

Maria Holm Thomsen

# Collecting Data from My Phone

Chronically Online Core

Graduate thesis in Bachelor i Billedkunst

Supervisor: Anne-Karin Furunes

Co-supervisor: Jacob Jessen

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Architecture and Design  
Trondheim Academy of Fine Art



Norwegian University of  
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## Abstract

A text about an art practice exploring the now, with the digital existences we find ourselves living in. Growing up in a Denmark in the early 2000's as my context, I cover the fangirl era with a core in the 2013-2017 Tumblr days. The focus being on the societal clash between "girlhood" obsessions and the professional self. I am doing this through my main subject, the *Twilight*- franchise and fandom with an autotheoretical approach. This leads to the project of looking into the TikTok existence both looking at the vertical format as an abruption of societal norms, the element of time in a capitalist society, and the evolution of subgroups like the chronically online reality in the evolution of language. The digital existence being an unavoidable fact of life in 2024.

## Sammendrag

En tekst om en kunstpraksis som udforsker vores nutid, med de digitale eksistenser vi lever i. Med en opvækst i Danmark i det tidlige 2000tal som min kontekst, behandler jeg fangirl-æraen med fokus på Tumblr-årene 2013-2017 og kigger på samfundsclashet mellem "pigetids" besættelser og det professionelle. Jeg arbejder med *Twilight*-serien og den tilhørende "fandom" gennem en autoteoretisk tilgang. Dette leder til projektet hvor TikTok-eksistensen undersøges ud fra flere vinkler. Det vertikale format som en løsrivelse fra samfundsnormer, tidselementet i et kapitalistisk samfund og udviklingen af grupper, som den kroniske online eksistens i udvikling af sprog. Kernen er det digitale liv som en uundgåelige forståelse af liv i 2024.

# Collecting Data from My Phone - Chronically Online Core



<sup>1</sup> Documentation photo from the exhibition *Fangirl POV* at Galleri Blunk

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## A beginning – I just downloaded the app, what is this?

What does it mean to be an artist and make good art? It feels so cliché to ask but when I first started at the academy it took some time, almost a year to figure out again what I define my practice to be. Not that it is a static thing, I just suddenly found myself uncertain having to reestablish it in a new place. It was not that I stopped working on projects, it just didn't feel like I was working on stuff that I felt a relation to. That is why I have chosen this text to have its beginnings in my second year at Trondheim Academy of Fine Art (KiT).

I started reflecting on what I previously have had interests in, and in general my own history. Around the same time the tiny gallery, Galleri Glam was going to have the exhibition *Girlbuzzin'*, for which I would exhibit a work in. I had started to think a lot about the relation between the artist self and the private self.

I was a bit on the outside as a nerdy, artsy, queer kid and that is probably why a lot of my interests through the years have had a context to the online world where it was easier to interact with these interests. Born and raised in a Danish white middle-class family in a suburb to Copenhagen, my life has been very privileged. Growing up in the early two-thousands in this setting meant the digital development around me was very present and I exercised being a fangirl of many things on multiple online platforms.

For the exhibition *Girlbuzzin'* I made the work *☆I'm a professional☆* claiming the fangirl term, which describes people



obsessing over something. It could be a movie, comics, an actor etc. often ridiculed because of its relation to the concept of “girlhood”<sup>2</sup> which is often connected to the idea of childhood innocence and naivety. The work consisted of business cards with my contact details on them. They followed the expectations enough to be read as business cards, but the contact details were based around being a fangirl of *Twilight*<sup>3</sup>. I used a lot of pink and cursive fonts for the visuals to make them truly “girly” looking.



1: Maria H. Thomsen, ☆I'm a professional☆ (2022)

Exhibited at Galleri Glam for the exhibition *Girlbuzzin'*

I enjoyed working with these themes and aesthetics and they have now become a core in my practice and everything I do seems to filter through it, even if not always explicit.

