...] seeing you is like just knowing you recently” (Johana, p.6). The airport moment here was crucial for Johana and Orlando because it was the transition from knowing each other virtually to physically, which was strange at first.

Similarly, Anna, who sees her partner once a year, also reinforces the idea that the first moments at the airport are strange:

“[...] When we see each other at the airport for the first time, there is this short period, like the first 5 minutes or something where we are like, who is this person, because....(Silence)...like there is an alienating moment because... we

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<sup>14</sup> Here, I acknowledge that this statement raises issues around racialization and the historical dynamics in Peru between Blacks, Asians, the indigenous etc. (Oboler, S, 2005). Moreover this statement also raises questions about the visuality afforded by Skype, like the lighting in this case.



have been to each other this thing on the other side of the screen like...like this image in our head that gets...elaborated through 11 months apart. And then we see the other person. I don't know like, we see their flaws, their awkwardness, umm...we see...yea...and we are like this is the person I am supposed to be so close to and...in a way, physically they are a stranger” (Anna, p. 12).

This excerpt highlights two different elements that I have discussed in this chapter: it emphasizes the links to the bodily sensations that were forgotten after spending extended periods of times apart, and how the other person is imagined over time and through space, making them a physical stranger. Moreover, it describes the moment of transition (from virtual to physical) that occurs at the airport as something experienced as bizarre or awkward, but ephemeral.

These examples frame the airport not only as a place, but as an event. According to Cresswell (2002), “place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence [...] places are intersections of flows and movement’ they are in a ‘constant state of becoming” (p.26). Such events that bring two people physically together<sup>15</sup> are important because they are both relational and transitional. They implicate corporeal mobilities and an adjustment period that is momentary, since this strangeness tends to not last for my respondents.

## 2.2. Transitions as Emotional Cycles

In her study “Relating at a distance: Negotiating being together and being apart in long-distance relationships”, Sahlstein (2004) explores how distance and proximity may influence a relationship in positive and negative ways (p.690). The aim of her study is to explore what partners experience when they are moving in and out of one another’s presence and non-presence in their LDRs (p.692). The results present the enabling and constraining implications of being together and of being apart for long distance couples. For example, being together may have positive impacts and remind partners of the quality of their

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<sup>15</sup> This could also be the case if two people are saying goodbye to one another, also at the airport. My data shows separations to be very difficult and emotional, as I discuss later. In this case as well, the airport is also a transitional and emotional moment.

relationship and it may be productive in constructing memories. On the other hand, being apart makes partners want to have a good time when they are together (i.e. making it “special”) and at the same time puts pressure on doing so (p.705). However, Sahlslein (2004) did not consider the transitions from being physically together to apart. This prompted me to formulate a question about these transitions as specific and relevant moments. My approach was more focused on the women’s subjective experiences of transitioning from physical presence to physical absence, which one described to me as “a roller coaster” (Michelle, p.2).

As I have mentioned previously, such transitions involve corporeal forms of travel, as well as moving between physical co-presence and absence. Mobilities are something that people may be moved by, and half of my respondents expressed the intense emotions they associate with these movements. Separating from their partner is described as something emotional and saddening. Anna describes saying goodbye to her partner through the metaphor of losing a part of her body: “[...] separating, saying goodbye, especially when it’s for 11 months, it’s like having my heart ripped out from inside of me...it’s like being amputated or something” (Anna, p.12). Similarly, Michelle finds these goodbyes very difficult: “saying goodbye... oh my god it’s terrible, every time it’s like the worst feeling” (Michelle, p.20).

Johana explains the contrary; the separation is neither negative nor challenging: “I feel like it is nice because I know him more [...] Well I feel like when he has left, like, he left something in me.” (Johana, p.11, p.14). However, she acknowledges that after a longer period of time apart, she longs for her partner’s physical presence: “[...] I mean, I feel as if I have him here, but as time goes by I need him to come back, I want him to come back” (Johana, p.14). She continues by explaining that after three years of being in a relationship, time has also made her want him (physically) present in her life: “[...] but now, we are in that necessity of, ‘I want to be with you now...I want to live with you’... and we can’t” (Johana, p.11). She describes the moments spent together during the short visits in positive terms, and the transitions as a way to allow for a deeper connection with one another. Yet, she also has a profound longing to be with her partner in a more physical and permanent way. Unfortunately, the (im) mobilities in Johana and Orlando’s lives limit their visits and time physically together (see Chapter 2). At the moment, their relationship does not have any future plans for them to live together more permanently. This breaks with common assumptions that long distance relationships have the shared aim of being with the other person physically and permanently.

Yet in some cases, the goal of these relationships may not always be duration, or ending the long distance. For some the relationship as practiced might be sufficient or the only accessible option. For others, there may be particular barriers to togetherness: in Johana's case, (im) mobilities tied to health and finances do not allow them to have a life physically together for the time being.

When I asked my participants to tell me about the transitions, about moving into and out of physical presence, three of them employed the images of a cycle or a curve, which resonates with Michelle's metaphor of a roller coaster. For Carolina and Sophie, this curve is associated with time: namely months or weeks. For example, Sophie calculates her curve in weeks: "the first week is never ending, and the second is better [...] it's like a curve: it's really hard, it's really hard, then it goes really well, and then it goes back down as you know that the date he is arriving approaches" (Sophie, p.9). This exemplifies how time is conceptualized (in either months or weeks) and how their experience of time (it goes by fast, or slow, never ending) may be associated with certain feelings of sadness or anticipation. Another example that highlights this is Anna's emotional curve, which follows the yearly seasonal cycles:

"[...] this cycle that always has had the same seasonal....schedule, like I would fly back to Montreal in the middle of January which is like the most hellish time of the year and being like totally blue for 2 weeks or so, like depressed, like excessively, unreasonably depressed. And like...umm...and then slowly... I think emerging from that depression is forgetting about that sensation" (Anna, p.13).

As Anna starts forgetting about the sensations she associates with being physically with her partner, it becomes easier to be far away from one another, and the seasons may shift their moods and their schedules. She continues:

"[...] "Because we are both in school [...] that takes us into spring, then like usually I would travel to somewhere else, take a smaller trip in the summertime like...visiting friends in Vancouver or Toronto, or something, so I have this other big distraction not really related to her...and maybe she

would have something similar, and then...that brings us to fall when we are already planning the next time we will see each other, so...I think that cycle helped us...distract us from the long time apart...because we are really busy, both of us” (Anna, p.13).

These cycles or curves of transitions evoke the sensations or the feelings that the women experience when they move in and out of physical presence with their partners. This raises questions about the relationship between time and presence and how they influence one another. My participants’ experiences show the different perceptions/experiences of time according to the rhythms of the cycle. Time, whether calculated in weeks, months, or seasons, had a similar effect on the women: saying goodbye was always difficult or emotional, the other person’s absence eventually became part of a daily routine, and some explain that it is important to keep busy with other things like friends, school, or work. Similarly, Sophie, Anna, and Michelle all associated the waiting period prior to being physically together as particularly long: “the week before seeing each other goes by really slowly” (Sophie, p.8). Anna believes that “the second worst moment is like the fall, waiting to be together because it’s so like, it’s coming so soon but we don’t have it yet...so we are sort of at that process of anticipation...which is in a way really pleasurable, but like really excruciating...” (Anna, p.13).

Anna describes the emotional cycles involved in the transitions between physical presence and absence in terms of “binging and fasting”:

“Well I think they’re...they’re insufficient. Like, I think we have been able to cope with that insufficiency, but like we have talked about [...] over the last few years it’s been one month, one very intense month together and then 11 months apart... I think about it as binging and fasting ...there are unhealthy things about that pattern that are, analogous to binging and fasting” (p. 12)

This excerpt highlights the intensities as well as emotions associated with seeing a partner for a certain period of time, or of being in constant physical contact (binging). The

fasting emphasizes the time apart and the wait to be together physically again. The airport might be the moment or event of transition from physical presence to absence, but the subjective experiences of my participants in between these moments are crucial to understanding their practices of intimate co-presence. These transitions raise several questions about the role of mobile technologies in allowing for a certain “imagined presence”, which I will further develop in the coming section.

