



## The Museum of Dating

Online dating has only recently become a culturally and socially acceptable phenomenon, but the use of technology to match singles has a long history. In the 1960s, computerized dating systems appeared in the Anglo-American world, which worked through questionnaires and customized algorithms. The early stages of computer dating are shared between the USA and the UK. In the mainstream history of dating, the first instance of the use of computers to match singles dates back to 1965, with the invention of Operation Match by two students at Harvard. In a development very similar to that of Facebook, a service initially intended for students (then separated by gender in campus) was later extended to the general population.

But before Operation Match launched its first match-up program, a woman running a marriage bureau in London had come to the conclusion that computers were the future of dating. Joan Ball founded a computer dating service as an extension of her matchmaking business in Piccadilly Circus, London, in 1964. The movie «The Lady of Computer Dating», directed by curator Valentina Peri, allows visitors to follow the incredible story of this entrepreneur woman through an interview and archival material about the St James Computer Dating Service, later to become Com-Pat, and its main competitor, Dateline.

The aim of the exhibition "The Museum of Dating" is to place the contemporary phenomenon of online dating within a spectrum of older technologies, practices, narratives, cultural and media artifacts.

Curator Valentina Peri presents an ongoing timeline of the history of dating with a focus on England and the emergence of dating mediated by computerized technology in the 60's. It traces the path from the family-monitored courtship of the 50's ("calling"), to the subsequent boom of the personal ads in the press, from the development of marriage bureaus to the emergence of the first computer dating services of the 1960s, from the introductory videotapes of the 1970s to the bulletin board systems of the 1980s and it ends with the creation of the first online dating site in the mid 90s.

The timeline is enriched by cultural, social and political facts and processes, both official and niche, that have contributed to shape the dating phenomenon and the idea of singleness until today.

Part of the exhibition is also a selection of cultural artifacts and mass culture productions, board games, movies, sit-coms, television programmes, books and old technologies, that are put into perspective through this chronological reconstruction.

The work of artist Lordess Foudre resonates with the content and the topics of the exhibition. Her digital collages and drawings interrogate the technological infrastructure of normativity, the social derives of the misuse of social networks, and contribute to a growing body of conversations about transhumanism in the past, present and speculative futures.

According to Zoe Strimpel, who has extensively studied the way people used to seek love in Modern Britain, digital technology has completely changed the appurtenances and affordances of matchmaking via a third party. But the assumption of total rupture on a social level hides how digital matchmaking fits within a longer history of mediated dating, in which the methods of matching have constantly interacted with social dynamics both new and old.

"The Museum of Dating" makes it possible to shed new light on key categories of historical understanding such as gender, generation, class, race and social status, through analysis of the power dynamics at play in partner selection within the context of the couple, the family, and the community beyond. This historical study of dating can also help to better understand the ability of seemingly neutral technologies to extend the power and belief systems of particular groups, replicate heteronormative categories and create new social needs.

Valentina Peri, 2023

## JOAN BALL. THE LADY OF COMPUTER DATING

Film, 2023

Written, Directed and Produced by Valentina Peri  
DOP, Creative Direction and Edit by Jhenyfy Muller  
Starring Joan Ball  
Running Time: 35 min

[LINK](#)



an Escort Service and Computer Dating..

In 1964 Joan Ball, a woman running a marriage bureau in London, had come to the conclusion that computers were the future of dating and matchmaking. Joan Ball founded and run the first computer dating company in the UK: The St James Computer Dating Service, later to become COM-PAT.

Curator Valentina Peri contacted Joan Ball in 2021 and finally met in London in 2022, to access her archive and document the amazing stories she had to tell.

This film by Valentina Peri in collaboration with filmmaker Jhenyfy Muller will be premiered at the occasion of the exhibition.

Valentina Peri's curatorial research is supported by Fluxus Art Projects.

# From the hub of the world comes Com-pat

## Britain's first computer dating service

So you're interested in meeting that girl or guy in a thousand? You couldn't have come to a better place, because we can honestly claim to be the most advanced computer dating service in Britain, if not the world.