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<sup>2</sup> I'm using girlhood and girly as a reference to the societal tags given the subjects described. I do not use it to gender the existences or interests, which can be related to any gender.

<sup>3</sup> A popular romantic supernatural Young-Adult book- and movie franchise

Especially the fangirl theme was something I worked on a lot that year as I continued my explorations at KiT. Because of my approach I ended up discovering the autotheoretical method of working popularized in the 2010's.

## Autotheory – Am I tripping or does this make sense?

The writer and artist Lauren Fournier (b.1989) tries to define autotheory as a method of working with theory through personal experiences and stories. A method especially used by women and minorities who historically often have had their private lives presented as a threat to their professional lives. Examples of this could be the way motherhood is seen as a threat to an artist continued career, or the way cultural clothes and hairstyles are often deemed unprofessional. The method can be recognized in art practices like Adrian Piper's, who often worked with questions of race, through her own experiences of being a light skinned black woman growing up in Harlem. Another example is multiple works by Madelyne Beckles during the years 2016-17 which I find a big interest in. At this time, she worked explicitly with feminist theory like in the work *Theory of The Young Girl* (2017)<sup>4</sup> when she, in a video gives a personality to excerpts she is reading from a 2012 translation of the book *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young-Girl* originally in French from 1999. The book is by the anonymous French post-Marxist collective Tiqqun that describes the "Young-Girl" as an archetype within the capitalist society. Beckles show her own existence and makes it more human by giving the theory a face.

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<sup>4</sup> (Wright, 2017)

Furthermore, I find an interest in her work because of her aesthetic choices using pink, lipstick, and other “girly” symbols while cosplaying as the “Young girl”.<sup>5 6</sup>



2: Madelyne Beckles, still from video work part of the installation *Theory of The Young Girl* (2017)

Available at <https://vimeo.com/226365764>

Going back to the term “Autotheory” and the origins of it, Fournier describes it as a term popularized in the 2010’s with books like *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson<sup>7</sup>, which is a book where

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<sup>5</sup> (Fournier, 2021)

<sup>6</sup> (Speidel, 2013)

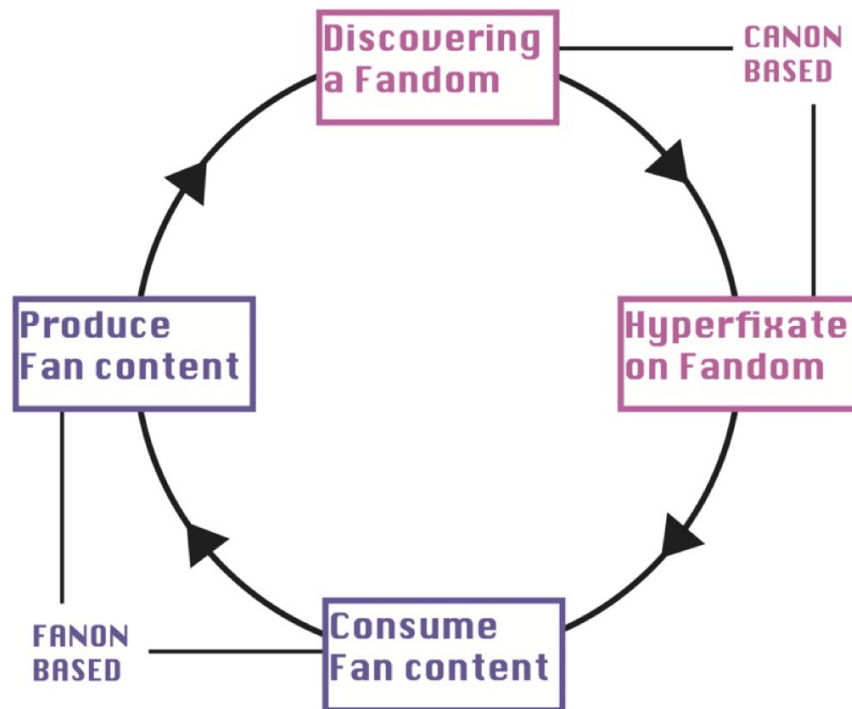
<sup>7</sup> (Nelson, 2015)