### **3. Technological Presence**

Throughout the first two chapters, I examined the ways various everyday mobilities interplay with remote relationships, and how my participants develop mobile intimate practices with their partners. Here, I am interested in developing these reflections further, by considering how *presence* interplays with our sensory experiences and practices of mobility and intimacy. How is presence subjectively imagined and experienced within everyday intimate practices through mobile technologies?

#### **3.1. Imagined Presence**

In media and communication studies, some scholars frame the concept of presence as a crucial one, especially in an era of smartphones (Hjorth, Wilken, Gu, 2012, p.43). My participants, as well as their partners, all have smartphones through which they have an Internet connection and access to a wide variety of applications that allows for the sharing of various medias.

Generally, scholars describe presence as “the degree to which geographically dispersed agents experience a sense of physical and/or psychological proximity through the use of particular communication technologies” (Hjorth, et al., 2012, p.54; Milne, 2010, p.165). Vitti and Stocchetti (2011) use the term “social space” in order to refer to “the psychological distance between communicative partners” (p.103). They argue that mobile technologies do not support physical presence, but rather support a certain form of absence; it is through mediated communication that the feeling of proximity can be recognized and maintained (p.103-4). Others, like Gergen, argue that there are new, more subtle, integrations of the absent

and the present that are facilitated by mobile phones (quoted in: Hjorth et al., p.55), which can result in a blurring of the boundaries between absence and presence (Licoppe, 2004).

Conceptually, I have been inspired by what some scholars refer to as “imagined presence” which suggests the possibility of presence although someone is (physically) absent (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Chayko, 2002). This presence is made possible through various objects, people, information, and images that move through time and space, either physically or through old/new mobile technologies. Imagined presence allows for a wide range of forms of travel and mobility to participate in the perception of presence (or absence), as well as intimacy (Chapter 3) through a wide range of practices. Although there is a lack of tactility between partners living in two different parts of the world, it is interesting to explore the other ways and sensory means that participate in the creation of a sense of presence. This raises a key question: is this presence strictly imagined if there are other bodily sensations and forms of contact involved?

Thus far in this chapter I have explored the various ways that women in this study perceive their partner’s absence, as well as how they experience the transitions between physical presence and absence. I have suggested another level of absence they identify: that of being technologically absent. My aim here is to explore the various practices that participate in the feeling of presence while partners are separated by distance and time, what we might call practices of technological presence. I have introduced the notion of technological presence, which is more specific to newer technologies, to foreground the expectations of speed in communication, instantaneity and reciprocity. In what follows I propose to analyze data that brings together visual practices such as text messaging, photos, and real time exchanges, as well as aural practices such as talking on the phone. Together, these multisensory practices participate in constructing a presence of a distant partner due to the immediacy they afford.

### **3.2. Visual Practices of Presence**

I have previously considered how imaginative travel is conceptualized in the mobilities paradigm and how it is made possible through visual practices and through speech (Chapter 2). Here, I wish to further develop the ways in which images, texts, and real time exchanges participate in constructing the presence/absence of a distant partner.

### *3.2.1. Photo Messaging*

As these practices became part of my own repertoire, I became interested in the textual and visual discourses of postcards and letters, as well as those of the text and photo messages. These old and new mobile technologies were adopted by most of my interviewees and were often compared and contrasted with one another. In the chapter on mobile intimacy (Chapter 3), I analyze postcards and letters as mobile objects that mobilize various bodily senses and participate in constructing and maintaining intimacy between distant partners. I also explore the intimate practices of text messaging and the exchange of (sexual) photos between partners as key elements in forms mobile intimacy.

Here, I want to focus on visual everyday practices, such as the exchange of photos and text messages. Lee (2005) argues that the exchange of picture messages is a way for women to share experience; it is a “new form of gaze”. Scifo (2005) frames photos as gifts that allow the sharing of space and objects (p.368-369), which resonates with what other scholars have called the gift giving etiquette (Taylor and Harper 2003). I am particularly interested in Hjorth’s (2006) metaphor of “postal presence” to describe the ways in which photo and text messaging may participate in the creation of presence: “MMSing is best encapsulated by continuing a tradition founded in the role of the postcard; a type of postal presence/presents metaphor that highlights changing relations between visual and textual, public and private, individual and social formations” (p.30). I explore the ways in which these photos that travel through screens also carry the “wish you were here” characteristics of the postcard, while allowing for imaginative transportation to a shared place.

In her book “Letters, postcards, e-mail: Technologies of presence”, Milne (2010) explores the similarities between 18<sup>th</sup> century postcards and emails. Her analysis suggests that there are similarities throughout time between the “experiences/fantasies of presence, intimacy and disembodiment” (p.190) through letters, postcards, and emails. Similarities between these modes of communication that she identifies include the physical separation between the writer and the receiver, and the fact that messages are asynchronous, durable and retrievable (p.173). Milne’s (2010) research does not explore newer forms of visual and textual communication,

which I propose to do here: how do these practices participate in the imagined presence of a partner?

Some characteristics of text and picture messaging are similar to what Milne (2010) has found: the sender and receiver are separated physically, spatially, and temporarily. However, according to my participants, these types of exchanges tend to be synchronous and immediate. Moreover, at times the messages or photos are neither durable nor retrievable. One example of a photo that is not retrievable is when partners use certain applications - for example "Snapchat". The application allows the sending of photos between users, but when the photo is received, it disappears after 1 to 10 seconds. Sophie and her partner use Snapchat in order to bring humour in their exchanges and to share funny moments: "[the photos'] goal is to help each other focus on various things, other than the fact that we aren't there together" (p.15). She makes a clear distinction and chooses a different application on her mobile phone according to the type of photo she wants to send to her partner. She sends photos through Snapchat for entertainment and diversion and sends nicer photos of herself through Whatsapp, an application that allows photos to be saved.

Sontag (1977, 16) considers the photograph to be: "both a 'pseudo-presence' and a 'token of absence'" (quoted in: Vitti and Stocchetti, 2011, p.106). Although receiving a photo instantly on one's mobile phone may allow for a certain imagined presence, it may also reinforce that the other is not physically there. For Sophie, the silly photos that are exchanged over Snapchat did not intensify a sense of her partner's absence. However, she did mention that at times other types of photos may have this effect: "the other day he sent me a picture [of himself] before going to bed [...] and it made me really miss him because I would have liked to have been there with him..." (p.15). This exemplifies the "wish you were here" quality of the postcard: her partner sends her a photo of himself lying in bed wishing she was there, and she receives it and wishes the same. At the same time, the exchange of intimate photos also affords a certain intimate interpellation. An individual turns around, believing, suspecting and knowing that he is being addressed, and acknowledges that he/she is the one that the interpellation is aimed at (quoted in: LeBlanc, 2004 from Althusser, L., 1970). Here, the reception of photos onto one's mobile phone can constitute a form of affective interpellation, as with Sophie's example of missing her partner as she receives a photo on her mobile phone. This intimate interpellation raises questions around the exchange of feelings it affords, as well



as the need to respond to or reciprocate the practice. Such practices allow for an intimate exchange and a technological presence to be created.

### *3.2.2. Virtual Place*

Sophie's example also raises questions about our conceptions of place within these photo exchanges, as well as the ways place may allow for intimacy and an imagined presence. In their analysis of the notion of presence, Ditton and Lombard (1997) define presence as "transportation" which they divided into three types: "you are there", "it is here", and "we are together". This allows communicative partners to be transported to a common place that they share. This transportation is enabled by visual practices such as photo sharing, but is also made possible through the imagination.

