
The Computer as a Tool for Love – A Cultural History of Technology

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Introduction

The Finnish Information Processing Association, FIPA, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2003. *IT-Viikko* (IT-week), a professional newspaper, published a number of memoirs by Finnish computer pioneers to mark this event and in honour of the past decades of achievement. Arno Soisalo, one of the authors who had a long IT career in the Post-Savings Bank of Finland, described the variety and requirements of computer work in the bank. Finland's first digital computer was introduced there in 1958. Soisalo's text was entitled 'ENSI-rakkaus', FIRST-love (*IT Viikko* 23.10.2003).

While reading the text my attention was particularly drawn to the heading, due to its specific emotional reference. During my studies of the cultural history of computing (see e.g. Suominen 2000; 2003a), I had mainly found mentions of love and computers in texts produced by female writers, or in texts focused on female characters. This text written by a male computer pioneer thus caught my attention, and the aim of this chapter is to locate *technological romances*, stories of computer love in the cultural history of (Finnish) computing. Is the title of Soisalo's text only an exception – or is it a sign of a more general alliance between information technology and love? Could it be an indicator of how the romantic relationship between a computer and a man or a woman is represented in the popular media and biographical texts?

The empirical base of this article is a qualitative content analysis of Finnish popular magazine articles from the 1950s to the 1960s and some films, film reviews and other articles related to computing from the 1930s to the 1970s. I have also utilized some technobiographies, which are autobiographical writings in the form of personal computer memoirs (Kennedy 2003), collected in Finland in the late 1990s.

This chapter is divided into seven sections, starting with a literary review of cultural and sociological studies of (technological) love, con-

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tinuing to content analysis of the primary sources and the presentation of four specific themes: (1) hidden love and emotionless computer, (2) the computer as a seductress, (3) caring love, and (4) nostalgic (teenage) heartthrob. As a conclusion, I discuss the role of love within technological domestication as well as in narration processes.

Falling in love – review of some earlier studies

Soisalo's title refers to the nickname of the IBM 650 installation in the Post-Savings Bank, Ensi (or ENSI), which underlines the fact that the machine was understood to be the first computer in Finland.¹ Ensi was also a rare name, typically given to first-born girls (Lempiäinen 1989). Love, which refers to 'an intense emotion of affection, warmth, fondness, and regard towards a person or thing' (*MOT Collins English Dictionary 2.0*) is most likely one of the common words which can be preceded by the adjective 'first'. The connection between these two words is thus obvious when the intention is to galvanize the reader.

However, the title is used quite boldly. The word 'love' brings a very strong emotional tune to the whole text and to the technological context. It reveals that the introduction of the computer and its usage not only meant rational transfer from one technique to another. It was not only an *innovation junction* (Schwarz Cowan 1987) or a matter of choice, where economic efficiency or the need for progress urged the change in technological environments and work practices. For this writer, the introduction of computing technology and its first use appears to have been a very moving experience, which has left its marks on the person's character. The experience was a kick-start for a relationship which was to last for decades, and on this basis the writer, Arno Soisalo, recalls his technical first love with yearning 45 years later. The first encounter or first love has led to a successful long-lasting association.

Although human love affairs (and representations of them) with computers have been analyzed or at least touched upon in several sociological, cultural and psychological studies of technology, particularly from a user personality perspective (see e.g. Corneliussen 2005; 2007; Turkle 1984), it would also be fruitful to look at studies or definitions of love in general.

These studies, however, typically interpret love as an emotion related only to human-to-human or human-to-God relations.

Love and first love in particular are very strong expressions. According to Ronald Barthes (2000, 74–75), the person in love is in hypnosis and ‘enchanted by an image’, and love ‘electrifies’, ‘changes’ and ‘turns over’ the person. In this particular case the computer, or ‘electric brain’, has enchanted and electrified its user. Before the appearance of this technology there was emptiness; primitive punch card technologies or mechanical calculators were not able to arouse strong emotions. In spite of its emotional freshness, scholars refer to the event of falling in love for the first time as some sort of learned experience, based on various sources and effects of media culture (Paasonen 2004, 23; Soikkeli 1998, 62, 258). A person who experiences her/his first love is experiencing something she/he had heard of or seen previously, and might include her/his own experience later in new romance stories.