Nelson gives critical reflections on domestic life, queerness, and motherhood through writings about her own and her partners life. Now, a lot of older in-between genre writings have also been categorized as autotheory. One of these is Chris Kraus infamous book *I Love Dick*<sup>8</sup>, which like *The Argonauts* works with the connection between theory and life. I started reading multiple books of this genre and found them to be a big source of inspiration for my approach to the subject of the fangirl life experience. Especially *I Love Dick* had a direct link to my fangirl project because it works with obsessiveness as well. In the story the main character of Chris and her husband Sylvère obsess over this academic named Dick. They start writing love letters to him without sending them. They are basically fangirling over him. Eventually sharing this obsession with him he does not reciprocate or challenge this obsession. In the end he expresses a respect towards Sylvère and an indifferent towards Chris. The story follows a *Fangirl Cycle*, which was a model I created to try and describe the development of a fangirl's obsession. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> (Kraus, 1997)

<sup>9</sup> (Fournier, 2021)



3: Maria H. Thomsen, *Model of The Fangirl Circle* (2023)

Available at: <https://www.tumblr.com/fangirltheory/722387003050754048/the-fangirl-cycle>

A fangirl will at first discover a fandom which will lead to a hyperfixating of it. If a tv-series is the fixation, the fangirl will watch all the seasons, read up on the characters, watch interviews with the actors etc. Completely hyperfixate on everything to do with the series. Both these points are based on “canon”, which comes from canonical and relates to storylines and facts established by the actual show.

The two other points, consuming and producing fan content are “fanon” based. “Fanon” is related to storylines and facts made

by and established by the fans; it could e.g. be an unofficial ship<sup>10</sup>.

The experience is circular and repeats. The fangirl will continue to discover a new thing to fangirl over, and the pattern will repeat indefinitely. Fangirling is repetitive for most people, so it just made sense to visualize it in a circular motion, which is why I thought of making a model.

## The Fangirl era – FYI this is me, if you even care

The essence of fangirling is simply showing joy over something and will often be explicitly shown to find other fangirls. I have seen and experienced it around a lot of different interest. Since it often displays itself in connection to popular media and pop culture, I would argue that the fangirls are a big contributing factor to the popularization of a lot of media, and decisions on which people reaches celebrity status.

