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Faculty of Fine Arts

Master of Contemporary Art

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Violet, show me how tender you can be?
(Shades of Love & Desire & Infidelity & Truth)

Master's Thesis

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*Lay on my brushstrokes.
Even if I'm lying, the pleasure is true.
A delicate lie, a delightful truth.*

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Prelude

Come on, I'll buy you a hot dog

"Come on, I'll buy you a hot dog," Mom calls out to me. We're at the bus stop and she says goodbye with a kiss on her friend's mouth.

You know that energy. We quickly head back to Dad's so he won't notice, but he's probably not home yet, and we won't see each other again until nightfall when he comes home, turns on all the lights, and talks to us. As always, he has that disgusting expression with rolling eyes and saliva dried in the corners of his lips.

But you're supposed to love him.

This woman could be looking for a haven, a new home where she and her daughter can stay, but these guys (the ones she runs to), her lovers, take their time, so she keeps coming home. No one will help her, the lovers watch from afar as she is beaten and make love to the mother again the next day while the daughter plays in the next room. Is love and tenderness what this woman is secretly going around town for?

You, mother, have a second husband after my father, I'm an adult and you want to introduce me to someone.

You smile, you're different, and you have a twinkle in your eye. You're probably excited and feel happy for a while before you know you have to go home and lie again as always.

Present but unspoken. Infidelity as a twin or a mute child who still cries and always follows my life.

Denisa

Introduction

In her paintings Denisa Štefanigová deals with the themes of love, relationships and intimacy. She questions whether in the future we will still take a monogamous approach to relationships and see infidelity as something unacceptable. Through artistic practice, Štefanigová creates possible scenarios and visions, encouraging the deconstruction of monogamy, the celebration of desire and free love for each other which also includes the struggles, fear and indecision. Denisa experiments with different media and approaches: Painting, textiles, participatory art, puppets and video.

The way we love as adults is a reflection and deeply connected to the way we learned about love as children.

On my mother's side of the family, who I spent more time with because my parents divorced when I was seven, it was mostly women who practiced infidelity. Sex was never taboo, and infidelity was tolerated in close circles. My mother and grandmother never mentioned the hardship and suffering associated with clandestine relationships. Since childhood, I have always resisted and been against lying and cheating in front of my partner. However, hence the beginning of my sexuality and intimate life, it was because I shared love and intimacy behind my partner's back. I want to understand the nature of the worldwide known phenomena called infidelity and its shades, because I believe it is not just black and white.

The master's project is an installation that includes videos, large and small scale paintings on canvas, fabrics and costumes. It is mainly about human relationships and their complexities which are questioned through color and painting. I have turned my attention from human sexuality to non-human - animals and then mainly to colors. In the graduation work I imagine colors falling in love, being in a relationship, experiencing adultery and wonder how jealousy, affair, separation will affect their shades, brightness and volume. The artwork is a narrative installation internally divided into three parts - 1. *Falling In Love* - an introduction to the themes of love, monogamy and how colors fall in love as opposed to the human approach, demonstrated through a video piece. 2. *Making Love* - this part is showing a documentation of performative acts where I made love with painting (color) and as its results it shows three large scale paintings and video demonstrating the method. 3. *Agreement* - a visually captured relationship within a person, within oneself, within an art and painting, harmony, becoming an organism, inspired by a therapy session where the main point of finding peace in relationship, love, friendship and life is basically to love yourself and accept who you are.

The written part is a fluid mixture of pre-existing knowledge, especially from Western experts such as Esther Perel, Luke Brunning, and Adam Phillips among others, found on YouTube, Google, a questionnaire I have created, discussions with people around me, combined with creative writing based on my own experiences with sexuality and relationship since childhood and potential stories and ideas that lie in the deepest part of the brain.

The writing is accompanied by several voices (first, second, and third person) representing different frames of discussion that shed light on its complexity.

1. Love

“Love is taking your privacy. Love is painful.
I am a lover, just a dick. My dickhead has no brain.
My dick has only one purpose. To fuck.
And I fucked it all up.
Maybe it is better to never love at all.”¹

Honey, can you light the candles? Romanticism

“We should meet a person of extraordinary inner and outer beauty and immediately feel a special attraction to them and they to us.

We should have highly satisfying sex, not only at the start, but forever.

We should never be attracted to anyone else.

We should understand one another intuitively.

We should have no secrets and spend constant time together.

Our lover must be our soulmate, best friend, co-parent, co-chauffeur, accountant, household manager and spiritual guide.

We don't need an education in love.

We may need to train to become a pilot or brain surgeon, but not a lover.

We'll pick that up along the way by following our feelings.”²

"How Romanticism Ruined Love,"³ the title of a video in which the British philosopher Alain de Botton humorously provided examples of the above myths, got me thinking:

How can I unlearn these contradictory beliefs about love that I still practise despite my openness to other forms of relationships?

¹ Dialog from Gaspar Noé's Love.

Gaspar Noé, Love. Companies Les Cinémas De La Zone; Rectangle Productions; Wild Bunch; RT Pictures, 2015.

² The School of Life. "How Romanticism Ruined Love." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w>. Accessed 8 May 2021.

³ The School of Life. "How Romanticism Ruined Love." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w>. Accessed 8 May 2021.

Once upon a time, when Love was born, three fates came to wish her. The first was called Commitment and wished Love happiness and a strong bond with man. Of course, she never mentioned that the bond required rules and agreements that had to be strictly adhered to. The second judge's prophecy was kinder and more sincere in regards to Love's upcoming future. She wished for her to flourish in all living things, to share her happiness, and to always bring joy unconditionally, no matter how hard the times. The third of them clearly interrupted her speech and cursed Love with the ability to be destroyed, to feel negative emotions, and to feel and pass on pain and betrayal.

Romanticism was an intellectual and artistic movement that emerged in Europe around the middle of the 18th century as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the dislocations of the Industrial Revolution.⁴ Representatives of Romanticism imagine meeting their soulmate in a very dramatic setting with cliffs, storms, gloomy nature, and a romantic gaze.

Do we? What do some people still hold as a symbol of romance today?

Gestures like giving red roses, candles before a delicious dinner cooked by a loved one. Romantic comedies always end with the best possible happy ending where it doesn't matter if it's forbidden love, what matters is if it's true love. It's idealistic, beautiful and charming. Romanticism's main idea is to create a unique proposition of a life-long, passionate love marriage where love and sex are united. Although sex did not always mean to care for and live with.

Previously people had imagined that they could have sex with characters they did not love, and that they could love someone without having extraordinary sex with them. Romanticism elevated “sex to the supreme expression, the crowning moment of love”⁵ *. The superlative to express one's devotion to someone, the ultimate proof of one's sincerity. It was no longer possible to say that sex meant nothing. True love must mean the end of all loneliness and is tantamount to “accepting everything about a person”⁶ *.

***Sex is the supreme expression, the crowning moment of love**

This leaves the love part completely aside, for as is to be understood, if one doesn't have extraordinary sex with one's partner, there are no equivalent ways in which one can provide the beloved with the pure love that is sufficient. Maybe at the beginning of the relationship we can rely on this phrase, when sex is the main filling of the time spent together and obscures everything else. However, after a few months, fortunately years, we may get bored and turn our attention to other things, looking for other forms of time together, for feelings that are love and adoration.

⁴ Wikipedia contributors. “Romanticism.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.*, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Romanticism&oldid=1021888366> . Accessed 8 May 2021.

⁵ The School of Life. “How Romanticism Ruined Love.” *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w> . Accessed 8 May 2021.

⁶ The School of Life. “How Romanticism Ruined Love.” *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w> . Accessed 8 May 2021.

What Romanticism does not talk about is the fact that when we get bored or disappointed that sex isn't as wild and joyful anymore, we try to fulfill the idea of the ultimate expression of love in the arms of another.

*Accepting everything about a person

To love someone is to accept and respect the person as they are, to embrace good and bad, whatever happens, to hold on to each other.

That seems like the right thing to do. Probably everyone has heard a similar phrase at some point in their life that two people promise to each other, "I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you all the days of my life." ⁷ Undoubtedly, the marriage vow and the romantic notion of love are closely related, and both celebrate monogamy as the norm for a successful relationship. If people lived by this norm that monogamy provides, it wouldn't be a problem, but according to statistics published on a BBC Future online page titled "Why we need to talk about cheating," it turns out that: "75% of men and 68% of women admitted to cheating in some way, at some point, in a relationship". ⁸

Although Denisa agrees that a lifelong relationship with a loved one is a great deal, and even if someone cheats once, we should try to understand and accept their actions and choices as part of them. However, infidelity is not seen that way throughout society. Of course, the Christian religion plays a big role in influencing the perception in the Western world.

The idea of romance seems to be massively practiced, perhaps because it's the only one people have always known, so it's safe because who wants to be the one to do otherwise?

Denisa found that her mind was also shaped by the romantics who raised her. Like a princess in a chamber with nothing to see but marriage and monogamy.