It is typical for first love to be contemplated in retrospect as an example of a starting point of some development. The reminiscent has passed on from first love’s ‘clean phase’ and socialised. In Arno Soisalo’s case, he has become a part of a new technological environment and culture. At the same time, he still casts his gaze back to where it all began. Sociologist Kaarina Määttä explains that the birth of love, also compared to enchantment and assimilation, will be followed by institutionalisation and habituation of the love affair, despite the fact that (falling in) love as a process is individual. The relationship is transformed, at least partially, into safe practices and routines (Määttä 1999, 37; see also Alberoni 1993, 16).

Ungovernability, discontinuity and the specific nature of falling in love link quite well to the changes in information technology, often described as a revolution. Francisco Alberoni (1993) defines falling in love as the birth of a mass movement between two persons. Alberoni seeks parallels for falling in love even in the French and Russian revolutions. For Alberoni, to fall in love is ‘the simplest form of mass movement’, even though revolution is not a sum of many incidents of falling in love. One can thus argue that the individual cases of falling in love with a computer can be connected to the computer revolution and mass movement, which was already described as a new industrial revolution in the 1940s (Suominen 2003a).

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The emotional charge of the title 'FIRST-love' is not, however, maintained strongly throughout the entire text by Arno Soisalo, except for a couple of references to the computer's disciplined personality. How can one explain Soisalo's reference to love in a wider context, immediately followed by descriptions of specific computing work? In what kind of situations is the highly emotional relationship between men / women and machine approved or disapproved? How has this machine romance evolved and how has it been gendered during the period from the 1950s to the 2000s?

Love in disguise

It is not extraordinary that strong emotions are connected to computers. This can be explained by our social and emotional nature. Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass (1996) have noted that we regard media technology objects, such as radio, television and computers as parts of the social sphere. We can talk to those artefacts, give them personal characterizations, curse them, or even touch them gently – or aggressively. We seek similarities between humans and machines. Inanimate machines are a part of the social environment in much the same way as plants and animals are. Comparing it to other machines, the computer is even special in this sense, due to its partly 'human nature': a computer 'reasons', 'calculates', 'observes like humans' and controls other machines as some sort of meta-machine. In science fiction movies, novels and comic strips in particular, computers, or 'electronic brains', have been described as human-like figures since the 1940s. Making the technology social or emotional has been the key to introducing and popularising it (Suominen 2003a; 2003b; Suominen & Parikka 2010).

In addition, the designers of new technology have intentionally tried to add human features to computers and software solutions. During recent decades this has involved not only machine reasoning but also capabilities to show emotions, as a truly intelligent machine cannot be emotionless. *Affective computing* means hardware and software solutions which create illusory feelings of emotional response (Kangas 2004; Picard 1997; see also Norman 2005).

Computers and information technology received variable attention in Finland and other countries from the 1940s onwards (Aspray & Beaver 1986; Cortada 1993; 2001). Mentions of computer love seem to be marginal, however, or even an *anomaly*, which as such suits well to the nature of falling in love. Francesco Alberoni (1993, e.g. 9–11) suggests that falling in love belongs to ‘the area of the unconventional’. Its intensity is deviant when comparing it to other behaviour. This unconventionality has not restrained the flood of romance stories.

My primary material, which includes hundreds of press clippings and comic strips from the 1930s to the 1970s, consists of only about twenty direct or indirect descriptions of romantic affairs between a human and a computer or robot. One explanation for the rarity of human-computer romances is that the lack of emotions was an advantage to both machines and users. The ideal machine did not have emotions or other human weaknesses: ‘They don’t go on strike, get sick, flirt, or go to have a cigarette’, testified an employee from an elevator company in 1956 according to *Valitut Palat* (9/1956, 71, Finnish Reader’s Digest), when he compared the advantages of automatic elevators over human lift operators. This discourse was related to (research of) traditions which emphasised emotional control in measuring quality of work and organisation (Ilmonen 1999, 303–304).

The intellectuality, calculation skills and indefatigability of the ‘electronic brain’ were qualities which repelled emotions such as love. The computer was a disciplinary machine, an instrument for maximizing employees’ productivity. The popular media, like the scientific perspective on information processing, generally had a top-down perspective from the 1940s to the early 1970s. Information processing technologies were the makers of the future, which did not appear at the personal or intimate level. Professionals (typically male) connected to science, technology or business could not show emotions such as enthusiasm, love or fear towards new information technology, at least not publicly, in Finland. Strong emotions were not suitable for a professional and when the computer was an ‘electronic brain’ or a ‘giant brain’, how could it be lovable? On the other hand, early computers received personal nicknames, and this meant that they were made as individual characters and because of this they were probably lovable figures as well (Suominen 2003a; Suominen & Parikka 2010).

