

### **Abstract for the general public**

Connections between love and technology seem very recent and are usually associated with the rise of the website environment and digital culture. This project goes back in time to research vintage and antique automata for estimating romantic compatibility to prove that our reliance on machines in matters of love is much older. The automata this project concentrates on are known as love tester machines or love meters and were first used in the early 1900s as entertainment arcades at technology fairs or in amusement parks. They were popular in the USA, England and France, but also in Japan where they have incarnated into more advanced models. Aiming at a systematic and comparative study of existing love tester machine models sitting in technology museums and private collections, this project bridges a gap in the scholarship on old media and technologies but also unravels unknown or misunderstood aspects of our modern (and contemporary) love cultures. A specific connection is being made between early love testers and the personality trait awareness sprouting in the 1920s. It is when the idea of compatibility and emotional eligibility for romantic relationships (and their related social contracts). Drawing on field and archive research as well as on the theoretical analysis of the scholarship of personality testing and profiling, this project will examine the motivations behind technologically-supported match-making.

This project subscribes to the tradition of media archaeology (an area of study that revisits old media and devices with regard to their role in the contemporary makeup of life) and to the tradition of cultural studies preoccupied with the shifts and trajectories in human sociocultural practices. It directly contributes to the debate on the role of technology in shaping emotional cultures and vice versa, showing different inspirations for the human obsession with a personal assessment and datafication of affect. More importantly, this project draws scholarly attention to forgotten and critically neglected technological devices by means of which it explains the current algorithmic environment co-creative of our love cultures today.

The proposed project's research results will be disseminated in a conference talk, an article in an internationally acclaimed peer-reviewed journal and in a monograph intended for MIT Press series *MEDIA ORIGINS*.