*Romance has strong roots, people need roots,
They want tradition even if it disappears.
We don't want to be alone, we want to be part of a pack.
Intuition. Black.
A lit candle at dinner, a kneeling ring,
nothing else than a sinner, a charming thing.
Shared experiences told from the deathbed still push us toward the realization of love, and we
still search for the right one.*

⁷ Braman, Kat "Traditional Wedding Vows for Your Ceremony." *martha stewart*, 2021, <https://www.marthastewart.com/7888175/traditional-wedding-vows> . Accessed 4 May 2021.

⁸ Park, William "Why we need to talk about cheating." *BBC Future*, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190625-why-we-need-to-talk-about-cheating> . Accessed 30 April 2021.

We talk a lot about love of course, but do we really understand what love is?

Pure feeling you can't control. The foremost medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas wrote: "The person who truly understands love could love anyone. In other words: true love isn't specific in its target; it does not fixate on particular qualities, it's open to all of humanity." ⁹ "At the heart of this kind of love is an effort to see beyond the outwardly unappealing surface of another human in search of the tender, interesting, scared and vulnerable person inside. Real intimacy isn't just sharing the beauty of who we are, it's also sharing the ugly.

The more energy we spend in thinking like this, the more we stand to discover a very surprising truth: that we could potentially see the loveable sides of pretty much anyone." ¹⁰

Based on this interpretation, could we also love anyone romantically?

Who will pay the bill? Post-Romantic Theory of Couples

*You should put on your pink glasses,
That you wouldn't see me and my crisis.*

Even if we could love anyone, We aren't forever infatuated and the relationship also involves some practicalities. If we want the relationship to last, these practises need to come into discussion and preferably as soon as possible. "We need to replace the romantic template with a psychologically mature vision of love that we might call 'classical'. 1. love and sex 2. money talk 3. flaws 4. loneliness 5. communication 6. Practicalities." ¹¹ They encourage us to adopt a range of unfamiliar but hopefully effective attitudes. For example, "That it's normal that love and sex may not always belong together" ¹² - non-committal sex and friends with benefits are very common today, as are dating apps, most of which involve sex without love. That it's not a betrayal of love to talk about money early, openly and seriously - This sounds like a reasonable solution, after all we are an emancipated society that proclaims equality. That we will never find it all in one person, nor they in us, not because of some unique flaw, but because that is simply human nature.

⁹ The School of Life. "Why, Once You Understand Love, You Could Love Anyone." *The School of Life*, -, <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/why-once-you-understand-love-you-could-love-anyone/> . Accessed 12 March 2021.

¹⁰ The School of Life. "Why We Could Love Anyone." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRbV8Pjlsow> . Accessed 13 March 2021.

¹¹ The School of Life. "How Romanticism Ruined Love." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w> . Accessed 8 May 2021. (3:45 - 4:33)

¹² The School of Life. "How Romanticism Ruined Love." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jltM5qYn25w> . Accessed 8 May 2021.

Falling In Love

Connection. Touch. Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam.

Love begins when a child sucks on its mother's nipple, when a woman gives birth.

The moment when you smell a tiny baby's skin, representing the purity of the divine.

The moment when the nose wanders onto your breast.

The moment when you are still uncertain and shy.

The moment you realize that sadness is beautiful.

There is a short period of time when a child has time to build their own self-love, because once we discover our sexuality, which can be quite early, the focus is mainly on others. We fall into common, fast and pulsating volcanoes like kindergarten, elementary school, high school, university, where everything revolves around two groups - girls and boys which means love and sex. There is an attraction, a chemistry that we don't even understand yet, but once your parents are mom and dad - wife and husband - you can guess and just try to copy the same relationship they built with those assets like kissing, love and intimacy. Love is something that no one teaches you or shows you, although almost everyone does, and it's one of those things that stays with us from beginning to end and that we may be born with.

Can I make two colours fall in love with each other? What will it look like?

"People should fall in love with their eyes closed.

Just close your eyes.

*Don't look."*¹³

Colours Falling In Love one of the early ideas for a video work. It is made of three costumes, three performers dancing and moving, representing colors, a gallery, a camera, Hanna, a speaker, various music, fluidity, Denisa's idea and curiosity. Three performers - three colors - three personalities.

Light Violet, from an absurdly stereotypical point of view, portrays a kindly man, a husband who is a stable provider who can be relied upon, a leader who nevertheless retains the curiosity to seek something outside the home. *Light Pink*, a fragile woman, a blonde and beautiful wife who follows and loves. *Ivory Black*, a seduction, a temptation, powerful, independent, mysterious. Imagine all three of them in the club.

Denisa's instructions to the performers:

Violet and Pink, I want you to fall in love with each other. Imagine you are in the club, stand on the bar first, notice each other, then mate like birds, trying to attract each other as you spin in circles. Do not touch each other, the space between you becomes the tension,

¹³ Warhol, Andy. *FAME*. Penguin Random House UK, 2018. 13

*the creation from which love will emerge. Once you hold your hands, you create a bond.
Now, seductive Black is coming!*

There is no one weaker or stronger, all three colors are equal, Violet is happy to let Pink enjoy with Black, flirt and dance and do the same in reverse. There is no jealousy, there is happiness together.



It's a layering over, not an erasure. One enriches the other. They become one organism, a flower blooming, a crumbled raspberry creating the full form from independent pieces together.

Once I asked my brother what kind of fruit he thought I would be? He said “that I was like a raspberry.” A sweet and nice juicy person, but made up of many little pieces of different personalities or behaviours that all come together to form me as one.

1. (above), 2. Štefanigová, Denisa. Screenshot from the video. 2021.

2. From left to right: Sofia Fatahhova, Sarah Nömm and Karolin Poska.



A parallel to video is painting.

Here I focus on the pace and rhythm of how the brush touches the surface. It is always an author's arm and hand directing the movement. Very often it is sensual.

Here I question: *How colors mingle ? Could paint be unfaithful? If one color cheats on another (third), are the color combinations still pure or dirty in the sense that they are bad, as when people lie and cheat in a relationship that is deteriorating?*

I wonder if people could behave towards each other the same way brush strokes behave on the surface; flowing, independent, equal, non-judgmental, blending into each other without being jealous, exactly as we are at the beginning of a relationship when we fall in love. But who knows what colors think...

As the brush dips into the acrylic paint resting on a repurposed porcelain plate, the canvas can't wait to hit the paint. Bright Turquoise slowly kisses the white surface of the jute with the help of the brush. Muah, muah, muah. The paint sticks to the layer while Permanent Red Light, wet and almost transparent, caresses the sky blue matter. The two circle each other, mingle and blossom until the devil dance begins. The dance gives birth to the shades of violet.

Sexuality as inner fire

Sex is drive, vitality, connected with the will to live.

The place where creation was born.

HeatherAsh Amara, author of *Warrior Goddess Training*, described sexual energy as “a potent force of nature that flows through the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees, and through you. It is a pure-as-snow-, core energy that dances through all two-leggeds, four-leggeds, creepy crawlies, swimmers, and every plant from seed to blossom and to fruit. It's not wrong, dirty, immoral, or amoral. It is the central driving force of creation on the planet.”¹⁴ *Not only people make love, but the whole planet. Abstract shapes in the ocean swirl between the tentacles of an octopus*¹⁵, *fish rub together like two brushes on a canvas.*

I hold a yellow one in my left hand and a blue one in my right. At first they are independent, but then they rub against each other like fish. Do they make love?

¹⁴ Surwillo, Anna. “Sexuality, Creativity, Women – Exploring the Art of Sexual Energy.” *Fractal Enlightenment*, -, <https://fractalenlightenment.com/39955/life/4-simple-yet-controversial-ways-better-human> . Accessed 13 April 2021

¹⁵ Reed, James, and Pippa Ehrlich, directors. *My Octopus Teacher*. Sea Change Project, 2020.

An interesting and slightly controversial documentary about a man who developed a very unique relationship with an octopus. According to an article in the Guardian*, this is erotic rather than just biological passion. The octopus is a creature that is extremely intelligent and has perfect control of its tentacles, which have about 2000 suckers, which have the same character as human fingers. According to the article, the moment an octopus lays on an actor's bare chest and its suckers presumably touch it sensitively is considered an erotic act. The tentacles have a very sensual movement. Since the octopus is such a unique and mysterious creature that has no similar mate, it is difficult to discern the relationship between them, especially from the octopus side. Because if we consider the man and the dog, we can say that it is not an erotic act (on both sides) when the dog is on the chest of the owner.

Making Love With Painting

“It’s one of the great things about sexuality. It can bring us closer in a way that maybe other forms of communication can’t.”¹⁶

The relationship between art and its creator has also been in question for centuries. The relationship between Denisa and painting, colour and art has also been questioned throughout her practice. The birth of such a bond between an artist and the medium could be described in the same way as when you meet a person and have a lot of independent sex. You want it all the time, you're not focused on the outcome, you just want to do it. You don't expect anything. You splash the paint, wildly spit a basket of water on the paper or canvas which lies on the floor, and the painter is pretty free, tender and wild at the same time. After the act, one "wakes up" from the transitory experience and then judges the result. This was Denisa's first real experience with painting in high school, where she studied illustration, but a teacher recognized her admiration for color and had Denisa paint in a lecture hall every day after class. Painting always seems to be about the outcome.