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Image 1. Cover of the early Finnish robot novel *Atorox Venuksessa* (*Atorox in Venus*, 1947), which presented a robot in a seducing role.



Furthermore for the popular media, computers and robots were not clearly separable in the 1950s. A computer could itself be referred to as a robot, even as a 'love robot', as in a popular article dealing with early computer-aided matchmaking (*Apu* 28/1957, 36–37). Robots figuring in popular exhibitions or science fiction novels and movies were equipped with stereotypical gender features, such as male drinking habits, yearning for a female partner, chest hair (electric wires), and skirt, fear of mice, cleaning or nagging. Thus, a popular and fictional robot was a kind of 'personal computer' of the 1950s. It was represented as resembling a human, it had personal characteristics, and individuals often used it. Therefore, a robot might have been an object or subject of romantic affairs. Still, a famous fictional robot from the *Forbidden Planet* movie (1956), Robby, was described in the *Apu* magazine as doing 'everything else but not confessions of love' (*Apu* 31/1955, 36). At least it waltzed with actress Anne Francis in a photo published in the magazine.

Rationing of emotions and love were like scripted in computing technology and its popular representations. This, however, did not inhibit episodic bursts of passion. Extreme emotions, such as rage and lust represented in popular media, could be examples of possible counter-strategies and opposition towards dominant computing discourses. Love and romance on their part were more conservative themes. Love had – and still has – standardised norms in popular discourses. In the specific contexts, there could have been more intimate relationships between humans and machines.

The computer as a seductress

Experienced Hollywood couple Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn starred in the popular romantic comedy *Desk Set* in 1957. The movie's Finnish premiere was about six months before the introduction of the first IBM 650 computer in the Post-Savings Bank. The ways of representing computing in the movie's reviews and the news concerning the real computer, Ensi, were surprisingly similar (Suominen 2000). Due to its love theme and its international popularity, *Desk Set* is a fruitful example of an examination of computer love, not only bearing in mind its role in reflecting the automation discourse in the 1950s (on historical context of *Desk Set*, see Bourne & Hahn 2003, prologue; Friedman 2005; Malone 2002, 20–21; Suominen 2000).

Desk Set can even be seen as a triangle drama, where technician Richard Sumner (Spencer Tracy) has to choose between supercomputer Emerac (aka Miss Emmy) and full-blooded red-head Bunny Watson (Katherine Hepburn). Even though the supercomputer has a nickname, some special features and is treated like a child genius or a pet, Emmy does not much resemble a human being. Sumner chooses Watson, but does not totally forget Miss Emmy. In fact, Sumner uses Emmy and 'her' problems as an excuse to beat off his rival suitor. According to Sumner, Emmy needs Watson's attention at about the same time as another man is about to ask for Watson's hand.

Bunny Watson has to compete against a computer to keep her professional honour and her job. At the same time, she is the computer's rival in catching the attention of a man. The latter theme has been used variably since its introduction; for example, the term 'computer widow' has been

widely used since the 1980s when describing such situations. The computer has typically taken the man away from his female partner. The same theme was developed in early hacker movies in the 1980s and 1990s, which in the end testifies that (male) computer enthusiasts still need other people, friends and loved ones (Sihvonen 2004, 234). Hilde Corneliussen (2005, 234) points out that men's relationship to technology is often referred to as intimacy and love in psychological and sociological studies, and this *pleasure* has been identified as a barrier for women. In order to 'preserve' their femininity, girls and women reject intimacy with the computer.