Malpas (2012) highlights that place is not a reference point on a map; rather, "place arise[s] in the dynamic interrelatedness of things" (p.33). Additionally, Massey (1991) conceptualizes place as "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (p.28). These conceptualizations allow for a notion of place that goes beyond geographical boundaries and that is constructed relationally; they "constitute a network of relations" (Malpas, 2012, p.33). Here, I am interested in exploring the ways the exchanges of images and texts participate in my participants' experience of place and presence. In order to do so I propose the concept of "virtual place" as a way to understand the dynamics of place in mobile intimacies. This virtual place is not geographical and is constructed relationally between partners. Additionally, this place engages various sensory experiences through a wide range of practices that allow one to be transported to this common place in order to "be 'there' together". In what follows, I will explore practices that help to transport partners to this shared, virtual place; along with other cases in which they have the opposite effect.

In her multimedia diary, Michelle includes a picture of her partner's meal:



4.1. A lens into your day/Screenshot/Multimedia Diary/Michelle/No Date.

She expresses how images can provide this sense of place: “The fact that we can't physically be together is really hard so it's always special to me and it makes me feel good when he sends me pictures of what he's doing to make me feel like I am there with him” (Michelle, Multimedia diary, no date). The reception of this image gives Michelle a lens into her partner’s sense of place - in this case what he was eating. Moreover, her feeling of “being there” with her partner highlights the transportation to a shared place that is created by the sharing of the image. This recalls Scifo’s (2005) claim that the exchange of photographs supports proximity and allows for the sharing of experience, creating a social continuity that bridges space and time (p.373). Michelle’s experience not only highlights a technological presence, but also an imagined transportation to her partner’s place, thus creating a shared, virtual place.

On the other hand, sometimes the shared images may have the opposite effect. Sophie’s earlier example highlights the “wish you were here” characteristic of the postcard; she receives a photo from her partner and this makes her miss him even more. In some cases, images may also heighten the sense of absence, or emphasize that both partners are not in a “shared place”. In my journal, I examine how receiving pictures of my partner’s place could also be puzzling:

“I had a bad day, and he kept sending pictures of beautiful places he was visiting. From my point of view, this was difficult: I was at work, angry with

my job, which I might lose, and washing dishes all day. At night, I was tired and we were texting. As he sent me more pictures and was writing to me about the amazing day he had, I was getting bitter because he wouldn't ask me about my day and because of how frustrating it had been" (Multimedia diary, June 15th 2013)

In this passage, when I received my partner's images, I felt like they reinforce that I am in a completely different location: that he is there and I am here. Moreover, my interpretation of these images is subjective and reliant on the context when I receive them: the time of day, my actual location, and the feelings associated with my day at work. This example shows how images may at times emphasize the uncommonness of place as well as the other person's absence. This also raises questions about the socio-emotional implications of the "wish you were here" quality of these types of images and how they may (or may not) allow for a certain imagined transportation into a partner's place. Here, the relationship between place as well as presence and absence are important within the visual practices of image sharing between partners at a distance.

### *3.2.3. Text messaging*

Another type of messaging that was a very common practice for many of my interviewees is text messaging. Here, I want to explore the ways in which the continuous sending of text messages may participate in constructing a sense of a partner's presence. I also consider what may happen when the sending of messages is not continuous or immediate.

As first developed in Chapter II, virtual connectivity "overcomes the barriers imposed by space, time and place" (Malpas, 2012, p.34), but often presupposes or demands immediacy and reciprocity. This raises questions about how connectivity interplays the feelings of technological presence/absence. For Sophie, the feeling of presence is made possible due to the fact that there is always something on her phone, such as text messages, links or photos: "I always have a message on my phone" (p.5). During the follow-up interview, I asked Sophie about a long "hang out" Skype session she had with her partner one day and she responded by contrasting this practice with text messaging:

“Well, he is there and he is not there. But it is really during those moments [Skype moments] that I feel more normal, but that I feel closer to him, not necessarily. Let’s say that we text all day... we text and we will have conversations about everything and anything, and I will still feel really close to him even though I don’t have...any visual reminders” (26:25)

For Sophie, a sense of closeness can be established although there are no images, videos, or real time exchanges. Spending a day texting with her partner may still have the same effect: “he is present in my life, it’s just that I don’t see him” (p.5). This raises a key question: do images and real time exchanges necessarily support presence because of their visuality; and if not, what other practices or senses may participate in creating a sense of presence? Returning to my earlier discussion about the creation of a virtual place through images, this may also be made possible with a continuous stream of text messages. They can allow for place and technological presence to be created through their immediacy, as when Sophie and her partner text all day. This presence is thus constructed not only through visual cues, but also textual ones. As Sophie explains to me: “you know, I read the [text] messages, and I read them in his voice, and I know what he means, it’s like he was talking to me” (Sophie, p.14). This exemplifies how text messages participate in the imagined presence of a physically and visually absent other through a range of sensory experiences: visual, textual, and aural. Sophie sees the messages on the screen and reads the text that is sent to her, subconsciously imagining/hearing her partner’s voice. Sophie’s experiences also highlight the important - almost synesthetic - link between texting and talking which other interviewees also make. For example, Anna explains that through constant messaging, she and her partner try to simulate how they would normally speak: “... I mean talking through text messages, I think we try to approximate how we would be able to talk to each other regularly if we lived together” (p. 15). This passage illustrates how texting is perceived as a continual written conversation (e.g. talking through text messages) that requires both partners to be available and connected, which in turn presupposes immediacy in responses.

On the other hand, some of my interviewees, like Michelle and Natalia, explain that although they expected to receive immediate responses to their text messages, this did not

always occur. As I have discussed previously, different media ideologies might produce non-immediate textual exchanges (see section on breakups, Chapter II). Here, I raise questions about the relationship between immediacy and the sense of presence: is immediacy necessary for a sense of imagined presence? Michelle recalls a few occasions when her partner did not respond immediately to her messages over Whatsapp. She adds that afterwards, she sometimes realized that her partner's status on Facebook would be "online". This would make her question what could be more important than answering her messages: "When I write to him on Whatsapp, and he doesn't answer...and I see he is like on Facebook, I just ask myself, [...] why is it not a priority for you to answer me first?" (Michelle, p.9) Not only does Michelle have a desire for immediacy, but she also monitors her partner's presence in other online activities when he does not respond to her text messages (e.g. seeing him online on Facebook). This returns us to previous questions about control and the desire for a constant connection with a distant other. Here there is an assumption embedded in my participants' media ideologies that partners should be prioritized over anyone else, and messages should be answered instantaneously. Moreover, virtual connectivity often creates expectations of a certain presence and attunement to a distant partner, and mobile technologies are expected to enable this instantaneous connection.

These examples highlight the relationship between the desire for presence/absence and the expectation of immediacy of responses to text messages. This virtual connectivity is significant in its interplay with feelings of technological presence or of immediate conversation. When text messages are not responded to instantly, questions emerge about the other person's whereabouts, what they were doing, or where else they may be present. My data also points to the emergence of a wider media ideology that carries the expectation of constant connectivity with others and immediacy in responses, raising significant questions of control, monitoring, and non-reciprocity embedded within the social affordances of these mobile technologies.

#### *3.2.4. Real Time*

As might be discerned from these previous examples, real-time practices such as Skype or FaceTime further increase the feeling of presence of the other. Because visual and aural

senses are immediately activated during these exchanges, they may be the closest approximation to face-to-face interactions. These practices prompt further questions regarding the relationship between immediacy, visibility, and presence or absence.

Through discussions with my interviewees, some directly related the feeling of their partner's presence to real-time discussions over Skype/FaceTime. Johana would spend approximately five hours on Skype with her partner at the end of the day between returning from work and bedtime: this was their predominant practice. At one point during the interview, when I referred to her relationship as a "long distance relationship" in one of my questions, she responded and challenged the assumptions regarding the metaphysics of presence: "for me, I do not really see it at a distance. The relationship would seem as though we are here, the only thing we do not have is physical contact" (Johana, p.18). Here, Johana foregrounds Skype as the ultimate practice to feel her partner's presence, which necessarily excludes physical presence. She praises such technology for its immediacy and the possibilities it affords of calling her partner at anytime of the day, allowing for a constant virtual connectivity: "I think that in this relationship, technology helps so much [...] for example, I have the easiness in calling him at any moment, at any time [...] but technology will not give you smells, flavours. Technology is visual, aural, but it is not tactile" (Johana, p.19).