What will the others say? Will they like it? Could we ask ourselves the same question when we fall in love with someone? What if the person doesn't fit into our circle of friends, he/she is not beautiful, not enough for our parents,...?

Making love with painting (2021), single-channel video projection of filmed performances. I have been ill with Covid, so I have not been in the studio for a while. After missing the daily presence of painting, I decided to bring the idea I had to life - I wanted to make love to painting where there is no violation, no gender, no shame, no jealousy. All of that is like a metaphor.

What means and to whom to make love with painting? What is my goal? Try to push painting somewhere or try to find true love? Is painting just a reflection of myself?

A fresh ex-boyfriend of mine filmed the first act I tried in the studio. I carefully prepared all my clothes beforehand. I intentionally dressed all black and sexy. Black lingerie body shirt with long sleeves, very tight, embraced by semi-transparent pantyhose with high waist, black free pants of light fabric, black lingerie bralette and black thong. In EarPods I listened to a sensual Quitar-song called “*Maggot Brain* by Funkadelic”¹⁷, which created an atmosphere where I wanted to make love, not *fuck* or have sex to a thick jute canvas approximately 2x2m laying down on the floor.

¹⁶ Monáe, Janelle, creator. *Sex, Explained*. Vox Media, 2020. Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81062193>.

*Hunt, Elle. “An octopus 'love story' on Netflix has caused thoughts to run wild. Why?” *The Guardian*, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/24/octopus-love-story-netflix>. Accessed 19 March 2021.

¹⁷ Funkadelic. “*Maggot Brain*”. *Maggot Brain*, Edward Hazel, George Clinton, Bloomsbury Academic, 1971, first track. YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=21sP7orRS3c.

Denisa, kneeling on four, slowly dipped her hair into the basket with water. Then moved splashily towards the canvas which she caressed by her head as cats cuddled people's breasts. Yves Klein used naked women, she chose to do it by herself, for herself, for painting's sake.



3. Štefanigová, Denisa. *Record of the method: making love with painting and colors - mostly with green and pink.* 2021. Estonian Academy of Arts.

As lipstick she applied light pink acrylic on her starving lips. Gently kissed the canvas, which was all wet. She circles her ass on the canvas to get wet as well. It spreads the color to all corners, only so that it does not forget a single piece of canvas body, as if you were kissing the whole partner's body. They are already flirting, kissing and wanting to make love. The painting lies on its back, as if your partner is waiting for what you will show him.

Slowly takes off her transparent pants and reveals full nylons covering her buttocks. Denisa wipes pink magenta on her breasts covered with lace and lets emerald green run down her thighs. Denisa lays down towards the ground, but still stays over the belly of her linen horse she rides. Like a crocodile that catches a prey and beats it with its speed, so Denisa, wrapped in a canvas, swirls across the floor of the studio. It rises and the one who looks from afar sees only an abstract form in which something / someone moves / loves. The act is tiring, fast and slow at the same time. Is there going to be an orgasm? Denisa finishes wrapping with a fast heartbeat and asks the cameraman: What now? he will answer: paint. Denisa very conscientiously and consciously takes a brush and paints images from her mind and all previous paintings she has painted or seen. As another layer above abstract visual lovemaking, a conscious figurative painting is created which thinks about the composition, color and satisfaction of the viewer.

The act takes place again after a few days as a live performance as part of the Online

*Performance Festival*¹⁸ on a new 2x2m blank jute. Once the live broadcast is over, Denisa is disappointed, crying internally and calling her loved ones because she has not received any response. She experienced something that the camera probably didn't transmit. Was it necessary to show, share? Do people deserve it at all?

Perhaps she should have kept it for herself and not show it publicly. It is the same when you write a love letter when you are a teenager, you feel the beauty and purity and you believe in it, in something higher. But then the person opens it and shows it to all his friends and they laugh at you. Third time, third 2x2m canvas. Third time, third lover.



4. Štefanigová, Denisa. “First Act of Lovepaint.”. Canvas cca 2x2m, acrylic, Method: make love with painting, 2021. Estonian Academy of Arts.

Two previous lovers/canvases are looking down from the wall. Are they jealous of each other? Seems quite peaceful. The act takes place again and again during one week period. Denisa took the first canvas which is stuck by the stapler to the wall and made love again, it could be counted as a third time. The third one is on the floor and in one moment Denisa and two canvases have a threesome, all wrapped around each other.

¹⁸ Denisa Štefanigová. “Making love with painting.” *onlineperformanceart*, 2021, www.onlineperformanceart.com/denisa-stefanigova-tallinn-estonia-making-love-with-painting/.

How to love deeply?

HUMBLE YOURSELF.

I let those paintings to finally be quite abstract. I wanted to forget or unlearn to judge them in the way if they are beautiful or successful outcomes, even if I wanted so much to reach qualitative awareness, I found this contradiction between unconscious and pure compared to desiring and achieving. They are all stapled to the wall, next to each other and in my opinion not beautiful, or perhaps not visually working as a great piece I would say. Then I realized I was obsessed with finishing them. I was so desperately trying to find something, that I overworked it, even though I hadn't noticed, just after watching the documentation of how beautiful images were created during the love making process.

Why do we always want more?

I thought about my own love making, where two people can reach a beautiful moment while splitting together and then there is always the possibility to go further then eventually you end up not finishing at all. It also and mainly remind me of my own relationships which are more than one at the moment, that I am trying so hard to let them work, juggling them between each other, building one on the top of other one, and then through these processes of painting I just realized that is okay if something: a painting, a relationship just doesn't work and I can let it leave. I embrace failure as a fact that it turned out to not be failure anymore.

Three images represent three lovers, three separate relationships showing that each of them/partner are different so then there is a different approach to each lover/partner/painting/ we cannot compare them, we are always learning and going towards the other one acknowledged thanks to the previous one. Each relationship between an artist and a painting /an art piece is unique, same as each relationship between a person and the other love one could be. We could look at them separately, therefore not mixing the emotions within all of the relationships but understand each relationship as an independent organism.

All my hair was dry, my whole skin on my head was covered, but I wasn't thinking about myself, I thought about our moment together painting, no one can take it out from me.

2. Monogamy

Desire Drive(s) Denisa

temptation, sense of aliveness, something different, need, out of control

Desire: “Everyone knows that most people, however much they may love their partner, are capable of loving and desiring more than one person at a time. It may be reassuring, but it is in fact very demanding - and often cruel – to assume that only one other person can give us what we want.”¹⁹

Drive(s): I have finished painting one picture, but I already want to paint another. She longed for you, and that desire was her aliment. Like a child she wants a new toy, and the whole fantasy in her head is a new world that feeds us, like when a fox chases a rodent, or when you fall in a bar and in her desire you are someone else. But she doesn't know if you desire too, but as soon as you give in, the desire disappears like steam over a pot.

Denisa: The name is a feminine form of Denis, originates in Greek language and means "dedicated to God". It is a feminine form ultimately derived from Dionysus (Dionysios), the Greek god of grape harvest, winemaking and wine and Nysa, which refers to the name of the legendary region where the infant Greek god Dionysios was raised by nymphs.²⁰

D: Dyonisus; the God of Wine and Ecstasy

E: Eros; the God of Eroticy, Lust and Sex

N: Nympho; a female with excessive sexual desire

I: Irrational; not logical or reasonable

S: Sex; pleasure

A: Amor; the God of Love

I am Denisa, I Desire and it Drives me further.

*Lust for Life*²¹, a book by Irving Stone about life and hardships of the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh by its title, exactly captures what my desire is about. It is simple. Desire means being curious, wanting more, exploring, always pushing further, feeling vital not only sexually but therefore spiritually and creatively. Constant desire for satisfaction, desire for mental satisfaction. Always want more, in life, in art. Esther Perel said: “We used to divorce because we were unhappy, today we divorce because we could be happier.”²²

¹⁹ Phillips, Adam. *Monogamy*. London, Faber & Faber, 1996. On cover page

²⁰ Wells, Nomina. “Origin and meaning of Denisa.” *eBabyNames*, 2021, <https://www.ebabynames.com/#!meaning-of-Denisa> . Accessed 1 March 2021.

²¹ Stone, Irving. *Lust for life: the novel of Vincent Van Gogh*. Doubleday & Company, 1937.

²² Howes, Lewis. “How To Create Sexual Desire.” *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLhMOR0AH8I>. 19:04-19:09.

Desire is the drive that drives us through life and gives it a purpose. It's impossible to just stop and live rationally by following rules and norms... Desire offers juicy life but afterwards also a bit dangerous as it could lead us to somewhere where it can get darker.