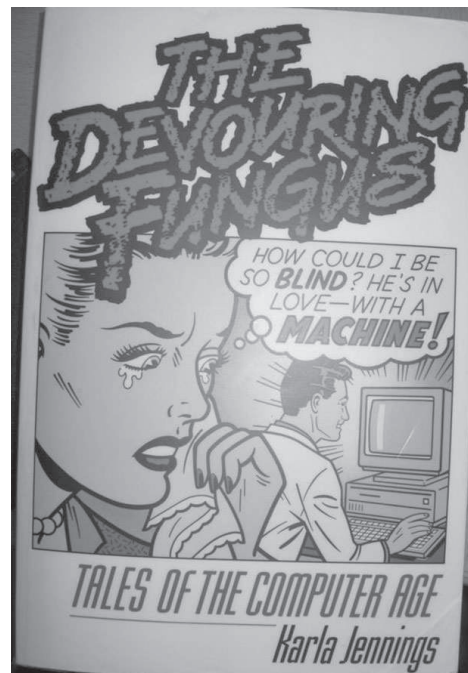
Computers or robots not only enchanted men represented in popular media. Although Susanna Paasonen has noticed that robots / androids / male cyborgs are rarely the object of romance, there are few exceptions where a male robot is the object or an active subject in such romances. In 1935, the Finnish magazine *Seura* ('Company'), aimed at a family readership like the magazine *Apu* ('Help'), already introduced a mechanical man – the 'Alpha', built by a Professor Harry May from London, England. In the popular article, Alpha was presented as the ideal future soldier that had 'human features in his face' and a 'fine permanent in his metallic hair'. This robot was able to speak and answer questions. It preferred 'obviously, blond women', and stared shamelessly at them (*Seura* 20/1935, 20.). In addition, Aarne Haapakoski's (alias Outsider) pulp-science fiction novels featured a more or less romantic robot figure in the late 1940s. Atorox-robot was reprogrammable with brain cassettes, and one of the cassettes consisted of the personality of a famous Finnish Casanova figure, Ruben Auervaara (who was arrested in the 1940s). The cassette turned the robot into a salon smoothie (Suominen 2003a.).

In 1965, *Apu* magazine published Sirkka Selja's short story featuring a male charmer robot (*Apu* 7/1965, 58–59). The female key character of the story visits an exhibition of 'young modernists' with her boyfriend at the Helsinki Kunsthalle. There is a gadget sculpture, constructed with tin plates and wires, which starts to follow the woman. Eventually, a 'man-sized robot', named Esko (like the early Finnish computer in the 1950s) comes off from the sculpture, bows gently to the woman and asks: 'Can I escort you to your home?'. The woman agrees because her boyfriend has disappeared somewhere. Having arrived home and engaged in a techno-

scientific discussion, the two agree that Esko will call her again the following day. In spite of the promise, he does not call, and it is revealed that the robot, which ought to be only intelligent and non-emotional, has disappeared to chase a pretty blonde, who had 'high heels, a mincing walk and a big white fur collar'. The woman says: 'Of course, I said. This had to happen, because it was a very well built robot.'

The article is an example of an earlier popular vision, where the illusion of artificial emotion is based on a both corporeal and mental connection between a woman and a machine. In addition, a robot's capacity for communication is essential to its human nature. The moody behaviour of the robot Esko proves its humanity in the end. However, the question remains of whether Esko is truly unpredictable, or only programmed to seek for an ideal partner based on external measurements.

Image 2. The term 'computer widow' was introduced during the 1980s at the latest. Here the computer widow theme is represented on the cover of Karla Jennings' book *The Devouring Fungus* (1990).



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Regardless of the gendered variations, love and romance are used for underlining the difference between human and non-human. There is typically a moral lesson to be learned from the stories in the popular media: in the end, machines do not replace humans. Obsession with machines is freakish, sick and condemnable; the questions raised are about the orientation of masculine work, or the making of a 'mechanical bride', or feminine objects of seductive acts. The relationship between humans and machines does not fit in with the hetero-normative ideal, where a man and a woman are seen as complementary halves and where the relationship is anchored to institutions, such as dates, engagement, and marriage (Paasonen 2004, 23, 26). The relationship between a human and a machine is represented as manic and addictive.

The popular media representations described above are fantasies which criticized other fantasies, extravagant visions of technological possibilities. Love, seduction and lust have their own repetitive place in popular discourses concerning computing technology. In recent decades in particular, there have been descriptions which go even further and transform technological eroticism into perverse relations (Eerikäinen 2004; Parikka 2004; Springer 1996; Strengell 2004).