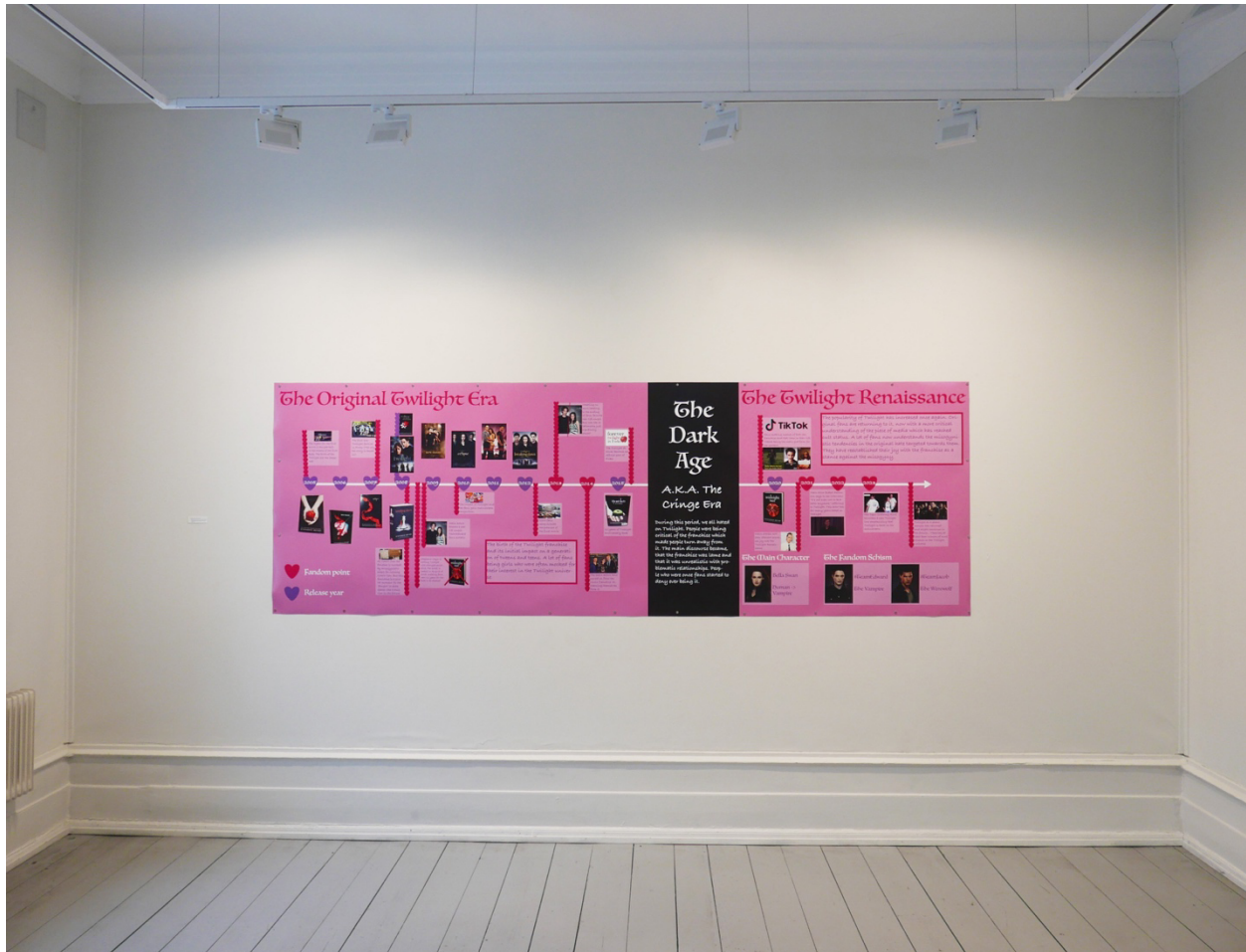
*Twilight* continued being the main subject in the fangirl project, which really started to take form while I was planning an exhibition on it at Galleri Blunk called *Fangirl POV*. An underlining theme was also my interest in the suppression of girlhood, because of societal misogyny towards “girly” interest.

Before *Fangirl POV* I made a work that became a precursor, when I made a three-meter-long *Twilight* timeline for our second-year exhibition *Undergang & forening*. With the timeline, I had no

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<sup>10</sup> The term “ship” refers to a relationship between two characters or celebrities. As a verb, wishing them to be together.

interest in the franchise's storyline though. It was called *Kortlægning af en opvækst* (A Mapping of Growing Up) and covered the development of a *Twilight* fangirl's relation to the franchise and fandom. The timeline mapped the evolution and popularity of the fandoms along with official releases.



4: Maria H. Thomsen, *Kortlægning af en opvækst* (2023)

Exhibited at Trondhjem Kunstforening for the exhibition *Undergang & forening*

You could be a fangirl of *Twilight* until around 2016. It became uncool mostly because of its connection to being an obsession of girlhood. If you continued publicly being a fan you would be ridiculed. It is something seen in other fandoms as well, like with fangirls of singer Justin Bieber or boyband One Direction.