Sex

Is for connection and pleasure

“Sex is one of the most powerful forces in human existence. It can drive people to the pinnacle of emotional and physical ecstasy or, conversely, spiral other people into the depths of despair and anguish. The power of sexual energy and expression exists because our sexuality is connected to the core of who we are; it is our essence, our life force, our creativity, and our passion. A sense of self means an inner knowing, a clarity about our true nature or authenticity. In a healthy sexual expression there is desire, connection, and a sense of well-being. The act of sexual self-expression leads to a positive, life-enhancing experience; it is an expression of love, an exchange of mutual pleasure and respect that leads to an intimate connection.”²³

If everyone let their inner desire come to light, would there be more happiness in the world?

“Sexuality today isn’t just part of our biology, it’s part of our identity.”²⁴

Are we walking sexual objects ? “Despite all these positive connections, we approach sex with indifference, guilt and shame, which keeps us from experiencing its true power.”²⁵

Maybe I'm just a soft object lying on the bed. Like a pillow with a hole in it, into which someone mechanically inserts a smaller, oblong pillow.

Are we like instant soups that just need to be poured ? Aren't we numb ? I ask him, as I kneel by the window and our mechanical pillows don't and don't get wet.

Adult and unfaithful, cheating to feel delightful.

Lick My Brush and don't feel guilty about it.

triangle / shame / regret / anger / adapt / liar / keeping secrets / self justification / guilt / failure / helpless / forgive / play / pleasure / truth / lie / curious / discovering / identity / female / male / intimacy / life / lust / freedom / acceptance / affair

Affair = alive

Affairs, cheating, adultery or infidelity, whatever people want to call it, are “way less about sex, they are an expression of longing and loss and they requires agency in terms of planning, hiding and lying.”²⁶

²³ Canning, Maureen. *Lust, Anger, Love: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Road to Healthy Intimacy*. Sourcebooks, 2008. *Google Books*. 13.

²⁴ TED. “Rethinking infidelity ... a talk for anyone who has ever loved | Esther Perel.” *YouTube*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q&t=15s>. Accessed 3 January 2021.

²⁵ Canning, Maureen. *Lust, Anger, Love: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Road to Healthy Intimacy*. Sourcebooks, 2008. *Google Books*.

²⁶ Schippers, Mimi. *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities*. New York University, 2016. 46.

Why is it always so, that infidelity is considered to be a negative thing?

“Cheating as something that is the lowest of the law and is associated with sin.”²⁷

“Cheating doesn't typically just happen spontaneously.”²⁸

Of course, Denisa argues that we are all conscious and our minds don't work the same as smartphones. Smartphones can be turned off, our mind cannot.

As Katie Ziskind, licensed marriage and family therapist who believes that cheating is usually a sign of deeper unresolved issues within the relationship. Sometimes it's rooted in issues with communication, and other times it's based on needs that aren't being met (wanting attention, feeling special, important, etc.) Denisa believes that there is always a reason - a root that is the basis for a seed to grow. But if "cheating" meant something else - positive - it could all be understood differently.

Once upon a time, a grand-grand mother living in deep emerald green forest told her almost adult daughter: “My little beautiful dear! Drink this magical cup with a heritage I inherited from my old ancestors a curvy amount of years ago. Drink up to your desires and let your lustful flower bud grow wide!



5. Štefanigová, Denisa. “Orgy” (let the colors flourish between themselves), Acrylic on canvas, 110x150cm, 2021. Estonian Academy of Arts.

²⁷ Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. *The History of Sexuality*. New York :Pantheon Books, 1978.

²⁸ Fellizar, Kristine. “7 Surprising Situations When Cheating Is More Likely To Happen, According To Experts.” *Bustle*, 2019, <https://www.bustle.com/p/7-surprising-situations-when-cheating-is-more-likely-to-happen-according-to-experts-15944150> .Accessed 10 March 2021.

I am happily passing on infidelity as your invisible companion on your life journey which will keep you curious, open minded and loving! Be truthful to the people you meet on your way and never forget to love yourself the way you are and embrace your desires. Never compare yourself to the other, never forget from which roots you were born from."

"Every affair will redefine a relationship which means infidelity could be enriching." ²⁹

Denisa wonders if it's possible to find an advantage in having divorced parents, having experienced adultery around her through her childhood and even after that practice it by herself. She just looks at infidelity from a lighter point of view, trying to understand it, embracing it as a part of her character which should be rather admitted than hidden and rejected.

Why?

Because being unfaithful or cheating on someone is seduction, excitement and pleasure while afterward it is considered a horrible tragedy followed by crying and people questioning: "How could you do this to me?"

In the following part I glued together pre-cooked knowledge of a relationship expert from Belgium Esther Perel in combination with an already mentioned british philosopher Alain de Botton.

According to Perel, "people have been having adultery throughout human history and infidelity has been around since marriage was invented." ³⁰ "The fact that for the first time in history we have sex before marriage, because before we got married and had sex, now we get married and stop having sex with others" ³¹ (or at all?). *I am slicing chicken in the kitchen. He is standing right behind me and massaging my breasts like making bread dough. We hug, thanks to which I feel a gentle vibration in my lower abdomen. I wonder what we would do if we could have sex only after the marriage and that we should probably get married the first week.*

If we remember one of the Romanticism ideas of love, then any interest outside the couple will be catastrophic in nature. We live in the digital era filled by visual temptations and seductive limitless opportunities. where everything is visible, everywhere are tangible proofs of ones cheating like messages, pictures, location identification, etc. If one cheats it is difficult to hide it in terms of protecting our partner. "Today infidelity is often traumatic because it threatens our sense of self. A crisis of identity." ³²

Who am I? and who are you? Are you different when you're with him?

²⁹ TED. "Rethinking infidelity ... a talk for anyone who has ever loved | Esther Perel." *YouTube*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q&t=15s> . Accessed 3 January 2021.

³⁰ Skavlan. "This is how you stop your partner from cheating | Esther Perel." *YouTube*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmiKAoAmYSg&t=237s> . Accessed 8 April 2021. 1:23.

³¹ Howes, Lewis. "How To Create Sexual Desire." *YouTube*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLhMOr0AH8I> . Accessed 13 February 2021. 19:00-19:09.

³² 92nd Street Y. "Esther Perel with Chris Cuomo: The State of Affairs — Rethinking Infidelity." *YouTube*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0dVjeBNANA&t=2175s> . Accessed 3 January 2021.

“When we seek the gaze of another it isn’t always our partner that we are turning away from, but the person that we have ourselves become. Not looking for another person, but looking for another self.”³³

If White makes love with Black, they're gonna create Grey. We suppose it's their child based on our "human relationship" knowledge. They are happy. After a while, when Grey grows up, White starts to meet with Red and they aren't gonna create Pink, but they are flourishing together. Red becomes lighter and White becomes reddish. What, if once White will come back home and Black will see White looking a bit pinkish...

Will Black be angry and make White dirtier with its fury or will Black rather let White flourish and invite Red to also add some new shades to its darkness?

While searching for statistics around how many people cheat, how, why and where, Denisa decided to rather create a questionnaire which is significant to her perspective. This gave her access to intimate stories instead of generic, sterile statistics.

Relationship Goals (Questionnaire created by Denisa)

The questionnaire on relationships, true love, monogamy and infidelity was created online and filled in by fifty people based in Estonia and the Czech Republic between the ages of 21 and 45.

1.

Do you believe in true love?

50 responses



³³ TED. “Rethinking infidelity ... a talk for anyone who has ever loved | Esther Perel.” *YouTube*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q&t=15s> . Accessed 3 January 2021. 12:18-12:36.

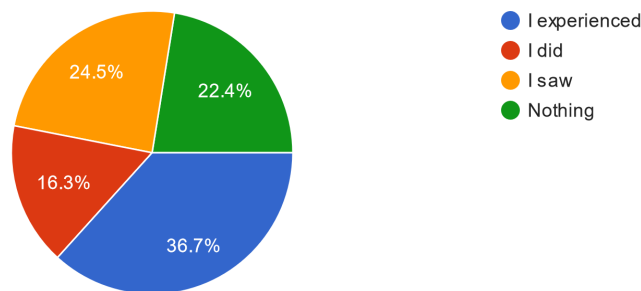
2. What does this mean for you?

(follows up on “Do you believe in true love?”, 46 responses)

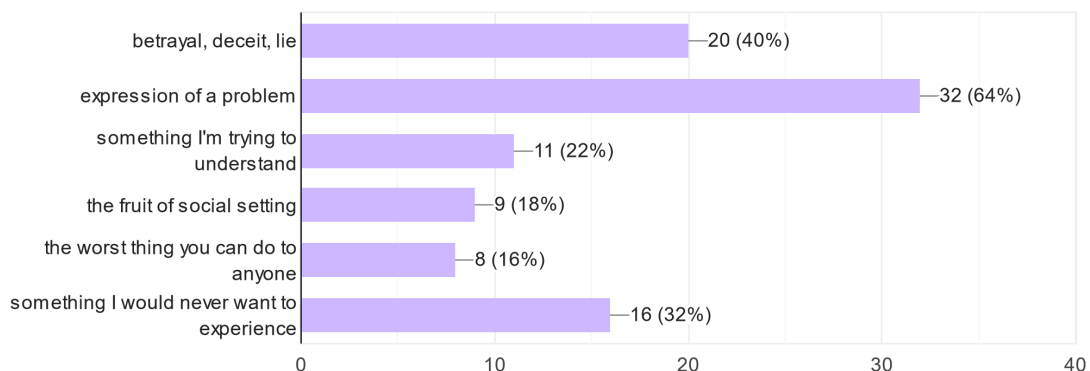
Denisa decided to pick a few of respondents' answers to demonstrate a wide variety of how people perceive love:

“Kindness before ego”, “nothing anymore. seems like people only exist to fulfill their basic needs-eat, sleep, shit & fuck around.”, “I believe that there are hundreds and thousands of potential "the one's" or "true loves" for you out there.”, “I have believed in it in the past but these were just illusions ending with disappointments”, “being addicted to someone”, “True love is sincerity of unconditional care, support, affection that you reciprocate. Always value it, always give it. The absolute equality of desires.