When we pioneered computer dating in Britain back in 1961, we already had over twelve months of research and development behind us. And today

even our closest imitators have not been able to develop a computer program as sophisticated as ours. We at Com-pat jealously guard this lead so that we can give you real value-for-money, by assuring you that the people we put you in touch with

are as right as possible. What's more they will be living close at hand; you yourself specify the farthest distance you would be prepared to travel.

Now you'll want to prove Com-pat for yourself. That's

just as simple as filling in the Com-pat Data Form and sending it back to us. All the remaining details it needs, like what your age or occupation, Com-pat can help you find the people who want to know you. People on your own wavelength. Remember, we're only in business to help people meet people they enjoy being with, and we think it's one of the nicest businesses to be in. You've only got to see the letters from our clients to believe that.

### Read what clients say about Com-pat

"I am glad to have found the courage to contact you. Having done the rounds of the personal columns and various agencies without success, I shall never forget that you came up with the perfect answer and restored my faith in the opposite sex. Long may you continue to thrive in your chosen work of spreading happiness as the best matchmakers in history." S. M., Penge.

"Regretfully I must now terminate my membership of your organisation as I am moving to another city and unable to transfer my membership to another Com-pat member. I am going to make sure he gives up his membership too!"

"What a pity your computer service was not in operation 15 years ago when I was younger. But I am grateful to have found it now." D.P., Bognor Regis, Wales.

"Can I say that having taken part in one run I can assure you I am immensely pleased with the results, having met several interesting people - one particularly interesting one."

"I would like to say that I could not be more pleased by the service given by you. It is truly excellent and worthwhile." W.P.C., Sheffield.

"You're marvellous. I have found my ideal partner in many ways. I want to have a go again." S.R., Walsall, Staffs.

"I am grateful to the team who are using a tricky, demanding machine with so much intelligence and understanding." E.G., London, N.W.3.

**They've said nice things about us on Radio and TV, too!**



Did you hear Joan on Jimmy Savile's Speakeasy radio programme or see her on the David Frost Show on T.V.? These are just two of the great programmes that have featured Com-pat.

### Coming soon



Com-pat are always on the lookout for new ideas to help their clients and we're now working on two real winners.

One is the Com-pat Compatibility Club. This is going to be an exciting club in London where you can arrange to meet your friends in truly sociable surroundings and where you'll always be assured of a real welcome. Whether you live in London or just pass through it now and again, you're going to find Com-pat's London Club a boon. Watch out for opening details.

Another great idea from Com-pat is the new Com-pat Accommodation Service. Using Com-pat's Computer Compatibility Research techniques, our new service will ensure the greatest degree of compatibility in new flat-mates and give information on accommodation available. Write for further details if you think this service could be of use to you.

### A message from Joan

I have always felt strongly about people wasting their lives and their time. So many wrong emotional attachments, so many wrong marriages.

The side effects on people are obvious. They can often lose their drive, their jobs, and their appeal to the opposite sex. And all this by having no means available to help them meet the right person.

In 1961 I sought for a method that could get people together in a natural and uncontrived way. It was at that time that a friend breathed the word COMPUTER at me. Match people by computer - the idea seemed preposterous!

On careful reflection, however, I realised what a marvellous thing it could be if it worked right way.

Tell me, do you agree with me that our initial intuitions were right. When I look back over the past ten years and think of the many thousands of lasting friendships brought about by Com-pat, I feel that it has all been worthwhile.

Now we're in the 1970's with the dynamic, successful and proved formula that I have long been searching for.

### Com-pat makes the headlines

"...I am amazed at the success of the adventure." Daily Telegraph magazine.

"Com-pat of Piccadilly, London, really is the last word in blind dates..." Daily Mirror.

"...thousands of people all over the country are eagerly trying out dating by data..." Leicester Chronicle.

"...a suitable procedure and better than the chance selection offered in random social activities." Data Processing.

"You can find your Raquel Welch through a computer date..." Channel Island's Sunday News.

"...a service which is fun for some, deadly serious for others." Bristol Evening Post.

"...hundreds of thousands of scientific blind dates have been arranged." TV Times.

"...helping lonely men and women to find each other." The Sun.



### Now it's up to you

We welcome new members, and that includes your friends. So if you have any friends you feel could be helped by Com-pat, don't hesitate - put them in touch at once.