It is seen as just a childish obsession and therefore it can be the butt of the joke even when first released and in mainstream media. With *Twilight*, an instance was when the popular American late-night variety show *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* made a sketch mocking the trailer of the first movie.<sup>11</sup>

When we entered 2020 the *Twilight Renaissance* happened, and the franchise reached cult status. Now the jokes about it came from the actual fans. They were also pointing out the real problems of the franchise such as the fact that the main couple has a 100-year age gap, where one is a teenager or the problematics of making up a fake indigenous tribe with almost no research. These are critiques which comes from awareness and not just to mock fangirls.<sup>12</sup>

For *Fangirl POV* I continued using the same aesthetic choices as the ones from the timeline and business cards, because it matched the girl room aesthetics of the exhibition. I tried to present what I had found to be key in the culture of fangirling. The focus was on the fangirls.

I became the fangirl of fangirls.

Initially I had wanted to make the project more collectively getting fangirl stories from multiple people. It was a new approach for me to involve people directly in a project and I did not manage to do it this time around, but it is something I wish to attempt in the future because of the inherent collectiveness of fangirling. Instead, I focused on what I knew

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<sup>11</sup> (Saturday Night Live , 2013 (2009))

<sup>12</sup> (Prospero, 2022)



like the slang or what I would define as the signs of fangirling. The main era I was working with were the years 2013-2017. It was the peak years for fandoms on the platforms Tumblr, Wattpad and YouTube, which featured heavily in my exhibition. Time goes so fast online that it already feels kind of dated. The exhibition became almost like a time capsule for those years, but the essence of fangirling this way continued and are still practiced on newer platforms.

Galleri Blunk consists of two rooms and during *Fangirl POV* the first room had multiple works analyzing the fangirl culture. The work *Fangirl Checklist* does this by showing stages of the fangirl mindset.



5: Maria H. Thomsen, *Fangirl Checklist* (2023)  
From the exhibition *Fangirl POV* at Galleri Blunk.



6: Documentation photo from the exhibition  
*Fangirl POV* at Galleri Blunk

For the room in the back, I tried to simulate a stereotypical girl room. I used a pinkish lamp, string lights and a scented candle to give the intended vibes to the works in the room, which needed something different to the white cube. This room already had more dungeon vibes which was an interesting relation to the idea of fangirling as being a bit unhinged and chaotic.

When returning to the platforms mentioned earlier, for *Fangirl POV* my main sources came from the digital world. This is also what I started exploring in the final year at KiT and is the basis for my bachelor project.

## Post Internet – I think we are living in it, no cap

In this day and age, a fact of life is that the internet never sleeps since it presents itself in a global context. By global, I mean it reaches a lot of places not geographically connected. I am aware that the internet is still limited in lots of places, and that many experience online censorship. For people with access, the internet is constantly active, and content is being produced at all hours. This becomes interesting when the user has a physical body which needs some basic necessities met to exist. Necessities like eating and sleeping which cannot be debated and are a fact of life. Especially sleeping works as a counteract to the 24/7 idea of the internet, because it requires the consumer to lock off for an amount of time. This gives the constant of being behind but still having to catch up in the morning. I started experimenting with this lack of time by

exploring mainly the short video-platform TikTok during my fifth semester.<sup>13</sup>

TikTok is one of the first platforms really committing to the newer format of the vertical 9:16 aspect ratio. Platforms like YouTube or Facebook started their existence on computers, which means that they adapted these formats to the phone and not basing it on the phone. Before it was mainly Snapchat and the short-lived video-app Vine (2013-2017) of the social media platform mainstream in the western world, that utilized the phone format. And I would argue that Snapchat differs from the other social medias I have mentioned in this text, because of its relation being closer to messaging apps, in its original function. Like Snapchat, many other platforms have started to make the phone format the standard as they are adapting features similar to the TikTok “For You Page” (FYP)<sup>14</sup>. It is seen with “YouTube Shorts” or “Insta reels”. The vertical format is being cemented as the current way of online living.