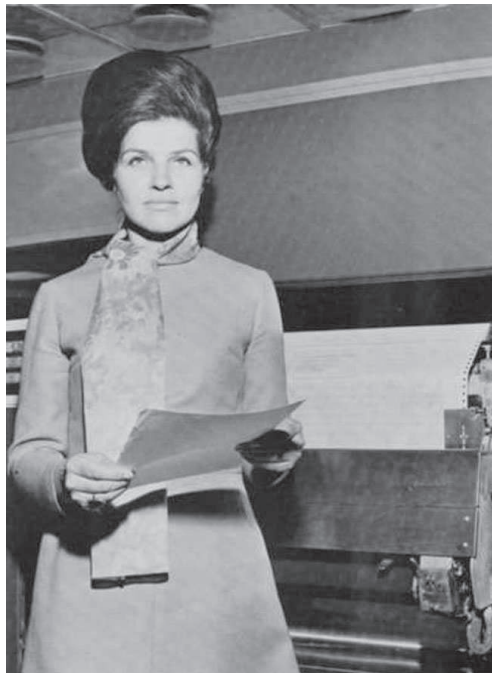
Platonic love, side by side

Finnish researchers of Indian, Arabic and Persian cultures, Virpi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (2005, 23), explain in their book *Rakkauden Atlas (Atlas of Love)* that love can be a little sick when it is connected to strong passions, and it seems that loyalty or devotion always balances love.² We can also find some descriptions of such symmetrical human-computer relations when dealing with relationships between the nurturer and the cherished. Francesco Alberoni (1993, 16) points out that falling in love is not only a personal need or whim; it is 'an orderly power, which creates institutions'.

Tuulikki Alkio presented some computer experts and professionals in the Finnish IBM customer publication, *IBM Katsaus (IBM Review)* in 1969 (2/1969, 45–47). She wrote about Mrs. Kuorinka and Ms. Laakso, whose relationship with the computers they used was peculiar:

During the early years, fear of the computer's possible human [!] errors made me lose sleep over this matter, but we soon got to know each other. First love never gets rusty [Finnish phrase], probably it does not in the Computer Age either, and Ms. Laakso recalls almost tenderly the first computer, which remembered 10 000 instructions and was more controllable than the current computer installations (...) 'You can call Mrs. Kuorinka anytime', reads a sign at the Folk-Pension Institute's computer centre. You can find her at the side of the computer at any time during the day or night – her relationship with the computer is 'warm' and the job exciting.

Image 3. Mrs. Kuorinka posing beside the computer.
in the *IBM Katsaus* article.



Both of these female computer experts are represented as very committed to their work. Particularly intimacy, touch, devotion and commitment are themes which are related to definitions of love. This love is not especially romantic (or sexual) but it is also friendly and non-selfish.

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Few articles published in the late 1960s, such as Alkio's text, reveal the change which was taking place in the computing branch. Women had earlier worked mainly in routine punch card jobs as secretaries or computer operators, but only very few of them had been represented in the popular media or in professional journals. The female professional role started to become more visible during the late 1960s and onwards, more ordinary computer use situations were presented publicly as they began to have longer traditions. One reason for introducing female experts and workers was to present the change in working life and also to give modern career examples suitable for both sexes (see e.g. *Valitut Palat* 8/1961, 57).

Nevertheless the female role was often to be an object of male desire and admiration, because popular media representations typically emphasized women's accuracy, trustworthiness and their pretty appearance.³ One could even claim that the pretty female worker provided a substitute male user interface to computers. Women were the cushioning middle piece, or the binary equivalent compared to the 'dehumanized' computer world. A woman also represented some sort of continuity during the computer revolution, as a reporter in a Finnish news flash put it in the early 1960s: 'There is a new age in the statistical office as well, and shelved abacuses are presented only to pressmen and news cameramen. Work is very technical nowadays, but still, women have maintained their cute supremacy in the organization.'

As in the earlier examples, the representations and narratives were gendered, but there were also descriptions of devotional male workers who love their computer without obsession and had fallen in 'love at first sight' (*Valitut Palat* 8/1961, 57). Compared to female examples, these emphasize the leadership position of the key figure, as well as the importance of developing one's own work and career. Although meeting the computer could have been 'love at first sight', the male examples do not concentrate on reminiscence. However, these examples are comparable to some newer technobiographies or personal 'computing histories', where users describe their own relationship with computers.

Teenage heartthrob

Teemu (1974) portrayed his earlier devotion to information technology in his writing, saying in 1999: 'I don't know if I have ever been as proud as I was then [in the 1980s], after a long time and many attempts I managed to get a sprite to obey joystick control. I could even, during these nostalgic recollections, compare it to a first kiss, but I suppose it is better not to mix that kind of issues' (Cit. Uotinen 2003, 241.).