3. Infidelity 49 responses



4. you agree that infidelity is: 50 responses

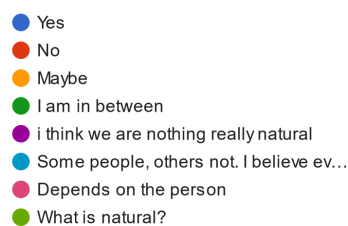
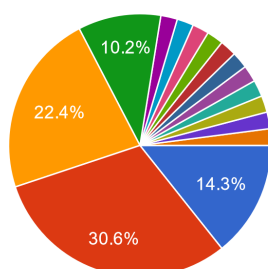


In the question “Where and how did you first meet infidelity?” 45 people responded and the most often mentioned keywords were family (parents, father left, father lied,”Mom was complaining about dad”), friends, young age and very little amount answered: “personally haven't experienced infidelity. In general I can say from movies”.

5.

Do you think we are naturally monogamous?

49 responses

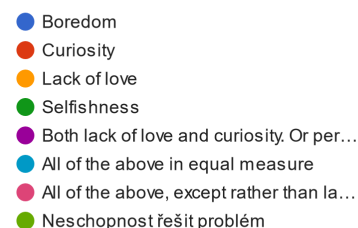
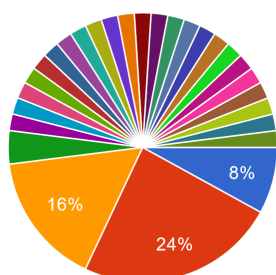


▲ 1/2 ▼

6.

What would you say is the main reason for infidelity?

50 responses



▲ 1/4 ▼

7. Denisa asked participants if they could match colors with words. Below you can find some of the most common answers which had the highest rate.

INFIDELITY: Warm (2) and Dark (6), Fiery Red-Orange (6), Black (6), Cold Green Blue (5), Lavender Purple (5), Cold and Bright (3),...

LOVE: Soft Pink-Red (14), Fiery Red-Orange (8), Warm (7), Light Blue Sky (2),...

ROMANCE: Soft Pink-Red (17), Creamy (6), Warm and dark (6), Fiery Red-Orange (6), The Smell of White Linen (1),...

DESIRE: Fiery Red-Orange (15), Warm and Dark (13), Black (1), Mysterious Purple (4),...

SEXUAL PARTNER: Fiery Red-Orange (10), Warm and Dark (7), Canary Yellow (7), Mysterious Purple (6),...

BETRAYAL: Black (11), Fiery Red-Orange (9), Cold (7) and Bright (6), Warm (1) and Dark (5),...

TRUTH: Light Blue Sky (11), The Smell of White Linen (6), Mint Green (5), Canary Yellow (5),...

LIE: Black (9), Cold (8), Cold Green Blue (7), Lavender Purple (1), Mint Green (1),...

As you can see, the color **Fiery Red-Orange** is most often perceived in the context of infidelity, desire, sexual partners, less so in love and betrayal - anything involving desire, sex and risk. From an esoteric point of view, the second chakra - the sacral chakra - located in the reproductive area, is symbolized by the color orange. The meaning of this color is sexuality, creativity, vitality and pleasure.

8. Your friend doesn't believe in monogamy. What would you say are the reasons why you think monogamy is beautiful and works best? (few picked from 46 responses)

“I don't think monogamy works best or worse. I think polygamy is a beautiful and very poetic view of love and relationships, I love how conceptually it is such a democratic approach to life. If we have many friends, why can't we have many lovers? But also I think it is beautiful to want to devote yourself completely and exclusively to one person. I really believe both and all forms and structures of love and relationships are valid and that multiplicity should be cheered upon.”

“Better have one deeper relationship than many shallow ones”

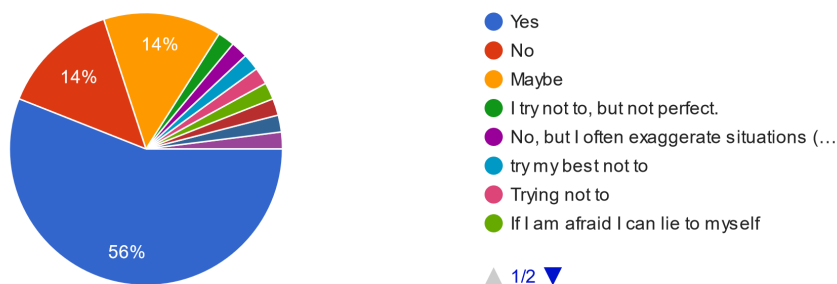
“No one who doesn't feel like it should be forced to live in monogamy. The most important thing is to be honest about your preferences”

“Christianity and the western world”

“people feel secure”

“you will never get to know someone as you get to know them in a monogamous relationship”

9. Do you lie sometimes?
50 responses



10. Why is truth important? 45 responses

For the conscience / *its the basis of your existence* / Easier to be with myself / *for being free* / **do you really have to ask that?** / *To grow* / Because if life is a lie then it is just a lie and has no meaning whatsoever / *Denying nature is self destructive.* / The truth is lightness and ease, no matter how heavy the information / *I keep asking myself the same thing.* I guess it makes it unbearable to live in a world where we can't know anything for sure, so truth is probably necessary in overall human relationships of any kind.

The first question I started my research on was, "Are we naturally monogamous?" And, surprisingly, I realized, also from the questionnaire, that people are aware that this is probably not the case. The questionnaire which mostly showed what I could have expected and as a wide variety of answers also opened up my mind in the sense that I can ask whatever questions to whatever people but what is the most important is what one wants and what one (me) believes is the best for him (myself).

Is it infidelity if you stay up late at night in the studio, drinking wine with painting?
Can we consider painting or creation in general as a valid reason to be jealous?
Can painting replace a lover?



6. Štefanigová Denisa. *"I love you in the park"*, 120x150cm, acrylic on canvas, 2021.
Estonian Academy of Arts.

“Infidelity can now look like a ‘solution’ to a broader range of ‘problems’ not simply a lack of sexual pleasure, but as offering intimate fulfillment, the ‘experience’ of variety or the possibility of having one’s authentic self ‘seen’ by another.”³⁴

“In conclusion, society’s general view toward infidelity is negative, but the frequency of occurrence says otherwise. The issue is that not everyone who cheats would admit even to themselves that they’re engaging in an affair. For instance, some do not consider flirting online as cheating until physical intimacy comes into play. In addition, what is socially acceptable when it comes to infidelity varies, depending on who you ask. It is, however, safe to conclude that cheating these days is not at all rare, and it is harder to keep it a secret.”³⁵

Lie & Truth

“Infidelity is as much about the drama of truth telling as it is about the drama of sexuality. It is only because of sexuality that we think about truth at all; that we find honesty and kindness at odds with each other.”³⁶

“We all have different understanding of words”³⁷

“Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”³⁸

“Truth shines and is fragrant. A lie has no strength.

Lies are a distortion of the world, they are not real, but they are our creation, we bring them into life and turn them into reality in the virtual reality of our mind.

We use symbols (words) to understand the truth through them, but the essence of the truth is that the symbols cannot say anything about it.

Truth does not exist in words.

The real truth is the creation of life or the object of perception, e.g. tree, man. The interpretation of the truth of every human being is always subjective.”³⁹

“Stop eternal thinking.”

“FLY AWAY FROM YOUR OWN CAGE”

When I paint, I stop thinking. When I love, I stop thinking.

What do I do when I start thinking?

Purity, presence, happiness - led by the paint, led by the passion.

The truth is you.

I know. I lie.

The truth is you. It’s painful.

Then sooth, but to whom?

³⁴ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 66.

³⁵ Zuckerman, Arthur. “50 Cheating Statistics: 2020/2021 Demographics, Reasons & Who Cheats More.” *CompareCamp*, 2020, <https://comparecamp.com/cheating-statistics/>. Accessed 3 February 2021.

³⁶ Phillips, Adam. *Monogamy*. London, Faber & Faber, 1996.

³⁷ Jichova, Bara K., director. *Talking About Adultery*. Incomplete Pictures, 2019.

³⁸ Sworn testimony is evidence given by a witness who has made a commitment to tell the truth.