Although real time exchanges may approximate "physical presence", they still lack the inclusion of other senses. Many of my interviewees predominantly referred to the sense of touch. Some feel an intensified desire for physical proximity during these interactions: "it's like, the physical aspect. He is like there, on the screen, but he is not there in front of me" (Michelle, p.4). This also raises questions about the ways that absence may also be reinforced during Skype or FaceTime exchanges because of their instantaneity. Sophie highlights this several times during the first interview: "...he is on a screen, and it only reminds me that he isn't here" (Sophie, p.4). She continues:

"[Skype] makes us more real, but seeing [him] makes you want to have a kiss even more, or that you really want to hold him in your arms, but you can't. When you only hear the voice, it's not as bad. It's the fact of seeing him. Not

the pictures, but to see him move, speak and his little habits that I know”  
(p.24).

Here, Sophie compares her different practices, and emphasises her preference for speaking over the phone and sending pictures with her partner, rather than having real-time interactions. Returning to my earlier analysis of virtual place, the immediacy afforded by real time exchanges through Skype functioned as a reminder for Sophie that her and her partner are in completely different physical/geographical places. The forms of presence that emerge through visual practices such as Skype/FaceTime return us to questions about the qualities of immediacy experienced by my participants, as well as the link between immediacy, place, and the feeling of presence/absence of the other.

### 3.2 Talking Everyday

Thus far, I have detailed the ways visual practices such as text, image, and real time may participate in the feeling of presence or absence of one’s partner. I also posed questions around the expectations of immediacy and how these practices may visually participate in an imagined presence of the other. In this final section I consider how aural communication such as the telephone is not necessarily pushed aside in favour of the visual. In some cases, as for Sophie and Carolina, speaking over the phone is preferred over newer forms of intimate co-presence. This is resonant with other studies that have shown that newer modes of communication do not necessarily displace older forms (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding, p.117, quoted in Baldassar, 2008, p.254;). Previous studies on (mobile) telephony have also shown its role in establishing and maintaining connections. For example, in her study on kinship, Baldassar (2008) explains that when communicating by telephone, hearing the other person’s voice can be more effective than reading their words in rendering their presence (p.254).

Similarly, for some of my interviewees, hearing their partner’s voice would render them more present than receiving image and text messages. For Carolina, it was crucial to speak every day: “for me, it is more valid to hear his voice” (p.7) [...] that way I feel him, not so far” (Carolina, p.17). Here, Carolina makes an important link between distance, virtual

place, and aural practices. The immediacy of a phone conversation bridges space and time, bringing her and her partner into the present moment and a shared sense of place, which is enabled by their voices and their sense of hearing. Similarly, Sophie explains that often hearing her partner's voice de-emphasizes his physical location: "when you only have the voice over the phone, well, [...] he could be anywhere in Montreal and it wouldn't change the fact that we can speak over the phone" (p.15). Place here is less about geographic location but emerges through the intersection of many factors, including mobilities, practices, and senses.

Similarly, presence is not solely physical or tactile, but emerges through multi-sensory real-time exchanges. In this way, the experience or sense of place and presence is not only visual, but may also arise through practices such as speaking over the phone, or sending text messages. I argue that a virtual place emerges that is relationally created through these aural and visual practices. For my participants this virtual place is very real, as emotional exchanges and sensory experiences are made possible within it. My data shows that presence goes beyond the physical, and that while there may be physical absence, a vital form of presence emerges through these practices of immediacy and multisensory exchanges.

### **Conclusion: Presence/Absence: Creating a (virtual) place?**

In interviewing my participants, I came to realize that when discussing presence it is inevitable to touch upon moments/events of absence. Throughout this chapter I have considered two forms of absence: technological and physical absence. Some form of absence is always at play in mobile intimacies, and my participants share their experiences and attempts to sustain their connection with various technological and sensory practices. These moments of absence, as well as the transitions between physical presence and absence are fundamental in the interplay with an imagined presence of the other over distance.

I have also considered two important correlates of presence/absence within these mobile practices: place and immediacy. They are crucial in understanding the ways that visual, textual, and aural practices participate in creating a sense of presence or in reinforcing absence. Through these various mobile (intimate) practices, how do place and immediacy interplay with technological presence/absence?



I have suggested the notion of “virtual place” as a place relationally created between partners through their multisensory exchanges: a place that is not bounded to geographical locations. In the absence of tactility, virtual place emerges through visual, textual, and aural multimedia practices in which exchanges allow for personal, intimate, and immediate contact. This virtual place is crucial to participants as it is where two people can virtually “meet”. As Urry (2012) argues, “places are about relationships [...] Places are located in relation to sets of objects rather than being fixed only through subjects and their uniquely human meanings and interactions” (p.80). In an age of increasing mobility, these places are more mobile, technologically mediated, and are dependent on various forms of movement. As I have explored throughout this chapter, they are made possible through a wide range of practices. For instance, my interviewees explain that the sharing of images could be a token of both absence and presence. Images may allow for an imaginative transportation into their partner’s place, offering a lens into the other person’s day or geographic location. Virtual place can be created in the sharing of the banalities of everyday life, like Sophie does over Snapchat with her partner. It can include the intimate practice of sending each other kisses, like Carolina, or it can involve sharing a picture of oneself or of one’s whereabouts. On the other hand, visual reminders such as images or real-time exchanges could also heighten the sense of uncommonness of place, reinforcing that the other is not “there” and is far away. To what extent is such place and presence possible without these visualities?

The virtual place that is created between partners lacks the sense of touch but may at times successfully enhance other senses through visual, aural, and textual practices. It is through these practices that non-tactile sensory contact is possible through various mobile technologies. Images, continuous textual exchanges, and real-time interactions allow for virtual connectivity and the creation of a shared, virtual place, which bridge time and space and construct a sense of the other’s presence. However, as I have explored throughout these chapters, there is a significant mobilization of bodily sensations that are intertwined with various old and new mobile technologies in these communicative practices. Therefore, imagined presence is not solely constituted within the borders of the imagination, but through the materiality of bodily sensations and experiences mobilized in these practices and exchanges. This resonates with Farman’s (2012) description of the sensory inscribed body, which ties embodiment to the sensory inscription in exchanges and connections (p.19).

This returns us to important questions regarding virtual connectivity and the expectation of immediate responses from partners. According to my data, the desire for immediacy is especially prevalent during textual exchanges, and as a result, my participants explain that they would “talk” or have conversations through text messaging. The other person’s presence is imagined as these written conversations are synesthetically read and heard in their partner’s voice and as partners attempt to approximate the ways they would speak when together. These written conversations tend to require that both partners be “technologically present” at all times, to answer immediately, and to have their mobile phone “always on/always-on-[them]” (Turkle, 2006). When messages are not responded to immediately, some of the women imagine worst-case scenarios, such as their partner getting into an accident; others envision their partner speaking to another woman, seeing someone else, or being disloyal. Issues of virtual monitoring and control come into play here, especially when the women limit their own social activities, ask their partners (or are asked) to always share their whereabouts, or to stop communicating with someone their partner feels threatened by. What is interesting is the ways monitoring and non-reciprocity may at times break with presence and enhance the discomfort one has in moments of unresponsiveness. My participants’ reactions regarding messages or phone calls not immediately responded to raise questions discussed in previous chapters regarding jealousy, trust, and monitoring. They exemplify the expectation that textual conversations demand immediacy in order to create an intimate sense of shared place and presence. Moreover, these exchanges also tie into wider media ideologies in which immediacy is expected as a demonstration of presence, and in which non-immediate exchanges would mean increasingly more absence in an era of global interconnectedness and speed of communication.

