

Earotic love

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Being in love and cell phones just don't mix. You can't hang up on someone anymore the way you could with a good old-fashioned telephone. So how are cell phone users supposed to communicate their feelings? I can't understand how such a non-dramatic object could ever become so popular.

»Excuse me,« I said to the man on the billboard next to me, »how did cell phones ever become so popular in such a short time?« He took a drag on his cigarette and pondered my question.

»Yeah, I miss not being able to really hang up on someone too, but what's worse is that the mobile phone industry is trying to supplant the cigarette industry. People wanted to give up smoking thinking they could face their lovers with nothing to fiddle with, but they soon broke down and reached for a cell phone. Now instead of always having a cigarette stuck in their mouths, they have cell phones glued to their ears. It's so embarrassing to have to sell tobacco these days. I'd rather sell mobiles. I could be in one of those hip cell phone ads with a handset caressing my cheek. I wouldn't have to try this hard to look relaxed. Believe you me, I would have refused this job, but I couldn't slam the receiver down on them, so I said yes.«

The man on the billboard smiled a Mona Lisaesque smile. Mona Lisa was definitely the world's first smoker. Her hands resting in the folds of her dress hide the lit cig, and that famous coy smile is just the mask of phony innocence of a convent schoolgirl caught red-handed.

Perhaps one art historical riddle has been solved, but the cigarette on the billboard points ineffectually to a retro-looking airplane and poses new questions.

Is the Western world currently experiencing the decline of the oral and the rise of the aural phase? Modern forms of stimulation – mp3, telephone sex, and iPods – give primarily aural pleasure; they nibble on earlobes and penetrate anvil and stirrup.

Sure our mouths are still involved in cellularitis, but instead of sucking, they spit. Spit up everything. No wonder the children of the information society are all word bulimics. The need to purge oneself in the face of information constipation. Ah, that's why cell phones have become so popular – for talk show-karaoke in public. This is indeed a piece of mobile insight: what was purportedly achieved in the name of reachability is really a barf bag for uncaring words. Gross. And like every therapeutic service, grossly expensive.

»**The cell phone** companies have sucked me dry, I couldn't afford to turn down this job,« the man on the billboard went on, »A moderate smoker spends €100 a month; a moderate cell phone user pays more or less the same. If you're hooked on both, it costs enough to force you to be stingy elsewhere. With love and desire, for instance.«

My billboard philosopher was on a roll now, »The *conditio sine qua non* of being in love is yearning, and yearning is the opposite of always being on-call. Marriage and cell phones are the only way to tackle yearning. Back when everyone was smoking we were full of yearning, now everyone's just full.«