³⁹ Ruiz, Don Jose. *The Fifth Agreement*. Amber-Allen Publishing, 2010.

Could Monogamy be a board game?

What is monogamy?

Denisa does not want to say, nor does she know what monogamy is, but rather sets out on a path formed by quotes from others. Even so, she could still say that love is a mess, and people make their lives complicated due to the brain patterns of thoughts they have learned in previous times and based on that are making their decision.

If a person was surrounded by lies and then still lied, was unfaithful, of course it could be very difficult for such a person to trustfully be sincere and suddenly be successful in a polyamoral relationship based on not being jealous and accepting and sharing the truth.

Through a fictional dialogue between Denisa and the quotations of many thinkers, I will present a summary of the best that, in my monogamy, c

Esther Perel: “Monogamy and Infidelity is a problem of the language itself. There is no morally neutral language because it is often so morally judgmental.”⁴⁰

Playful Denisa: Amagonom? Ytiledifin?

Adam Phillips: “Like a magnet that collects our virtues and vices, monogamy makes the larger abstractions real, as religion once did. Faith, hope, trust, morality; these are domestic matters now. Indeed, we contrast monogamy not with bigamy or polygamy but with infidelity, because it is our secular religion.”⁴¹

Virtual Reality Denisa: I imagine that I have the strength to have a magnet inside my body that gathers all the trust, honesty and faith between me and the people I have met. I walk around the city, I live and there is a database of accumulated material in my body, as with all other people. Next to each person's head (as in a video game) is an indicator of the level of how trustworthy a person is based on their previous experience. Same principle as in the well-known simulation video games The Sims or Tekken (fighting game).

Esther Perel: “Monogamy used to be one person for life. Today monogamy is one person at the time.”⁴²

Curious Denisa: Does that mean I'll have lunch with Tom and dinner with Jack, and I don't cheat on them?

Luke Brunning: “Nowadays, many people happily pursue serial monogamy, having one partner as a time without expecting to have one partner for life.”⁴³

Confused Denisa: Is it healthy that even though I love you, I still consider it possible that we could break up? I think we all want to think about a relationship that is forever, or at least for a period that we can imagine. Does Romanticism speak up from me?

Adam Phillips: “Each of our relationships is different, and we are different in each of them.

⁴⁰ 92nd Street Y. “Esther Perel with Chris Cuomo: The State of Affairs — Rethinking Infidelity.” *YouTube*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0dVjeBNANA&t=2175s> . Accessed 3 January 2021.

⁴¹ Phillips, Adam. *Monogamy*. London, Faber & Faber, 1996.

⁴² TED. “Rethinking infidelity ... a talk for anyone who has ever loved | Esther Perel.” *YouTube*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q&t=15s> . Accessed 3 January 2021.

⁴³ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 130.

This is what makes monogamy so perversely interesting.”⁴⁴

Denisa as a painter: Absolutely agree. It is like you are able to paint a painting exactly this way based on the knowledge you got /sucked from the previous ones.

Angela Willey: “The naturalness of monogamy-for individuals, groups, or species-is persistently posed as a “true” or “false” question: are we or are we not wired for monogamy? Let’s ask instead, what is the relationship between how we imagine social belonging and how we understand human nature? Imagine how we relate to one another differently is to open up new possibilities for how we understand what we are biologically.”⁴⁵

Cosmic Denisa: Imagine there is no knowledge, just you standing in front of another person with a chemistry. What will or have defined the way we live now? Are we our emotions?

Lesbian Resource Book: “One of the most significant rules imposed on this relationship [heteronormative marriage] is that of monogamy, an extremely well-entrenched code, completely supported by law, religion, and custom. Upon this framework, taught by parents, schools, churches, synagogues, the law, medicine, and reinforced by the media, women and men are expected to build their lives.”⁴⁶

Luke Brunning: “For some, sexual fidelity is paramount; for others, love and emotional intimacy take priority. Some prize domesticity; others emphasize shared values and projects, or quality time spent together. These disagreements help us see monogamy as one form of life among others, and that the distinction between monogamous and non monogamous relationships is rarely absolute.”⁴⁷

What do you value the most, Denisa?

Honest Denisa: I want to feel secure, not always afraid that the person will leave me the next day. I would love to see the body from within and measure how much each person really loves the other, because I believe we can always lie, even if we don't want to. Do we understand our emotions, our needs, our desires and the things that make us happy?

I think a person should try, go beyond the uncomfortable zone, even sacrifice the loved one for his/her own happiness.

⁴⁴ Phillips, Adam. *Monogamy*. London, Faber & Faber, 1996.

⁴⁵ Willey, Angela. *Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology*. DUKE University Press, 2016.

⁴⁶ Vida, Ginny, editor. *Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book*. Prentice-Hall, 1978. 21.

⁴⁷ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020.

3. Polyamory

“She’s not even jealous; rather, it hurts her.”⁴⁸

jealousy – waste of time, lack of self confidence and self worth

By virtually bringing two philosophers voices together, Denisa summarized what jealousy could mean or how we understand this complex emotion. She found help from an English philosopher, Luke Brunning and his book *“Does Monogamy Work?”* together with an Icelandic philosopher Kristján Kristjánsson and his book *“Virtuous Emotions”*.

“Jealousy, the essence of which lies in the fear of loss, is closely linked to envy, which is associated with feelings of inferiority and longing (Parrott & Smith, 1993). In other words, the difference between them is that “in envy we wish to obtain something that the other has and in jealousy we fear losing something that we already have to someone else”.⁴⁹ The painting is made up of superimposed layers.

Could Denisa be jealous of the top layer that took the previous one from her? Or is it Denisa who has taken away the previous one from the bottom one? Could the bottom layer, the transparent one, be jealous of the layer that has been painted more and given more attention? Is Denisa or a layer of painting an object of jealousy?

From a philosophical perspective is covetousness understood “as a one-party emotion, envy as a two-party one, and jealousy as involving three parties. Jealousy as a unique composite of envy, anger, and righteous indignation and belongs to a category of conceptually and psychologically complex self-conscious emotions which include oneself (or, more theoretically speaking, one’s own ‘self’) as an attitudinal object (cf. Kristjánsson, 2010, chap. 4),”⁵⁰ which is accompanied by self-evaluation and self-doubt.

*Jealousy is narcissistic.
Compersion is thinking for others.⁵¹*

“In addition jealousy seems and therefore is seldom valuable, some people also believe that jealousy can be tamed. But not only that. Some think that we can cultivate a new trait of feeling which is often described as jealousy’s opposite.”⁵²

(Since relationships between emotions are quite complex, we should resist thinking that jealousy has one opposite.)”⁵³ They call this good feeling ‘compersion’ (the word is a neologism that reportedly originated on an Ouija board in a non monogamous commune in

⁴⁸ Jichova, Bara K., director. *Talking About Adultery*. Incomplete Pictures, 2019.

⁴⁹ Kristjánsson, Kristján. *Virtuous Emotions*. Oxford Scholarship, 2018.

⁵⁰ Kristjánsson, Kristján. *Virtuous Emotions*. Oxford Scholarship, 2018.

⁵¹ Brunning, Luke. *Compersion: An Alternative to Jealousy?* Cambridge University Press, 2020.

⁵² Brunning, Luke. *Compersion: An Alternative to Jealousy?* Cambridge University Press, 2020.

⁵³ Kristjánsson, Kristján. *Virtuous Emotions*. Oxford Scholarship, 2018. 110.

San Francisco). Compersion - an idea, feeling coming from polyamorous (nonmonogamous) relationships and communities is way of being that you feel pleasure and joy when your partner flourish and feel mainly romantic or sexual pleasure with other people.⁵⁴

7. Štefanigová, Denisa. *“King Size Bed for Polyamorists”*, acrylic on canvas, 45x75cm, 2021. Estonian Academy of Arts.



Denisa wonders if, in an installation of paintings, videos and fabrics, all media are compersive to each other? Whether, even if there is a certain hierarchy between them, they step back and support each other. Are the colors in the painting compersive when they are juxtaposed, or do they prefer to compete to get the viewer's attention first?

⁵⁴ X, Gracie. “Compersion: A Polyamorous Principle That Can Strengthen Any Relationship.” *HUFFPOST*, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/compersion-a-polyamorous-principle-that-can-strengthen-any-relationship_b_6803868. Accessed 11 February 2021

Compersion requires us to be empathetic and understand how other people think and feel. To do this, we need to try to view experiences from the perspective of our partner and the other people who care for them. Instead of focusing on what we lack, we can concentrate on what a partner gains when they are with another. Compersion requires us to be empathetic and understand how other people think and feel.