For remember, we are not just a machine, and you are not just a number... Com-pat really cares.

### How it all works

As you'll appreciate, with thousands of Com-pat members, it would be an enormous task for anyone to go through the completed forms to find those people who are best suited to each other - indeed, before the days of computers it would have been virtually impossible. But that's not the whole story. As we said before, ten years of research have gone into the design of the questions in the Data Form, and of the computer program which takes each question in turn and uses the answers you give to build up the Compatibility Indices. Such a sophisticated program needs the most advanced computer technology.

If quite clearly, a powerful computer must be used for this - far more powerful than a computer dating firm could afford to own. So Com-pat uses time on a computer capable of 500,000 character extractions every second. It has 32,000 locations of storage in its 5 magnetic tape drives providing simultaneous transfer of information each at a rate of tens of thousands of characters per second; a bank of discs each of which has storage space for 8,000,000

characters; a lineprinter; a card reader and other peripherals available for expansion.

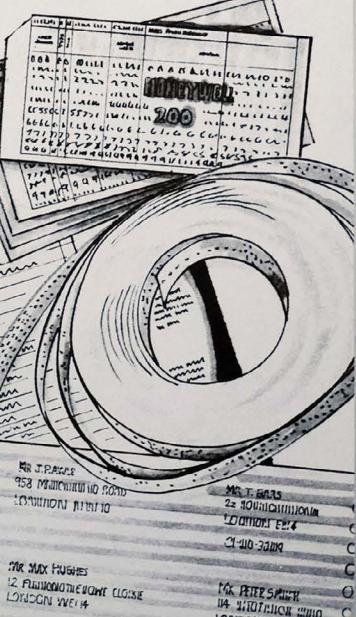
When you record your details on the Data Form, we allocate you a membership number and your form is then used to prepare a set of punched cards. These cards are then fed into the computer, which checks that you have completed the form correctly. If all is well, your details are stored along with those of all the other members on a magnetic tape. On each run, the tape is loaded onto the computer, which then compares the member with every member of the opposite sex on the file.

If either has a characteristic corresponding to a "Code 4" (reject entirely) given by the other, then the program stops comparing this pair of members. Otherwise it computes a compatibility index, according to the degree of preference.

When all the information

has been analysed, the

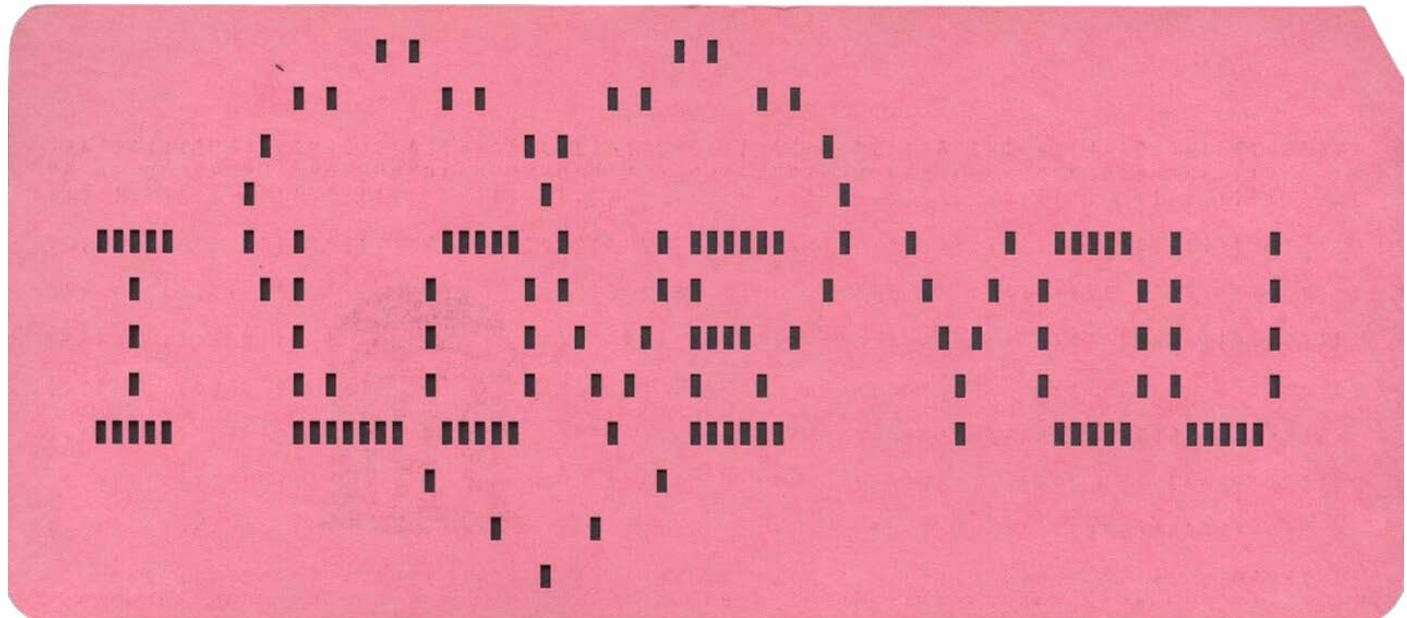
computer prints out a slip of paper for each member, listing up to four other members with whom he or she has the highest compatibility index. It also records the fact that the member chosen as the best member cannot be sent the same name twice. The computer is therefore the backbone of Com-pat, Britain's first confidential dating service that linked the speed and accuracy of a computer with the expertise of the personal "human" touch.