Ultimately, the technological practices associated with mobile intimacies also raise questions about expanding media ideologies that demand a constant instantaneous virtual connectivity. In an era of expanding media ideologies that demand instantaneous responsiveness, I propose a final key question for the digital present. To what extent does technological and physical absence come to signify a virtual vanishing of place and person [other]?

# Conclusion: Wish You Were Here: Virtual Places, Bodily Sensations, and Other Implications for Mobile Lives

*The Balmoral, Edinburgh  
Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1884*

Dear and Beloved—Here am I, and you at the Antipodes. O execrable facts, that keep our lips from kissing, though our souls are one.

What can I tell you by letter? Alas! Nothing that I would tell you. The messages of the gods to each other travel not by pen and ink and indeed your bodily presence here would not make you more real: for I feel your fingers in my hair, and your cheek brushing mine. The air is full of the music of your voice, my soul and body seem no longer mine, but mingled in some exquisite ecstasy with yours. I feel incomplete without you.

Ever and ever yours,

Oscar

Here I stay till Sunday<sup>16</sup>.

Oscar Wilde wrote this love letter to his wife Constance in 1884, and it is one example from one of the two intense relationships he sustained through letters. Over the centuries, many other relationships have been maintained through letters (e.g. Simone de Beauvoir and Nigel Algren, Napoleon Bonaparte and Joséphine) that signified a sense of presence, shared emotions, and intimacy. I chose this specific letter because Oscar Wilde refers to the bodily presence of an other. Linking it to the actual/virtual paradox, he writes: “and indeed your bodily presence here would not make you more real”. Additionally, Wilde’s letter emphasizes the imagined presence of Constance as he integrates the various senses that participate in this imagined presence: “the music of your voice”, “I feel your fingers in my hair”.

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<sup>16</sup> On Love, p.144. Famous Love Letters- Oscar Wilde to his wife Constance

The letter is an object that travels physically from one place and person to another; both persons touch the paper and the pen, acting and traveling as a stand-in for this bodily presence. Nigel Hall (2000) explains that the materiality of letter writing has recently gained importance and interest in research, especially with the advent of the computer and electronic communication (p.83). My participant's experiences of receiving/sending letters and postcards shed light on the value they attribute to these objects; especially because of the emotions and affect they carry. My research has explored the ways various movements (Chapter II) affect social relations, and more specifically, the ways women practice intimacy and imagine a partner's presence through various mobile technologies and sensory experiences. In what follows, I will return to certain questions raised throughout my research related to questions of wider media ideologies, reciprocity and immediacy, as well as the bodily sensations within these experiences that allow for intimacy and a sense of presence. The subjective experiences of my participants shed light on the ways connections as well as disconnections may occur when partners are apart. This will also allow me to raise certain questions and discussion for future lines of research.

### **Our Senses**

Today, innovative and creative intimate practices are emerging and are being created relationally between partners. Innumerable quantities of applications, technologies, and practices have been developed. I have explored several of these practices from photo sharing to text messaging and real time exchanges that still carry the "wish you were here" quality of the postcard, as well as some of the socio-emotional implications that accompany them. One dimension all these practices and experiences have in common is that they are all tied to the senses.

I have examined how the postcard acts as a precursor to contemporary practices of text and picture messaging, manifested by such qualities of co-presence as "shifts in public and private spheres, fusions of work and "leisure" (symbolized by the *flâneur*), being *here* and yet *there*, being present while simultaneously absent" (Hjorth, 2005, emphasis in text p.2). Mobile objects are valued because of their tangibility, as well as the emotions bound to them. Letters are mobile affective objects that continue to be valued for their content and their form. The three-dimensional characteristic of letters and postcards are important as they offer a tactile

representation of the other. At times, as for Sophie, the smell of a partner's cologne adds an additional sensory experience. Farman (2012) argues that it is through objects and through our senses that we connect as beings in the world. He explains that the sensory experience and information we get through our senses is central to our knowledge and our place in the world (p.25). I have explored several practices that include visual, aural, textual, and tactile experiences gained through objects and interactions. The interrelatedness of these objects, practices, and senses allows for the co-construction of a virtual place, in which intimate practices and a sense of presence are activated in ways that bridge time and geographical place.

### **Mobile Lives: People, Places, and Intimacy On The Move**

One quality I have examined throughout my thesis is the increasing outboundedness of relationships to a single geographical place and location. The mobilities paradigm offers a framework that has allowed me to explore different scales and types of travel, as well as moments or circumstances of immobility at play. When certain forms of immobility are enforced or present, individuals are prompted to find creative alternatives to interact, be intimate, and create a sense of presence in their relations at a distance. I proposed the concepts of mobile intimacy, virtual place, and technological presence/absence, as they allowed me to explore the ways individuals relationally connect or disconnect (either physically by traveling, or through postcards and letters; or virtually through other modes of expression and other practices). For example, I proposed the notion of virtual place as a relationally co-constructed place where sharing, intimacy, and the other's presence are made possible. This virtual place is unattached to a single geographical location. It can be created through a range of practices such as photo or text messaging, telephone conversations, or through Skype/FaceTime exchanges. Accordingly, this virtual place also opens up the doors for an intimacy that is possible within it; therefore, an intimacy that is on the move (Berlant, 2000). In some cases, the exchange of photos offered a lens into the other person's place, but they can also emphasize the uncommonness of places. A range of social and emotional implications come into play in these instances, resonant with the "wish you were here" postcard. This was also true during real time interactions: aural, visual and immediate qualities often increased my

participants' desires to be physically together, heightening their sensorial and embodied connection.

In Chapter II, (im)Mobilities, I examined the various movements that were part of my interviewees everyday lives. My data shows various forms and practices of virtual (dis) connectivity, which range from micro-coordination and creative linguistic games to break ups. The chapter on (mobile) intimacy highlights practices of virtual connectivity that were used in order to construct or maintain intimacy between partners. I have argued that intimacy has shifted from fixed locations to more mobile ones, resulting in an increasing intimacy "on the move". These textually, aurally, visually intimate practices raised questions regarding the types of immaterial and affective labors at work within my participants' remote relationships, especially with regards to questions of control and virtual monitoring. In the final chapter on presence/absence, I proposed the notion of technological presence/absence. The term is specific to newer technologies and assumes that partners have access to Internet and smartphones. Yet, the notion ties into wider media ideologies in which expectations of immediacy and reciprocity are often presumed in constructing a sense of presence or absence of the other.

### **Disconnections as part of Connections**

Although this research originally began with the intention of exploring ways of connecting and being intimate at a distance, I came to realize that there are also many forms of disconnection that can occur when partners are apart. We live in an age in which the phenomena I have proposed - namely virtual connectivity, technological absence/presence, and virtual place - presuppose speed, immediacy, and reciprocity in communication. Although my participants' experiences offer insight into moments of virtual connection, and the successful creation of a virtual place and mobile intimacy, there are also less seamless moments or events that occur within these trans-national relationships. The expectation of immediacy and reciprocity that accompany these technological practices also raise questions and concerns when messages, images and other practices are not responded to instantly, or when certain practices are chosen over others in order to connect or disconnect.

In chapter 4, through an examination of my data I developed the notion of technological presence and absence. Being technologically present is often equated with

immediate responses to text messaging or phone calls, creating a virtual place of intimacy and technological presence. Its antipode, technological absence highlights moments of non-immediate exchanges or of unresponsiveness. Several instances of technological absence arose as I collected my data. For Sophie, technological absence made her appreciate any type of communication because it is “better than nothing at all”. However, for others, these moments of technological absence and disconnection made them worry about their partner’s whereabouts, or whether or not they were being loyal (in a monogamous framework).

Throughout my research, a wider media ideology became evident, one associated with mobile phones and especially textual exchanges. My participants expected to be responded to instantly, prioritized over other online and offline activities (such as social media for example), and they tended to worry when phone calls or messages were not responded to. This raises wider issues around control, power, and monitoring within these mobile relationships. Carolina’s example of requesting to know her partner’s whereabouts at all times, or Michelle’s monitoring practices over Facebook or limiting her own social activities to reassure her partner are some examples of the ways mobile technologies and practices can increase the desire to constantly know the other person’s location, what they are doing and with whom. In Hjorth’s (2005) words, the mobile phone allows you to be “free and yet always on a leash” (p. 1).