The vertical screen presents a new perspective which has started a reflection on viewing, that could evolve in a way artist and writer Hito Steyerl describes in their text on perspective *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*: “*But if we accept the multiplication and de-linearization of horizons and perspectives, the new tools of vision may also serve to express, and even alter, the contemporary conditions of disruption and disorientation.*”<sup>15</sup> TikTok might seem to be at its top, but at the same time we see it threaten by its real life

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<sup>13</sup> (Crary, 2013)

<sup>14</sup> The main page on TikTok, where the algorithm has curated content for the user.

<sup>15</sup> (Steyerl, 2011)

surroundings because the online existence is politicized even if not always explicitly. The politics is both on the platforms and within their framework. It is impossible not to recognize its existence within a global capitalist context.

While I'm working on this project the government of the United States are trying to ban TikTok, because of the app's owner, the developer firm ByteDance, which the Chinese government has a one percent stake of, resulting in a fear for espionage. At the same time, we are also seeing social media being the main source for conveying the multiple genocides which are happening in Palestine, DR Congo and Sudan, while mainstream western media have failed to communicate and recognize these same genocides. Especially seen with Palestine where people amid the genocide have been able to communicate the atrocities directly from Gaza to social media for example like the filmmaker and activist Bisan Owda do on her Instagram<sup>16, 17</sup>

Going back to what seems to be an impending US ban of TikTok, it appears to come from a similar place. There is a fear from the US government that young people get information from non-state funded sources and might disagree with the lawmakers. For example, have the Pro Palestinian discourse on TikTok led to TikTok having to defend their algorithm and explain, that they are not pushing Pro Palestinian content. A lot of other platforms have experienced the same, but without a need to make a statement like the platform Instagram that is under the American owned Meta. We are also seeing these accusations going the other way, with people accusing the platforms of shadow

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<sup>16</sup> (Owda & @wizard\_bisan1, u.d.)

<sup>17</sup> (Hale, 2024)

banning Pro-Palestinian content. It is discussions not only happening in America but also seen in a lot of other countries including my own home country, Denmark. Employees of the state-funded public-service radio and television DR (Danmarks Radio) was advised in 2023 to avoid using and having TikTok installed on their work phone because of the fear of Chinese espionage. The future of TikTok is clearly not guaranteed and my explorations might end abruptly, if multiple TikTok bans would happen. <sup>18 19 20</sup>

## Practicing Art in 2024 – It's giving Corecore

I like to place my practice as coming from the development of the term post-internet art in the way that artist and media theorist Marisa Olson describes it. The term brings the understanding that the work is not necessarily made online or existing online, even though it can be. It instead has to do with having a relation to the online space. When Olson first used post-internet, it was a time where a clearer division between the online and offline world existed. Now, this difference is merging when digital systems take a physical form e.g. using online reviews as a bases for our real-life experiences. <sup>21</sup>

My work would not happen without the internet because it is the core of my practice. The society I find myself existing in has developed to a point where the online is a foundation for our

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<sup>18</sup> (Hale, 2024)

<sup>19</sup> (Harwell, 2023)

<sup>20</sup> (Nisgaard, 2023)

<sup>21</sup> (Olson, 2017)