“To do this, we need to try to view experiences from the perspective of our partner and the other people who care for them.”⁵⁵

Blue tries to see Yellow perspective, why did it want to change its unique proposition of such a shiny pigment? Instead of focusing on what we lack, we can concentrate on what a partner gains when they are with another.⁵⁶ *Why Red? Blue asks. Am I not cold enough for Yellow?* We must also interrogate any habit of automatically thinking of others as rivals.⁵⁷ *Blue thinks Red’s impact on Yellows is catastrophic and it will completely change its look.* Occasionally people are rivals – they want to hurt us or disregard our interests – but this is rare. Often another person looms large as a rival because we know little about them.⁵⁸ *Apparently Red shade is going pretty well with Blue because it brings completely new shades that Blue never experienced before and wouldn’t be able to reach with Yellow.* Once we understand more of someone’s personality, history and interests – an effort that requires empathy – it is harder to dismiss them as threatening. This may sound good in theory, but hard to obtain in practice.⁵⁹

How can we become compersive and replace jealousy with feelings of joy?

There are two steps to this process: to address our jealous tendencies, and to focus on the flourishing of other people.”⁶⁰ Emotions that are comparative like jealousy are deeply rooted in processes and traits that aren’t always very easy to change. So it may be the case that it’s actually quite hard for people to experience compersion. I don’t think that’s a problem, necessarily. So much depends on the individual. There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to it.

”Love’s future will be as diverse as love’s past. Monogamy will not disappear, but nonmonogamous alternatives will seem increasingly normal, and multi-partner relationships may receive social recognition.”⁶¹

The differences between people’s opinions and responses about what is the right thing to do in what situation, but especially in relationships, are insanely wide. Denisa can’t get the right answers from anyone, then maybe colors can help.

⁵⁵ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁵⁶ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁵⁷ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁵⁸ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁵⁹ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁶⁰ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 114, 115.

⁶¹ Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020.

My approach to art has not been and is not monogamous, for if it were, I would remain faithful to painting and could not, say, cheat with other media. Sometimes an artist is required to devote himself to only one medium and improve in it. But isn't that a very monogamous approach, which again smacks of a commonly practiced norm? I really enjoy spending time painting and performing the next day. I can also combine mediums, which can be considered a polyamorous approach to artistic practice. The way I create art is also not monogamous, as I don't use just one style of painting or group of colors, I don't stick to specific materials but I am open to experimentation and create a broad spectrum through curiosity, or my own awareness, from which I can choose what suits me best, as well as the relationship. The practice is not monogamous and the final installation cannot be. The complexity of monogamy comes with balance and inner struggles, because you probably haven't found the right approach to the relationship yet, you haven't painted the final absolute picture. But through the whole process of thesis and research, I've found that instead of looking for a single option and choosing between the two, I can embrace both and explore all. In my thesis, I did not deal with issues such as religion, race, gender, Western/Eastern perspective, and other artists dealing with issues of love. Although all are closely related to the problems discussed in the thesis, from my current point of view it seems more like a distraction from the real problem that lies at the core. Rather, I will first focus on a general understanding of the main differences in the approach of love and relationship. Following that, with this knowledge, I can move into more detail on each topic.



8. Štefanigová, Denisa. *"Polyamorous Dance"*, acrylic on canvas, 2x1,7m, 2021. Estonian Academy of Arts.

Conclusion

Romanticism, which still predominantly dominates our understanding of love, and the results of the questionnaire showed that people still want a love that is stable, built on trust and honesty, and preferably with someone who is similar to us and with whom we can live together peacefully. They do not want to be cheated on because infidelity is based on lies and experiences with it are usually associated with harmful feelings. People value truth because it is the foundation of who we are and what we can communicate with. Both have shown that we usually look for a companion for life, something like a best friend, who we can usually trust the most to support each other. The only thing that can be in addition to friendship, of course, is that we share intimacy in the relationship.

So why do people still believe that lying and hiding - the main components of infidelity - is a better solution than being honest to secure their commitments and partners?

The idea of a monogamous relationship is not tragic, nor is it criticized in this paper, as the author practices it himself. Rather, the focus is on its consequences and the closed-mindedness that monogamy brings, which is most visible in encounters with infidelity. Once upon a time, two people promised each other fidelity in a relationship. But things can always change, or one of them wants something different. Usually, instead of a conversation up front that could resolve the situation, the conversation afterward comes with crying, separation, and scars on the broken heart.

We still keep the promise we made many years ago, if only months ago, as if it were today, and when something changes, we consider it a betrayal. If we created opportunities and a safe environment for open conversations about love, sex, desire, and commitment, perhaps we could prevent the potential damage that usually accompanies infidelity. Now more than ever, diversity in the way we think is evident, and the youngest generation is proof of that. Therefore, we cannot expect the whole society to follow the same path or standard because love is a personal matter.

The problem is mostly also that people don't know any alternative to monogamy than secret infidelity. The ignorance could be replaced with a greater awareness of different approaches to relationships and sexuality, which would lead to each individual being able to evaluate their options and, without stereotyping, assess and know their own needs and desires and choose from that how they want their relationships to be and whether it is even necessary to follow predetermined boxes. The best way to find out what kind of relationships will work is also to encourage people to experiment without fear. "Without such experimentation, we cannot know what intimate actions will best help people live thriving lives."⁶²

The conclusion cannot give a universal answer because the answer is unique to each of us, and if it works for us, it may not work for the other. Hopefully, over time, knowledge and

⁶² Brunning, Luke. *Does Monogamy Work?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames & Hudson, 2020. 122.

diversity of approaches to love will evolve around the world and people will open up, become more empathetic, listen to each other without prejudice, and be open with their partner about their needs. This could lead to a decrease in the toxicity and anxiety that is prevalent in the population in most parts of the world. This could lead to toxicity and anxiety going down in the world.

To illustrate the importance of different perspectives, the paper features three voices:

1. a person like me (Denisa Štefanigová) speaks in the voice of a human being, a citizen of society, in an effort to convey a general point of view.
2. she - I - Denisa and her personal opinions, thoughts are marked in italics in the work and arise mainly from emotional and sincere thinking. The creative way of writing has helped to illuminate the complexity of ideas and issues, and thanks to a more playful point of view, they are also more accessible and understandable. Like fairy tales, they tell of the complexity of human behavior, or fables in which animals take the form of humans, emphasizing an overall social character without pointing to any particular person. Through something else we can see the reflection of ourselves and understand it better.
3. The third voice represents, in particular, the quotations of experts, the widespread knowledge that we must acknowledge.

Unresolved issues:

Is there a monogamous way to look at art? *Can colors get horny?* The sexuality of animals and plants. *What will life and sexuality look like if we were equal to the animals?*

Abstract
Denisa Štefanigová

Violet, show me how tender you can be?
(Shades of Love & Desire & Infidelity & Truth)

Lay on my brushstrokes.
Even if I'm lying, the pleasure is true.
A delicate lie, a delightful truth.

The master's thesis is mainly about **human relationships** and their complexity, which is explored through colors and paintings. Denisa Štefanigová, in her search for answers about love and relationship, has turned her attention from **human sexuality to the non-human; mainly of colors and brushstrokes.**

In the final work she imagines colors falling in love, being in a relationship, experiencing adultery and wondering how **jealousy, infidelity**, separation will affect their shades, brightness and volume.

The text begins with an introduction to the theory of **Romanticism**: an artistic, literary, musical, and intellectual movement from the mid-18th century that continues to shape our understanding of **love** today. Romanticism sees sex as a central symbol of love, and its main idea is to create a unique proposition of a lifelong, passionate love marriage. The sub-chapter called **Falling in love** which includes all the keywords mentioned in the written part of the thesis, such as: **love, relationship, commitment, monogamy, pleasure, desire, need, fulfillment, cheating, arousal, betrayal, lying, truth, jealousy, compersion, non-monogamous approach, and then potentially polyamory.**

The idea of romantic love is followed by one of the main chapters – the way the norm dominates our relationships. A faith similar to the religion we practise in our lives, called **Monogamy**. The chapter presents factual research on found materials on monogamy, mainly from the books “*Monogamy*” by A. Phillips, “*Undoing Monogamy*” by Angela Willey, “*Does Monogamy Work?*” by Luke Brunning and also from the YouTube channel, mainly from experts such as Esther Perel, Alain De Botton and discussions on monogamy and relationships between other experts.

Monogamy is introduced by the body of **Desire**, which is the contradictory source that makes us imagine and want more and therefore look for another intimate fulfillment outside the monogamous bond – in the embrace of another person. Desire and **sexual drive** are closely linked to **creativity**, which effectively captures Denisa's approach to non-monogamous art practice. The mediums she uses, such as **painting, performance, video, textiles**,..., are not jealous of each other, therefore Denisa can develop all of them, just as the painting style is varied – she is not faithful to only one, but experiments and looks for

other options or solutions. Another major theme related to monogamy, and probably its antagonist, is **Infidelity**. The sub-chapters talk about **Sexuality** as an inner fire and **Lust** as a powerful force that drives us forward to what we crave. Desire can bring much **pleasure**, but at the same time it can be a dangerous key to the gateway of infidelity, which is the major theme in the written part, using material from Esther Perel, which focuses specifically on redefining infidelity and our understanding of it.

The author created a questionnaire to ask people in the local area about their opinions on **infidelity, love, monogamy and truth**.