The ultimate example of disconnection is when a rupture of the relationship occurs at a distance. Natalia’s experience of a breakup raises several questions around media ideologies: which technologies are, or should be used to disconnect? Mobile breakups raise questions about the ways emotions, disconnection, and (im)mobilities may contribute to their occurrence. It is important that these more disruptive or negative implications are explored in future research because breakups and conflict are also part of communicative tasks within relationships. Mobile breakups pose questions around the paradoxical but intertwined experience of the real versus the virtual. Although the breakup occurs virtually, the socio-emotional implications are very real. In Farman’s words: “[the virtual] is a component of experiencing the real” (p.22).

## Other Implications and Discussion

I have learnt many things throughout the research process, and it has broadened my views in many ways. Two final implications I would like to consider in the conclusion that follows. Firstly, I want to further consider some of the specific implications of distance relationships for same-sex couples, as well as some of the cultural implications and differential access to mobility.

### Same Sex Couples and Implications

In my interview sample, Anna was the only participant with a partner of the same sex. I believe this was important and enriched my sample, but more importantly it opens up interesting questions for future research. Some of the social implications specific to same-sex couples can include “coming out” to families and friends. For Anna and her partner, these were not issues. On the other hand, a long distance relationship may be a helpful life strategy for someone who is unable to come out in his or her country.

For Anna and her partner in Japan, the bigger question is who will move where: “... just because we are two women, the situation for me to move there is a bit more complicated [...] because there is no recognition for same sex couples” (p.2). Several such implications specific to same sex couples could be addressed in future research: in what ways do same sex couples experience intimacy at a distance, or together? What are other socio-cultural and political implications for these relationships? Anna explains that her relationship is an “asymmetrical legal relationship” (p.2). On the one hand, different countries have different laws and regulations regarding same-sex couples. Anna elaborates: “If she moves here [to Canada], we can get married, she can get a permanent residency as a spouse, umm...if we start a family, we will be legally recognized as a family, ahhh...if I move there [to Japan], [...] It’s unclear, how we would, how we could start a family, and have a legal connection like between the two of us and a child” (p.3). Anna explains that if she were to live in Japan, she would be a permanent expat (p.3). Immigration and social support systems may or may not recognize same-sex couples and facilitate an immigrant’s integration into society, which are important factors for these types of relationships (they are also important to consider for heterosexual relationships when one of the partners must move). Anna explains to me that at the moment, neither one is willing to move for the next couple of years, which also challenges normative



assumptions that the immediate aim of long distance relationships is to move to be together, or to assure a long duration for the relationship.

### Cultural Implications

Finally, I want to explore another dimension that shapes differential assumptions regarding wider media ideologies. Of my sample, all of the women (and their partners) had easy access to smartphones, tablets, Wi-Fi or Internet in order to maintain their long distance relationships. The notions I proposed of technological presence/absence are based in these assumptions. In a North American context, we tend to expect to be responded to instantly, and for everything to be high speed. These practices create a certain social obligation to be accessible (Elliott & Urry, p.92).

During my trip to Tanzania this year, I came to realize the importance of acknowledging that not everyone may have the same access to mobilities, technologies, and connections around the world. Yet, this does not mean that they do not also maintain relationships with partners in other cities, or other countries. As I have considered, historically, many relationships were maintained through letter writing throughout time. During my stay in Tanzania, I met young man from the Masaai tribe, who told me about his girlfriend who worked in another city, located approximated 3-4 hours away (by bus) from where he works. I asked him about the ways they stay in touch and he explained that they would send text messages and that he would call her everyday, but that it was difficult to travel due to short vacation time and because of transport. There are several things I would like to touch upon that sometimes may seem transparent, or that we may take for granted. The work hours and the transport system in Tanzania are very different from urban North America and do not allow partners to see each other regularly. This is an example of relationships that do not need to go beyond international borders to prompt partners to engage in mobile intimate practices. This raises questions I have already considered regarding (im)mobilities and the unequal distribution of them around the world. Some do not have smartphones or access to a regular (stable) Internet connection. Yet other forms of aural and textual practices of intimacy and presence are not less significant and still allow for the maintenance of distant connections. This challenges my original assumptions that an endless stream of notifications to one's phone

is correlated with the feeling of presence. Although someone is technologically (and physically) absent, it does not mean that there is no imagined presence.

### Reflections on Findings

I found that including myself in the research process was productive and broadened my views, my practices and gave me many new perspectives. I gained a good deal of theoretical insight on my own practices and conceptions of time, place, presence, and intimacy.

One constraint of this research is that it explored only one of the partner's experiences. Future research could be designed to conduct interviews with both partners, either together or individually. Semi-structured interviews could be conducted through Skype or include creative methods such as letter writing or correspondence (Rautio, 2009). Future research could also consider designing a sample in which participants do not all have smartphones and access to Internet and Wi-Fi; participants that do not practice monogamy; members of the LGBTQ community, or people in online relationships. Are there similarities or differences in the ways intimacy is practiced or the ways presence is imagined around the world?

Other possibilities for future research could explore some of the dimensions that I did not have the data or amount of pages to undertake further. For instance, "sexting" and other sexual experiences across time and space were not discussed in depth during my interviews. Additionally, the practice of sending sexually suggestive photos of oneself to one's partners raises questions about the relationship between visualities, desires and sexualities. One subject that I considered briefly in Chapter III, involves new products becoming available on the market that allow remote sexual tactility at a distance. These products are specifically designed for and directed to women's sexual pleasures in long distance relationships. Drawing on feminist approaches, future research could explore the implications for women and raise questions about gender commodification and pleasure versus control. My investigation of the subjective experiences of my participants and myself has offered original research and reflection on a subject that could and should be further explored. In what ways and directions are these mobile sexual practices developing?

Through the investigation and theoretical reflection I have undertaken, my participants' experiences and practices have provided rich data and insights on connections that go beyond

the physical, and that are affected by many forms and levels of (im) mobility. My data shows how intimacy, place, and presence not bound to a single geographical location can be interrelated with movements, bodily sensations, and emotions that create an intimate, virtual place of connectivity. If it is true that places are about relationships (Urry, 2012), my data shows that relationships are also about places of several kinds: mobile relationships are dependent on and maintained through the virtual places that are co-created, allowing for intimate practices and a sense of presence within the range of (im) mobilities that are part of contemporary lives.

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# Appendix

## A) Participants recruitment online add

### Annonce:

Je recherche des femmes, âgées de 18ans et+ avec un partenaire vivant dans un autre pays, pour une recherche universitaire. Participation demandée: entrevues et peut être l'écriture d'un journal de bord. Contactez Dania au XXX-XXXX.

### Facebook add:

SVP!!! Je recherche des femmes qui vivent à Montréal, âgées de 18ans et+, avec un partenaire vivant dans un autre pays (relation romantique à distance). C'est pour ma recherche et votre participation serait une entrevue d'une durée d'environ 1h. Message privé ou étiquetez qq1!! Merci!

Please!! I am looking for women living in Montreal, 18 yr or +, who have a partner that lives in another country (Long distance relationship). It is for my research your participation involves a 1h-1h30 interview! MSG or TAG someone you know below! Thank you so much!

### Abroad Online Add:

<b>posting title</b>	<b>specific location</b>	<b>postal code</b>
<b>Se busca gente para entrevista</b>	<b>Lima, Peru</b>	
<b>posting description</b>		
las relaciones de parejas a distancia y los usos y las prácticas de varios medios de comunicaciones. La entrevista sería de una duración de 1h o 1h30, y su participación sería voluntaria. Estoy buscando a mujeres peruanas que tienen más de 18 años de edad y que hace por lo menos un año que están con su pareja que vive en otro país.		