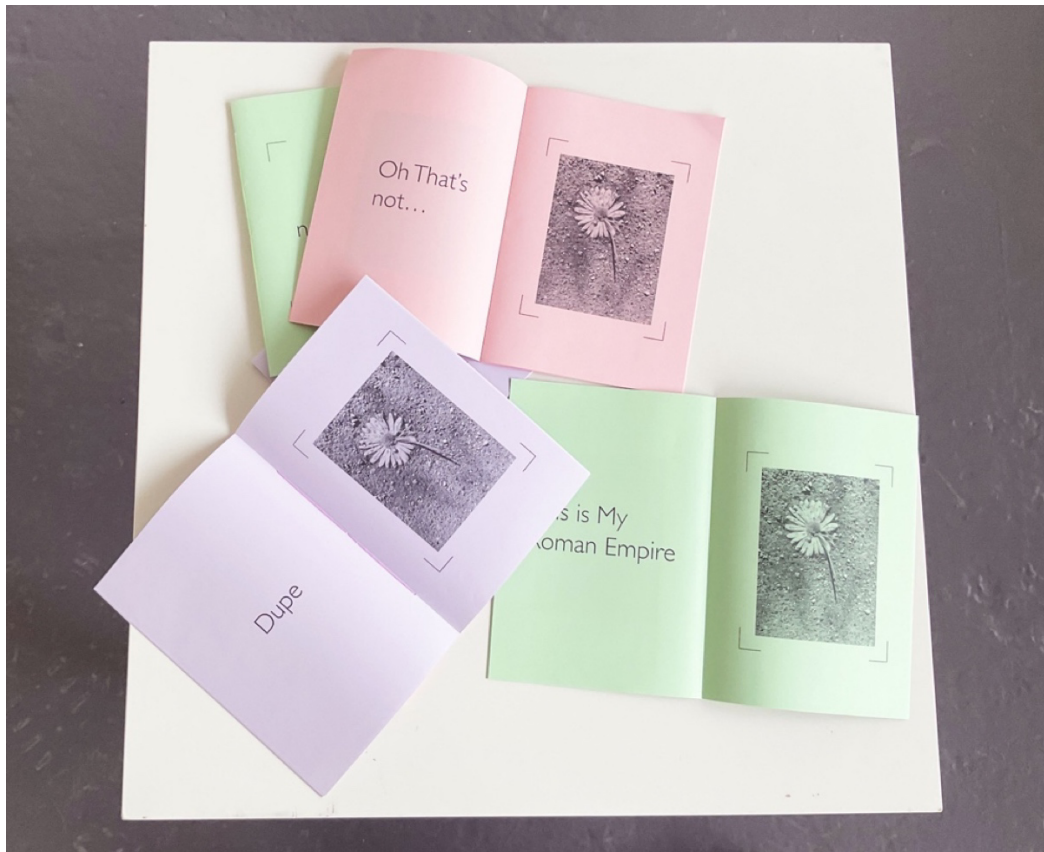
life. Constant even if avoiding it, we are so aware of its existence that we not only are keeping an eye on each other but are also surveilling ourselves to be able to be in this space, which we have a lot of expectations to as art critic Jonathan Crary describes in his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* about the digital constant: “Because of the infinity of content accessible 24/7, there will always be something online more informative, surprising, funny, diverting, impressive than anything in one’s immediate actual circumstances”<sup>22</sup>. I’m interested in what this place so many of us escape to is and how it affects us committing to the chronically online reality, when also having a physical body existing on a deteriorating planet. This non-place has become so important in defining ourselves that it seems impossible not to relate to it.<sup>23</sup>

The chronically online lifestyle has become a way of existing. The term is not an official diagnosis, but a commonly used phrase referring to people who is so much online that their behavior and thinking processes are based in an online setting. This chronically online mindset is especially present in some specific places, even if non-physical like the TikTok-comment section. Here an evolution of language can be observed, even though the language is often changing and short lived. It is something I am mapping, and I used some of these sayings in my fanzine *no\_context*. A word like “Dupe” refers to calling something a duplicate, or “This is My Roman Empire” refers to an obsession often thought about. *Twilight* is obviously my “Roman Empire”.

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<sup>22</sup> (Crary, 2013), p. 59

<sup>23</sup> (Han, 2012)



7: Maria H. Thomsen, *no\_context* (2023)

Before the fanzine but after I had started researching the chronically online project, the third edition of the exhibition series *Extractable Madness* came around. Me and my classmates have done this collective exhibition series with themes of posthumanism and the Anthropocene each year of our bachelor's in Gallery KiT. This version ended up being called *Oceanic Feeling*, and while preparing for this exhibition I explored the internet with the working question "What if the internet was water based?". A lot of terminology used online has an analogy to water etc. "to stream tv", "flood the comments", or "doing a deep dive on YouTube". For the exhibition I ended up making a video installation which very much could be seen in a relational framework to works by artists like Steyerl or Pipilotti Rist

because of the formatting of the installation, inviting the audience into a video experience through the sizing and formatting.