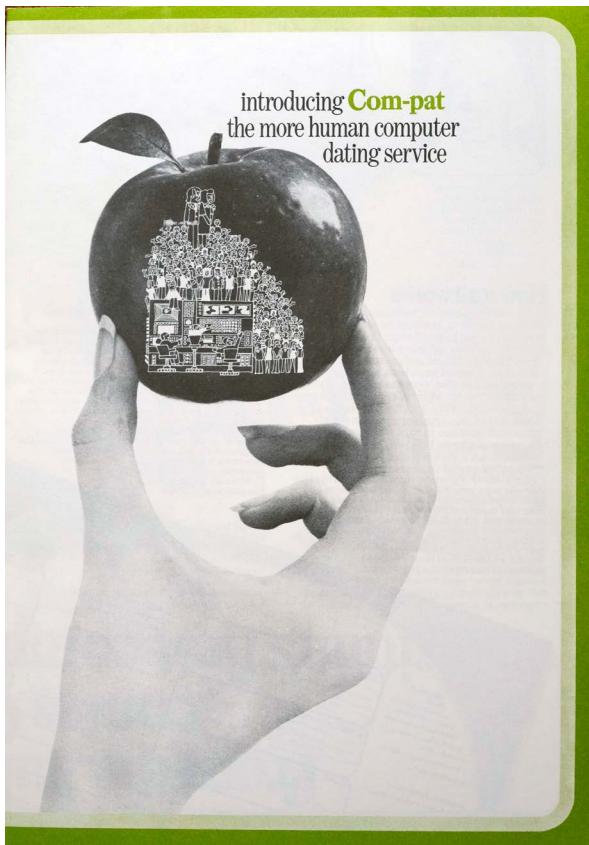
## TIMELINE

<p><b>1940s</b> Introducing a punch card with holes. This newly computer company to be one important innovations, company to the processing. Decades, it medium for aid reporting first through equipment and</p>	<p><b>1948 Post-war marriage crisis</b> Over 60000 divorces were signed in England in 1947. It will end by the mid-1950s.</p>	<p><b>1959 Happy Families Planning Services</b> Started by Jim Harvey and Phil Fraher as a class project at Stanford, they used a questionnaire and an IBM 650 to match 49 men and 49 women.</p>	<p><b>1964 St. James Computer Dating Service (later Com-Pat)</b>  Joan Ball started the first commercially run computer dating company in London, in the framework of her marriage bureau. The computer dating service worked by means of a questionnaire with multiple questions. A monthly computer run matched the clients, who received the name and telephone number of the 4 most compatible singles of the opposite sex.</p>	<p><b>1965 Operation Match</b>  It was started by Jeff Tarr and Vaughan Morill at Harvard. It used a paper questionnaire and an IBM 1401 to match single-sex college students. There was a \$3 fee for submitting a questionnaire and a list of 4 names and telephone numbers following the computer run.</p>	<p><b>1966 Dateline</b>  Dateline was founded by John Richard Patterson in Canada. London, it is the longest-lived computer dating service in the world, active until the 90's. It is the main competitor of Joan Ball's Com-Pat in the UK.</p>	<p><b>1967 Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</b> The eighth studio album by the English rock band the Beatles. Sgt. Pepper's release was a defining moment in pop culture, heralding the album era and the 1967 Summer of Love.</p>
<p><b>1939 The Marriage Bureau</b> Founded by Mary Oliver &amp; Heather Jenner, this matrimonial agency situated in Bond Street in London was dedicated to high class people.</p>	<p><b>1953 Playboy</b> First issue of the magazine addressed to the single man, founded and directed by Hugh Hefner in the USA.</p>	<p><b>1962 St. James Friendship &amp; Marriage Bureau &amp; Eros Escort Service</b>  Joan Ball founded her first Marriage Bureau in Piccadilly Circus, London. Clients would join the bureau in order to find a partner, usually so that they can get married to. Joan Ball also founded an Eros Escort Service for women and men who needed company to attend an event, or just for an evening out.</p>	<p><b>1965 The Dating Game</b>  Popular American television game show: a bachelorette would question three bachelors, who were hidden from her view, at the end of the questioning period, she would choose one to accompany her on a date, with expenses paid by the show. Occasionally, the roles would be reversed with a man questioning three ladies. The format was adopted in many countries and internationally broadcasted since the 60's.</p>	<p><b>1967 The Pill Law</b> Legalization of abortion.</p>	<p><b>1967 The Pill Law</b> The Pill was legally dispensable for all women.</p>	<p><b>1967 Homosexuality Act</b> Legalisation of homosexuality between consenting adults.</p>

