



/

# A Cellphone Named Desire

Posthumanism of the  
New Intermedia

Stéphane Symons,  
Tomasz Kitlinski,  
Joe Lockard

*\_turn the phone on, and  
you can be located; turn it  
off, and you are in hiding  
in the non-networked  
invisible underworld\_*

The mobile phone networks promise global communication, wholeness, plethora, safety, and romance. Instead, cellphones silence us. In a repressive pseudo-democracy, we are silenced. The cellphone is posthuman neo-mobile fetishism, both Freudian and Marxist. It commemorates infantile sexuality and reifies humanity; it provides a status symbol; it is a badge of globalization that is not happening. Cellphones are dumped onto Second World countries and bottom-rate minutes are wholesaled over shared village phones in the Third World, a replication of the global economic hierarchy. These fetish-phones are conducive to propaganda and manipulation; they can spread and distort any message, but not critique it.

Cellphones are the promise of simultaneous mobility and communication, an entry into neo-mobile society. They provide more than communication: they are an empty fetish-symbol of universal provision and freedom. In the neo-mobile society, communications consumption constitutes freedom. As one U.S. cellular service company advertises, "Get the freedom you need with an Alltel wireless plan," as though an empowered social subjectivity were a patentable invention. The neo-mobile society commodifies freedom as a communications product, transforming a basic human right into a marketing campaign and profit center. A fetish-symbol is an object emptied of its use-value and transformed into a cultural totem bearing a range of meanings. A cellphone serves as communication device, empty promise, and reminder of that emptiness.

Yet not everything is emptied: the cellphone remains a security fetish. Words and images are predictable: security-manic, safe and the same. A continuous noise-and-image stream reassures us of predictability. It is this same manic security that destroys communication. The cellphone network is conducive to surveillance; it invites control, and incites "discipline and punish." Turn the phone on, and you can be located; turn it off, and you are in hiding in the non-networked invisible underworld. The network turns sinister in its potentialities; neo-mobile culture has a vastly more powerful reach than Industrial Age modernism, when Thoreau wrote from Walden about discerning "invisible bolts," the white noise of a nearby railroad branch-line, penetrating his consciousness.

The woods no longer hide and shelter. Neo-mobile invisibility now reaches out to police social subjects, identifiable as network nodes.

*\_Love me,  
love my  
cellphone\_*

Cellphones are yet another network for censorship. The policed World Order rushes to keep full control on each and every cellphone. Cellphones stabilize our labile self and change it into a docile body. The phones voice neither *episteme* nor *doxa*, but secure information. These portable network nodes are part of the spectral, ominous, and omnipotent state, the same state that can become a police state without hesitation. The cellphone is European, if not Eurocentric. It is cheaper and more popular in the "Old" World. Yet the mobile phone network spreads like the Blob throughout the world. And like the Arendtian Blob, it is all too social, that is collective and passive, instead of public,

or deliberative and active. The cellphone constitutes immobility as much as symbolizes mobility. There is a social immobility and class paradigm stasis where mobilomachy rules. Whose is more connected? more powerful? richer?

*La donna e mobile*; the mobile telephone is not. Cellphones serve technology and power. The cellphone is enslaved and enslaving, and in our *servitude volontaire* we love it. Cellphones enchain us: we harness ourselves, figuratively and literally, to serve them. Contrary to their promised mobility, cellphones are static. It is an inert, invertebrate technology.

A cellphone is not mobile, dynamic, changeable, protean; instead, it mobilizes a postmodern techno-identification. It seduces; we want to be seduced, and will pay for the privilege.

Breaking news on your cellphone. Nasdaq and DOW Fut too, or sex ads. Or just wearing, sporting, holding, hiding your cellphone. This is recognizable as all-too-human onanism. Masturbation is the spice or, if you prefer, chocolate of life. Bachelors, as Marcel Duchamp depicted it, grind their chocolate by themselves — Duchamp's masturbatory *machines célibataires*, or machines for bachelors. The cellphone is a *machine célibataire*. Pornography on Internet-enabled cellphones, predictably, is the new wave: well-established European cellphone sex sites are being joined in the United States by new providers such as Xobile.com and ohmobile.com.

Alterity is not the cellphone's cup of tea; sameness is.

*the opera of voice-messages is limited to a couple of arias*

Susan Sontag cites a Kierkegaard fragment that defines this sameness in terms of nineteenth-century technology: "A double leveling down, or a method of leveling down in which double

crosses itself. With the daguerreotype everyone will be able to have their portrait taken — formerly it was only the prominent; and at the same time everything is being done to make us all look exactly the same — so that we shall only need one portrait." To analyze the anti-specter that haunted Europe in 1848 — capitalism — was to analyze its product, the daguerreotype, in 1854. To analyze the real

## *European cellphone sex sites are being joined in the United States by ohmobile.com*

mobility of global capital and illusory mobility of global labor in the twenty-first century, is to analyze the mobile phone in 2005. It is to analyze the social reproduction of an unreflective sameness in order to standardize and globalize markets. As goes the communications market, so goes global culture.

### **Global Mobile**

Mobile phone networks aim at impermeability; a porous network is an anathema. That is an impenetrability coextensive with contemporary social biographies and economic existence. Babies are born with parents, doctors and midwives using cellphones. Children are raised under the tutelage of cellphones. The poorest slave opts to have, possess, and take pride in a cellphone. For those without means, a cottage industry from Vilnius to Kolkata, and from Cape Town to the East End of London, unlocks stolen cellphones. We are the wage chattel of the mobile classes, of mobile telephone corporations; we contend with service providers, controllers and censors from cradle to grave. We live in a global neo-mobile culture.

As a new religion, the mobile networks opiate the masses. The links, connections, and bonds the mobile phone networks generate are imaginary, but they cultivate