## **B) Participant's profiles**

Johana is from the city of Piura in the north of Peru. She currently lives in the capital city with her daughter and works as a commercial executive secretary. She was married to a man, who was violent with her and who had jealousy problems. They are separated but she cannot get an official divorce. Her partner is also Peruvian, from the city of Trujillo, but he lives in Canada. She explained that she was just starting to use the computer and that she just wanted to chat and make friends, when she met him in a chat room for adults. Eventually, they started talking on the phone, and then on Skype. They met in December 2010, and met in person for the first time in January or February 2011. They have a significant age difference as well, she is 52 years old and he is 34. They only see each other once a year for a few days, when he travels to Peru to visit his family. She cannot get the visa for Canada because of her financial situation and debts, but is hoping she can pay her debts back and apply for a visitor's visa. Traveling becomes also increasingly difficult for the couple, because they are both sick. She has degenerative arthritis and is in a lot of pain. He has had rare tumors, including one in his knee and another in his lung. He has had operations and is in crutches, making it difficult to travel because of the medication he must get administered every 20 days. They speak over Skype every day, from the moment she comes home from work, until they go to bed. They have been together for 3 years, which she believes is getting more and more difficult.

Natalia is 28 years old and lives in Lima. She has a bachelor and a master's degree. Last year, she was working in the Amazon, in Tarapoto, where she met her American partner. He was working as an English teacher and they were neighbors. They started dating, but when the time came to each go their separate way, they were not supposed to stay together. However, they continued to communicate and she did not really feel like they had broken up. A few months went by, until she decided to go visit him in the United States. She ended up taking English classes and working as a volunteer in an organization for about 5 months. She then returned to Peru, and it was a few days before we met for the interview that she received a break up e-mail from her partner. After two Skype conversations, she knew and understood that it was over. In January 2014, she took French classes and got her driver's license. She has now moved out from her parents' house, and has found a job in Lima, Peru.

Alejandra is a 28 year old originally from Lima, Peru. She is currently living with her mom in the north of Peru in a city called Chiclayo. She is studying translation at the University Cesar Vallejo and speaks French and English. When she decided to become vegetarian, she registered on a website called [www.veggieconnection.com](http://www.veggieconnection.com), which is an online pen pal, friendship and dating website about vegetarianism. She was looking for information and people to talk to about vegetarianism because in Peru it is not common. It is through this platform that she met Tom, a 68-year-old man who is retired and lives in South Carolina. They have never met in person. They have been together, she says, for about a year now, but when I asked her if she tells her friends and people that she is in a relationship, she said she used to, but doesn't right now. She explained to me that she enjoys the conversations and sees him more as a mentor.

Carolina is 25 years old and lives in Lima with her parents. She is a manager/supervisor in sales. She met her partner for the first time when they worked together in a restaurant in Lima. At the time, they were both in relationships. It was only a few years later that they saw each other again at a birthday party and reconnected. They started dating in February 2011. Approximately 6 months after they started dating, he was relocated for a 3 year work contract to Panama City. They were not sure about the long distance relationship, but decided to give it a try anyway. They see each other every 2 months approximately, and she is usually the one who goes to Panama, except during the holidays when he

travels to Peru. They are still unsure if he will get relocated to Costa Rica after his contract ends in August 2014, or if he will decide to quit his job in order to move back to Lima.

Sophie is a young 21-year-old from the west of the island of Montreal. She did her bachelors in biomedicine in 2 years in a half. Her last semester was done abroad, in Lyon, France. Through friends she met on couchsurfing.org, she went to a party and that is when she met her partner, who is from England. At first they were not supposed to stay together, but decided to try and stay in a long distance relationship. She is currently decided which career to take, either in medicine or law. Her partner was accepted to do a master's at McGill University and will be coming to Montreal in August 2014. They will be moving in together for a year and will see what to do after this.

Anna is a 33-year-old Canadian living in Montreal. She is a PhD student in Communications at Concordia University. Her mom is Japanese decent. She met her partner at a Japanese New Years party when she came to Montreal during a gap year and was working part time. This was approximately 4 years ago now. Montreal #2 goes to Japan every year to see her close relatives there, and also to visit her partner. She usually visits for a month, and normally the other 11 months of the year they are apart. This year, this pattern has changed, as her partner was coming back to visit at the end of February. She is still unsure who will be moving and when they will be living together.

Michelle is 21 years old and lives in the west of the island of Montreal. After finishing Cegep, she was unsure what she wanted to do, and so she decided to take a year off and went to work and travel in Australia for half a year. She met her partner, who is from Germany, in Sydney because they worked at the same nightclub. They started dating, and he had to leave because his father was dying of cancer. They decided to stay together and try managing a long distance relationship and have been together for over a year now. She was accepted to study abroad for one semester in London, and another in Sydney. They are happy that they will both be in Europe for the next school semester and will both go to Sydney together afterwards.

## **C) Interview guidelines**

### (i) First qualitative, semi-structured interview

#### **BEFORE STARTING:**

Introduce myself (Dania, I am from Canada, speak French and English, learnt Spanish in university and studying in Argentina. For my thesis, I am interested in long distance relationships

Thank them for their time and accepting to be interviewed

Go through consent form with them

#### **1) General background question**

Brief opening questions for context, simple questions about them apart from their relationship:

Where do you live? With who?

What is your occupation?

Interests?

Could you talk to me about you and your partner; how did you meet?

How did you come to be in a long distance relationship? For how long will it be this way?

Time together (how often? How are arrangements made...)

#### **2) Communication and Mobile Technologies:**

Could you tell me about how you keep in touch regularly or daily with your partner?

Have there been any changes in your uses or practices? Evolution/Chronology of uses and practices

Could you describe to me a typical day of communicating with your partner?

\*Speak about technologies as they come up, how they feel about certain technologies, what they like, do not like...

#### **3) Possible issues**

Could you talk to me about some of the issues that have come up in your long distance relationship?

Maybe compared to other relationships you have been in?

Transitions (from together physically to not) and feelings

Coordinating to see each other

Navigating time differences

How do you do to feel close?

Conflicts

#### **→ Backup questions:**

Around language issues: Are there any language differences? How does that work? Issues around conveying emotions and languages? (Examples??) Are any technologies help or a nuisance to language barriers? How do you deal with these issues at a distance?

Visa issue/mobility issues: Travel issues? How do you manage these issues? What are the challenges and what other issues does that raise?

Skype Sex strategy: If Skype sex comes up, make sure this is okay with them before asking the question: What does it mean to you? How does it work or happen (not necessarily a description)? What does it bring to your connection? **Not on behavior but around meaning.**

Backups (if not discussed enough):

Presence

How do you sustain a presence at-a-distance?

Could you tell me about the transition from being physically present to not?

Intimacy:

What does intimacy mean to you? (or maybe how is it defined where you come from?)

How do you build a sense of intimacy at a distance?

Ending Cues: I have a couple of more questions, Finally, my last question...

#### **4) Closing questions**

If you were speaking to someone who has never been in a long distance relationship, how would you explain the ways in which you conduct your relationship at a distance?

(This question depends a lot on how question 3 goes, if they did not speak enough this could be a closing question)

#### **One or the other of these:**

At the moment, if you could change something in your long distance relationship, what would it be? (Except for being physically together everyday)

What if you could create something that would facilitate your long distance relationship, what would it be and why?

**5) EXTRAs**: image, quote to get their impression and to talk more about how they relate or not to the image or wtv.

**6) Additional information**: Did I miss anything? Is there anything that you would like to add that hasn't been covered?

#### **DEBRIEF at the end**

Debrief chit chat

Second phase of the research, explain. Would you be interested in participating?

Revise and reiterate ethical stuff

Thank you!!! Gratitude

(ii) Follow-up Interview guidelines

#1 Grille d'entrevue, Sophie

Mercredi 23 avril

**(Introduction/update)**

La dernière fois qu'on s'est rencontré on a vraiment discuté de pleins de choses : comment vous vous êtes rencontré, comment vous communiquez, des transitions entre se voir et ensuite être séparé, l'intimité etc.

→ Je voulais savoir comment as-tu trouvé le journal de bord ?