A detail of the timeline about the history of dating, with a focus on England.



Original punchcard from the 60's, from University of North Carolina.  
Thanks to Jim Scott for this donation.



introducing **Com-pat**  
the more human computer  
dating service

## Dateline

If you're Single here is  
**A SPECIAL OFFER**  
from Dateline

12 months subscription,  
worth £5, to  
**singles**

the magazine that really gets people together.

**FREE**  
If you join now.

By yourself, you may not be able to find the perfect person for you. But if you have a locked in computer, your computer gets the information to match you to the partner who both interests and attracts you — the partner you are seeking, and who is looking for you.

Dateline is the longest established and most successful computer introduction service.

Whether you're looking for a permanent relationship, a deeply satisfying friendship, or someone to talk to who will share your interests and attitudes, Dateline is for you. It is a completely personal and reliable service which focuses upon your needs, of people already in love because when you meet through Dateline you know a good relationship is possible even before a word is spoken.

How do you know? Above all, because Dateline's computer system has been developed through continual research by psychologists and computer scientists. Only Dateline can offer you this amount of care. So let Dateline help you meet the woman who wants to meet you!

If you fill in this special Mayday questionnaire you'll get delivered to your home each month a free copy of "Singles". This is the magazine for singles. "Singles" has 52 pages packed with useful information and ways of getting the most out of single living.

Complete the questionnaire on these pages carefully and sincerely, and send it to Dateline, 25/25 Abingdon Road, London, W3. Telephone: 01 937 6563.

Somewhere there is Someone who is Right for You

**But don't believe us! Read what other people say about the Dateline system.**

"... without whom I have lost as many friends as I can cope with." D. T. Marlow

"... one of the girls on my print-out is my ideal match." L. T. Stirling

"... will be eternally grateful to your computer for matching us together." D. G. Leeds

T.S. Newbury

getting the right people together. The unique Dateline computer system has been developed through continual research by psychologists and computer scientists. Only Dateline can offer you this amount of care. So let Dateline help you meet the woman who wants to meet you!