My video installation called *Deep\_Dive\_Into\_The\_Vertical\_Void* consisted of two vertical three meter high 9:16 video projections looping across from each other in a black box. One video showed a screen recording of a fast-paced scroll through the “ocean” tag on TikTok. The other showed a face reacting to a TikTok FYP not matching the screen recording.



8: Maria H. Thomsen, *Deep\_Dive\_Into\_The\_Vertical\_Void* (2023)

Exhibited at Gallery KiT for the exhibition: *Extractable Madness 3: Oceanic Feeling*



When reflecting on this work after the exhibition it became clear that the core of my continued explorations, would be more interesting with a focus on the platform which has led to time becoming a key in my new investigations. Then when looking at the human, to think more about the effects of the chronically online, and not necessarily the reactions to the content, so to show time with the human existence.

## The Conclusion – How many letters in “internet”? (Period)

I am planning to make an experiment where I explore the never ending TikTok reality, that will find its end when the platform TikTok dies, which very much places this project, including my bachelor project, in the now (Spring 2024). It is going to be made physical, by bringing videos into the gallery room, without digital objects. We are used to online content “disappearing” and being nontangible, which we as humans have difficulties understanding, so I am looking into the effects of making it physical by printing TikToks, turning them into analogue objects. I am also going to place it in our understanding of time by looking at 24 hours of TikTok within the framework of the human existence. I will screenshot TikToks during 24 days at all 24 hours. I am still figuring out the practicalities of it, but it will not be the end of these explorations, as I am committed to being chronically online.

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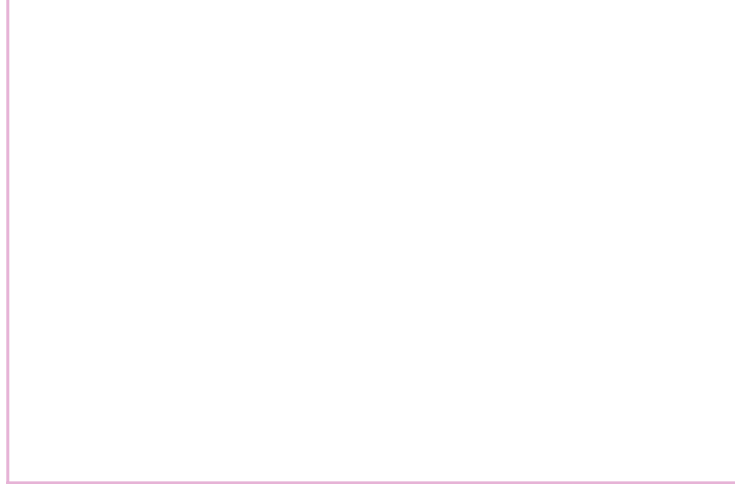
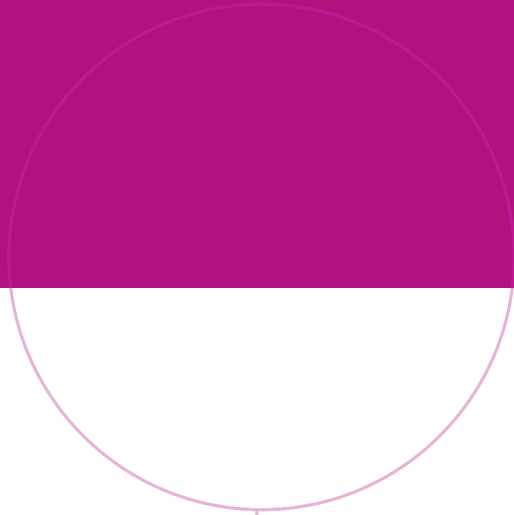
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