According to Johanna Uotinen (2005), who has studied Teemu's and the technobiographies of other writers, computer related stories by young males consist of at least three different elements: opinions, descriptions of technical skills as well as emotional expressions. The opinions refer to general information of societal development or to conceptions of quality of certain machines, software or technical practices. Descriptions of technical skills are related to the writers' own user experiences of their learning process. In addition to these, there are also descriptions of personal positive or negative emotional states and feelings. According to Uotinen, this emotional imagery consists mostly of reminiscences. The emotions are typically connected to the writers' boyhoods in the 1980s, and the descriptions of emotions are rarer when approaching the present time. The emotional descriptions are related to, among other things, the joy of receiving a new and long desired computer, or success in programming or installing software or hardware components. The writers also tell about shame and disappointment, but particularly the relation with the early period of computer usage is an essential element. Teemu, for instance, becomes very enthusiastic in his own reminiscence, but he tries to make a difference between human (first kiss) and human-computer excitement (programming). In doing this, Teemu is emphasizing his own normality, his ability to distinguish between humans and technology.

Ethnologist Pirjo Korkiakangas (1999) says that nostalgia refers to memories that are coloured by melancholic yearning or pleasure of enjoying the past. Remembering and writing down computer memories seems to be a pleasure for Teemu, although one cannot know from the citation whether the yearning is also plangent. Teemu is also moving towards *reflective nostalgization*, where reminiscence means that he has to

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question his own positive memories. At the same time, one can see Teemu's story as a description of socialization in information technology and the domestication of emotional relationship with the machine.

Susanna Sallinen (2004) has argued that people check from time to time how they have developed over the years. By using reminiscence, she/he is able to harmonize segments of her/his life story to the entity, which progresses naturally. This is done with computer-related autobiographies, for example. Some of these stories are clearly technological romances connected to first experiences with computers, certain turning points, as well as to successes and disappointments. However, it appears that particularly in the writings of male authors, such as the newspaper and magazine articles related to male experts, there is a quite rapid shift from romance to descriptions of technical details, progress and own expertise. The changes happening to the author or his/her object are an essential element here.

For the male authors, the first experience with computers is typically desirable and expected, and a natural part of their personal history. This is not often the case with female writers. Initially they typically regarded computers with suspicion and the possible love of computers emerged only slowly. It was not love at first sight, but rather resembled the taming of the shrew (which brings us to the question of who is the shrew and who is the tamer?).

Conclusion: Loved and domesticated?

In 1995, the Finnish Literacy Society and the Educational Association for Clerical Employees organized a writing contest with the title 'Tietokone – isäntä vai renki?' (Computer – Master or Servant?). The material was archived for researchers to study. Potential writers were asked several questions, for example: 'How did you regard your new tool? Did you fall in love with it immediately or did some fears arise? Has your relationship with a computer changed since then? What did you expect from the machine? Alternatively, has it made your work easier, more frustrating, or physically and mentally grinding?'

The participants who submitted work in the contest were mainly female. A repetitive theme can be found in the stories, and this theme is how suspicion towards computers changed into excitement and heart-throb through daily use (mainly at work). The stories often had romantic titles such as 'On love to Mac', 'My love – PC', or 'Computer my beloved'. Writers also used nicknames such as 'Love and affection' and 'Computer mon amour'. They clearly touched upon the question of computer love as posed in the contest brochure. They experienced it as reasonable in terms of their own computer affairs.