Truth is understood as the meaning of life, the base from which we were created and on which we rely on, something that shines throughout everything. This sub-chapter presents a different view, mainly from two books: 1) *“The Four Agreement”*, a practical guide to personal freedom written by Don Miguel Ruiz with Janet Mills, and 2) *“The Fifth Agreement”*, by Don Jose Ruiz, Don Miguel Ruiz and Janet Mills. Lies, the opposite of truth, survive only because of people who put them into practice. Denisa introduces the complexity of capturing what monogamy is through a dialog between her and authors like Adam Phillip, Esther Perel, Allain de Botton and others.

The third chapter titled **Polyamory** could be seen as a possible next step for those who are dissatisfied by the monogamous approach and may have never known the other options besides monogamy. Polyamory, as one of the possible ways to be intimate with more than one person, is not widely practiced because it confronts **jealousy**: one of the most complex emotions, a unique composition of envy, anger, and righteous indignation. It introduces the reader to this topic and its deeper understanding through articles from Luke Brunning and the book *“Virtuous Emotions”* by Kristján Kristjánsson, (chapter Jealousy). **Compersion**, as some people call the opposite of jealousy, is a possible solution to how society could get rid of jealousy and possibly be open to other forms of relationships. Compersion is a way of being where one **feels pleasure and joy** when their partner flourishes and especially feels romantic or sexual pleasure with other people.

The **conclusion** does not favour any approach. It is rather a speculation on whether it is even possible anymore to think that only one mainstream attitude to love should be practiced, applied to society, supported by legislation, religion, education, and the way we perceive the world among us. The author of the research suggests that everyone should decide for themselves what they like, based on personal preferences and choices, while maintaining an open mind and a non-judgmental attitude.

The practical part wonders if people could relate to each other in the way brush strokes relate on the surface of a canvas; fluid, independent, equal, non-judgmental, blending into each other without being jealous, just like we are at the beginning of a relationship when we fall in love. But who knows what colors think...

Kokkuvõte
Denisa Štefanigová

Näita mulle Lilla, kui õrn sa võid olla?
(Armastuse, kire, truudusetuse ja tõe varjundid)

*Lama mu pintsli tõmmete peal.
Isegi, kui ma valetan, siis nauding on tõene.
Delikaatne vale, meeldiv tõde.*

Magistritöö tegeleb enamasti inimeste vaheliste suhetega ning nende kompleksusega. Seda on uuritud läbi värvide ja maalide. Denisa Štefanigová vastuste otsingud armastuse ja suhete valdkonnas on suunanud tema tähelepanu inimeste seksuaalsuselt mitte-inimeste omale; peamiselt värvi ja pintsli tõmmete valda. Oma lõputöös ta kujutab ette/kujutleb, kuidas värvid omavahel armuvad, on suhtes, kogevad abielurikkumist ning mõtisklevad, kuidas kadedus, afäär, lahutus/lahku minemine võib mõjutada nende varjundeid/ varjusid, eredust ja volüümi.

Tekst algab sissejuhatusega **Romantismi** teooriasse- kunstiline, kirjanduslik, muusikaline ja intellektuaalne liikumine, mis sai alguse 18.sajandi keskpaigas ning on vorminud meie arusaama **armastusest** tänapäeval. Romantismi vaatepunktist on seks armastuse keskne sümbol ning selle põhiline idee on on tekitada erilise eluaegse ja kirgliku pakkumise armastusabielule. Alapeatükk **Armumine**, sisaldab kõiki märksõnu, mis said/on mainitud magistritöö kirjalikus osas. Näiteks: **armastus, suhe, pühendumus, monogaamia, nauding, iha, teostatuse vajadus, petmine, , erutatus, reetmine, valetamine, tõde, kadedus, kompertsioon, mitte-monogaamne lähenemine ning potentsiaalne polüaamorlus.**

Romantilise armastuse ideele järgneb põhiline/ põhipeatükk- (nimelt) kuidas normid domineerivad meie suhteid. Saatus, mis on sarnane religioonile, mida me igapäevaselt kasutame- selle nimi on **monogaamsus**. Peatükis esitatakse faktuaalset uurimust monogaamia kohta leitud materjalide osas, põhiliselt A. Phillips'i "*Monogamy*", Angela Willey "*Undoing Monogamy*", Luke Phillips'i "*Does Monogamy Work?*" raamatutest kui ka Esther Perel, Alain De Botton'i Youtube'i kanalitest ning monogaamia ja suhete teemalistest diskussioonidest teiste ekspertidega.

Monogaamiat tutvustatakse iha kehastuse kaudu- kui vastuoluline allikas, mis paneb meid arvama ning rohkem tahtma, seega ka otsides uut intiimset täitmine väljaspool monogaamset sidet- s.t. teise inimese embuses. Iha ja **sugutung** on tihedalt seotud loomingulisusega, mis omakorda jäädvustavad hästi Denisa lähenemise mitte-monogaamse kunstipraktika suhtes. Meediumid, mida ta kasutab, näiteks: **maal, performance, video, tekstiilid**...ei ole teineteise peale kadedad seega saab Denisa arendada neid nii nagu varieerub maalimis stiil. Ta ei ole ustav ainult ühele vaid eksperimenteerib ja otsib teisi variante või lahendusi. Veel üks suur teema, mis on seotud monogaamiaga ning tõenäoliselt selle

antagonistiga, on **truudusetus**. Alapeatükid räägivad seksuaalsusest ja sisemisest tulest, ihast kui võimsast väest, mis meid juhib elus edasi selleni, mida me ihkame. Läbi iha me saame tunda palju naudingut. Samal ajal see võib ka olla ohtlik võtme element truudusetuse vāravasse. See on seega järgneva suurem teema magistritöö kirjalikus osas, kasutades Esther Pereli materjali/ kirjutisi, mis spetsiifiliselt keskenduvad truudusetuse redefiineerimisel/ uuesti defiineerimisel ja meie arusaamal sellest.

Lābi küsimustiku, mida autor lōi, et küsitleda kohalike inimeste arvamust truudusetuse, armastuse, monogaamia ja tōe kohta.

Tōde mõistetakse elu mõttena- see oli meie loomise aluseks ning midagi, millele me toetume, miski, mis kumab lābi kōige. Alapeatükis esineb kaks erinevat vaatepunkti, mis on vōetud: 1) “*The Four Agreements*”- praktiline juhend personaalse vabaduse jaoks, mis on sarnane “*The Fifth Agreement*” raamatule, mille mōlema autoriks oli Don Miguel Ruiz (koos Janet Mills’iga). Lisaks oli teine rikastatud Don Jose Ruizi poolt. Valed, mis on vastupidised tōele, eksisteerivad vaid tānu inimestele, kes ikka harrastavad neid. Denisa seletab monogaamsuse olemuse jāādvustamise keerulisusest lābi dialoogi enda ja autorte Adam Phillips’i, Esther Perel Allain de Botton jt.

Polūgaamia ehk kolmandat peatükki vōib vaadelda kui järgnev samm neile, kes ei ole rahul monogaamsuse lāhenemisega ning ei pruugi olla teadlikud muudest vōimalustest peale monogaamia. Polūgaamia, kui one vōimalikest viisidest, kuidas olla intiimne rohkem kui ūhe isikuga, ei ole miski, mida praktiseeritakse massides. Seda kūll peamiselt/ pinnapealset, kuna see vastandub kadedusele, ūks kompleksetest emotsioonidest- iseārane kooskōla kahetsemisest, kurjusest ja ōiglasest nōrdimusest. See tutvustab lugeja teemaga ning annab talle sūgavama mōistmise lābi Luke Brunningu artiklite ning Kristjān Kristjānssoni “*Virtuous Emotions*” (kadeduse peatūkis). Viis, kuidas oleks vōimalik lahti saada kadedusest ning vōimaluse korral olla avatud teiste suhete vormidele, on miski, mida inimesed nimetavad kadeduse vastandiks ehk **Kompersiooniks**. See on olemise viis, kus ūks partneritest tunneb mōnu teise partneri mōnust ja rōõmust siis, kui teine partner “ōitseb” vōi tinned romantilist, seksuaalset mōnu teiste inimestega.

Kāesoleva uurimuse kokkuvōtlik järeldus ei anna konkreetseid vastuseid ega eelistat ūht konkreetset lāhenemisviisi teisele, vaid pigem spekulērib teemal, kas on ūldse vōimalik praktiseerida ūht suhtumist armastusse, mida toetaks nii ūhiskond, seadusandlus, religioon, koolisūsteem ja ūldine maailmataju. Uurimuse autor pakub vālja lahenduse, et igaūks peaks ise otsustama, mis talle meeldib, toetudes isiklikele eelistustele ja valikutele, sāilitades avatud meelt ja hinnangutest vaba hoiakut.

Magistritōō praktiline osa mōtiskles, kas inimesed suudavad teineteisega suhestuda nagu pintslitōmbed seda teevad pindade peal; voolavad, iseseisvad, vōrdsed, hinnanguvabad, ōksteise sisse sulandudes ilma kadeduseta, just nagu me oleme suhte alguses, kui armuse. Aga kes teab, mida vārvid mōtleavad...

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