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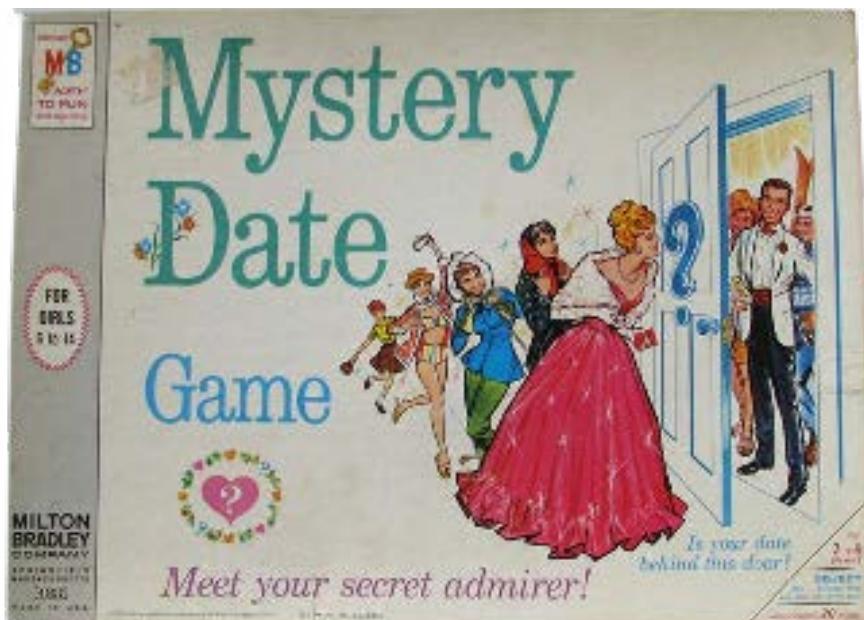
Somewhere there is Someone who is Right for You

**Operation Match**

COMPATIBILITY RESEARCH INC. / P.O. BOX 72 / CAMBRIDGE, MASS. ☺

Advertising of different Computer  
Dating Services in UK and USA

## CULTURAL AND MASS CULTURE ARTIFACTS



Mystery Date, a board game produced by MB in 1965.

## LORDESS FOUDRE

LA based artist Lordess Foudres' digital collages and drawings interrogate the technological infrastructure of normativity, the social derives of the misuse of social networks, and contribute to a growing body of conversations about transhumanism in the past, present and speculative futures.



*the place where you can find an unrealistically idealized version of yourself to fall in love with forever and ever*

## VALENTINA PERI

Valentina Peri is an independent curator, cultural critic and author based in Paris.

Her work examines the role of technology in contemporary culture, with a focus on love and intimacy in the digital age, media histories and technologies in the anthropocene.

She has curated exhibitions, published writing and given lectures on a broad range of topics in these areas, including data collection and surveillance, the commodification of desire, representation and identity, media ecologies and new materialism.

Her travelling exhibition [Data Dating](#) has been presented in France, Israel and the UK. In the context of this exhibition, she co-edited an essay collection published by Intellect: "[Data Dating. Love, Technology, Desire](#)

Her research on dating continued with the exhibition [SWIPE RIGHT! Data, Dating, Desire](#) that she curated at iMAL in Brussels in 2021, and continued with [TECHNO ROMANCE](#) that she presented in Geneva in 2022.

[DATA DATING DESIRE](#), a new iteration of this travelling exhibition was presented in Brescia, at Mo.Ca until December 2022.

In 2022, she began researching the phenomenon of Internet romance scams in Ghana, and published the book "[The New Romance Scammer's Instructor](#)", a collection of original messages from Ghanaian love scammers.

She is one of the artists in residence in 2022 of the European program [BEYOND MATTER Eu - Cultural Heritage on the Verge of Virtual Reality](#) at Tirana Art Lab (Albania). During the residency she realized "[Her Boyfriend Came Back from the War. And They Never Spoke About it Again](#)", an augmented reality project based on the history and photographic archive of her grandfather during World War II, and her grandparents' love correspondence.

She received a [Fluxus Art Projects](#) Grant 2022 for her curatorial research on the history of dating to be presented in London in 2023.

Since 2021 she has collaborated with [peer-to-space](#), an independent exhibition platform based in Berlin, which creates virtual and IRL exhibitions.

From 2010 to 2021 she was associate director and curator at [Galerie Charlot Paris - Tel Aviv](#), a contemporary art gallery specialising in digital art.

Valentina Peri is co-founder of [SALOON Paris](#), an international network of women identifying art professionals in Paris and many other cities around the world.

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