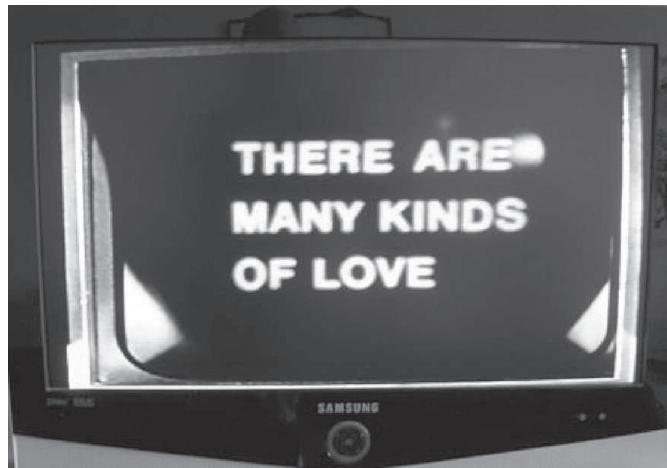
The folklorist Jyrki Pöysä (2003), who has studied these writings notices that 'the dictum [master or servant] which utilised a control metaphor suited very well as a pattern for structuring writers' personal experiences: the computer was experienced both as an uncontrolled and a controlled fact. (...) A more intimate way of speaking [in the instruction brochure] directs the contestant to a more personal and confessional way of writing'. Also, according to Pöysä, some writings are labelled with so-called *intimacy duality*, which is a playful way to describe the use of a machine as a social relationship between two counterparts. Those stories are, however, varying and personal, but some of them seem to be descriptions of intimate human-computer affairs, where there are moments of having a crush, love and power battles between the counterparts represented by the human side of the story. Even though some female users wish to play down their fascination with computers (Corneliussen 2005, 238), this power-battling narrative seemed to be suitable for describing computer-related emotions.⁴

Nevertheless, the cultural appropriation of technology is not only a linear process, where 'feminine' taming (such as household applications, aestheticism, user friendliness, relationship analysis, and name giving) follows after a 'sublime masculine shock' (introduction of a new, revolutionary grand technology) (Nye 1994). Equally, the introduction of new technology can always be condensed as a romance, where euphoria of falling in love is followed by institutionalizing or habituation. Mika Pantzar (1996; 2000) writes that the domestication of technology is a process with many phases and variations. It is a process where natural resources become part of the material and immaterial culture of our everyday lives. According

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to Pantzar, we have learned and grown to be technological consumers during the last hundred years. During this process, we have learned to use machines – and they have learned to use us.

Image 4. Here is the answer from the Colossus supercomputer to doctor Forbin (its designer), Colossus tells Forbin that he has an emotional need (for women). *Colossus – The Forbin Project* movie (1970).



In the context of this chapter, the domestication of technology is partly a societal project, where machine love and romantic tales have clear places and situated forms: they act as tools in moral technological education. The issue is about a communal process, where people are not only taught to use technology, but also to learn, behave and act correctly with technological artefacts. When we try to ‘behave’ with machines, there are always emotions – and attempts to control them.

The domestication of computer technology is not only a human-human or human-computer social process. It has also happened as a construction of personal identity, as a kind of selfhood project where one negotiates with her/his own user relations as well as with general and dominant information technological discourses. Recollection is a part of

this personal identity project. The domestication of technology involves a set of trials, which do not necessarily lead to a certain result or proceed in a particular order (Lehtonen 2003). They can even result in technological denial or opposition, or hate instead of love – or typically as a relationship eluding either of these dichotomies.

Table 1. Four explicit romantic roles of the computer in popular media and autobiographies.

	Active role	Passive role
Present or future-oriented discourse	The computer as a seducer or seductress	The computer as cared for or owned
Retrospective discourse	The computer as tamed or domesticated	The computer as a (teenage) heartthrob

In this contribution I have sought to argue that when we ‘love a computer’, we commit ourselves at many levels what is technology’s role in our own life and social sphere? A loved computer is situated as a part of social reality, which is explained in a kind of retrospective love story or a cautionary description of the dangers involved in a desire that is too deep. Love requires a story which gives technological experiences both a general and a personal character. The technological romance not only tells about the relationship between people and technology. Through love, one can also learn about practices of how to be and act as a part of the technocultural sphere. These emotional stories deal with bonds to other people, work, and institutions, past, present and the future.

Notes

- ¹ This is controversial as the first Finnish mathematical computer, ESKO, was built in the period 1955–1960 (on ESKO, see Paju 2005; Paju 2008).

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- ² Psychologist John Lee distinguishes between romantic, friendly, playful, unselfish, practical and manic love (Hämeen-Anttila & Hämeen-Anttila 2005, 21; Määttä 1999, 38).
- ³ Women were represented either as part of a machine, its slave, or as seductresses in a technological environment as early as in descriptions of 19th century industry or in advertising in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Wosk 2001, 17–37).
- ⁴ Georg Simmel (2005, 214–215) compares love affairs to economic ownership or business, where the partner who loves less is more powerful or controllable.

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