→ Pourrais-tu me donner un petit update sur comment vont les choses avec ton chum depuis?

***Présence/absence***

Durant la première entrevue, tu m'as expliqué qu'au début tu préférerais Skype, pcq tu avais l'impression qu'il était plus réel, mais qu'ensuite tu n'aimais pas vraiment ça parce qu'il était là dans ta face mais que tu ne pouvais pas le toucher, que c'était pas tangible.

Tu m'avais même dit : "y'è présent dans ma vie, c'est juste que je le vois pas

Par contre dans ton journal, tu m'as beaucoup parlé de Skype : Penses-tu encore de la même façon ? Les choses ont-elles changées ?

→ As-tu remarqué d'autres changements dans votre façon de communiquer depuis la dernière entrevue ?

Ensuite je voulais aussi discuter un peu de la fin de semaine du 1-2 mars lorsque tu étais dans le chalet et que vous avez eu votre première coupure de contact.

"Même si des fois ces moyens de communications me font sentir loin de lui, aujourd'hui ils m'ont fait me sentir très près de lui"

→ Qu'est-ce que ce weekend t'as fait réalisé de plus?

→ Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres moments ou exemples de situations dans lesquelles tu t'es sentie qu'il était absent? (qui peut être quelques heures ou une journée)

Est-ce qu'il y a des façons de communiquer qui te font toujours sentir plus proche de lui plus que d'autres?

**Intimité**

J'aimerais aussi faire un retour sur la partie de l'intimité. On a parlé de cette bulle à toi, dans laquelle tu laisses rentrer les gens. Tu m'as ensuite expliqué que vous construisiez cette intimité en étant honnête un avec l'autre, et avec les sujets de conversations que vous avez.

→ Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres façons ou d'autres choses que vous faites qui aident à construire ou maintenir cette intimité?

→ Pourrais tu penser à un moment, ou à une expérience intime que vous avez déjà eu? Et qu'est-ce qui est arrivé pour que tu te sentes de cette façon?

Souvent dans la littérature on explique que l'une des difficultés dans des relations à distance est que le côté physique qui n'est pas présent, est-ce que y'a des choses que vous faites dans votre relation pour amener ce côté physique là ?



Je veux pas des détails sur ce que vous faites exactement, mais juste savoir si ce côté là est présent dans votre relation et comment ça amène quelque chose à votre relation

### ***Mobilities***

J'ai trouvé ton journal vraiment riche en détails avec des choses que vous avez fait : les messages, les lettres et cadeaux, la note audio, et Skype, et même ouvrir ton cadeau sur Skype

Tu m'as expliqué que "malgré la distance, nous avons réussi à en faire quelque chose de spécial"

Et que:

"la très longue session de Skype, même si elle n'avait rien de spécial, m'a permis de me sentir proche de lui. On a l'habitude de passer des journées à rien faire un à côté de l'autre et ça m'a rappelé une de ces journées"

Lorsque tu m'as raconté la lettre qu'il t'a envoyé, tu m'as parlé de la tangibilité de celle-ci. Mais tu m'as aussi mentionné sa cologne.

→ Comment as-tu réagi ou comment tu t'es sentie avec cet autre sens qui a été ajouté à la lettre? Est-ce que ça a fait quelque chose?

Il y a eu quelques émotions que tu m'as parlé

Pas se sentir à la hauteur, sentiment de distance physique a été le plus présent

Sentiment d'insuffisance et de culpabilité.

Lui qui pleure au téléphone

→ Est-ce qu'il y a des moyens de communiquer qui sont mieux pour partager des émotions ?

### **(Fermeture)**

Questions? Choses à rajouter?

Remerciements et cadeau !

Michelle, Jeudi, 24 avril 2014.

Last time we met, we talked about a lot of things: intimacy, different ways you communicate, like text, video or letters, we spoke about presence and the connected or disconnected feeling, and transitions between being together to being apart. Then, you agreed to do the multimedia diaries.

→ I was wondering what you thought about the exercise? How did it go overall? Feedback?

### **(Introduction/update since the last time)**

A lot has happened I am sure since the last time we met in February. Your boyfriend had arrived the evening before and stayed for 10 days.

→ Do you want to give me a bit of an update on how things went while he was here, and since he has left?

→ Have you noticed any changes in the ways you communicate since our last interview ?

### **(Questions about themes/categories and diaries)**

***Presence/Absence (disconnection/connection)***

You mentioned a few times during the interview, that it was important to **feel connected**. You gave me some examples, like doing workouts, eating on the phone or watching the same episode.

→ Are there any times that you can think of when you feel particularly disconnected from him, or moments that you feel his absence even more? How?

→ In which ways have you tried to reconnect in the last few weeks?

### *Mobilities*

You had told me that he never sends you photos last time, so it was nice that you included some in your multimedia diary. You explained that they are special to you and that seeing food or pictures of London made you feel his excitement and that you were there with him.

→ Could you elaborate on these examples?

→ What do these photos bring to your day?

→ Last time in the interview, you mentioned this feeling of being unsure what it feels like to kiss him, is there anything that you do to help you remember? (imagination here... or storage of affect?)

### *Intimacy/sex*

Finally there was another theme we spoke of during the interview, which was intimacy. You told me about what it meant to you and the various ways that you are intimate together, but at a distance like for example the sending of pictures, videos, links, activities over FaceTime etc.

→ Since the last time we saw each other, what would you recall as an intimate experience that you have had? What happened that made you feel this way?

I also would like to go back to the sexy photos and text messaging that we talked about if that is all right with you?

You mentioned sending him photos of yourself, and that this resulted in him complimenting you and sometimes even talking a little dirty.

→ Is this “talking dirty” just on his part, or is it an exchange? Has it ever worked for you in an erotic way? If yes or no, how or why?

→ What other ways do you find to try to bring the sexuality aspect in your LDR?

You also told me that you never receive pictures in return when you send him these “sexy photos”, and that sometimes you are reluctant to do it, but that you also wanted to make him happy.

→ Could you maybe elaborate on this? How does this make you feel?

(Do you feel responsible to maintain this aspect?)

→ Generally what do you think about these types of exchanges, what does it bring to your connection or what does it mean to you, is it special?

→ Do you have any preoccupations around privacy or risks?

Ending Cues: I have a couple of more questions, Finally, my last question...

**(DEBRIEF, present, thank you)**

### **(D) Multimedia Diary Guidelines**

During our interview, we discussed many aspects of your relationship: the being apart, being together and the transitions from passing from one to the other. How you first met, as well as the hopes for a future together. We also discussed the various ways you use to communicate on a daily/regular basis, and the various ways in which there is an intimacy and a presence even while being physically apart.

Your participation in this second part would include trying to go further in depth within these themes, including some of the media shared in order to get a better understanding of the ways in which various media participate in the creation of certain degrees of intimacy and presence.

#### **Objectives:**

Capture in the moment occurrences, intimacies, and feelings of presence/absence of their partner through various media while they are at a distance.

The diary should be something simple, and easy for you to remember to save certain medias.

#### **Multimedia diaries can include:**

Letters, postcards, e-mails, photos, screenshots, facebook, instagram twitter, audio, voice notes etc.... or any other types of media that you use with your partner and that you believe could be relevant in demonstrating and explaining your intimacies and feelings while apart.

#### **Time frame and entries:**

2 entries per week or more

During approximately 3-4 weeks

For a total of approximately 6-8 entries, or more if you want to

There will be a follow up interview to discuss the materials and/or texts shared in your diary.

#### **Guidelines:**

You are free to use any type of diary you want (It can be hand written, scrapbook, blog, word document, powerpoint, folder with images, audio recording of your voice, etc.)

If you want to briefly explain or make notes of why this media has been included in your diary, feel free to do so (can be written out in details if you like writing, it can be a voice recording of yourself, or it can be point form, in order to keep some of the details about that specific moment)

Should you have any further questions about the multimedia diary, we can hold a Skype conversation or we can also e-mail or speak over the phone.