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Abstract

Informed by nonparticipant observations of public cell phone use, we offer a Lacanian theorization of common social scenes involving mobile communication technologies. Identifying paradoxes of the mobile mediascape, such as connected versus disconnected and public versus private, we turn to Lacan's distinction between the look and the gaze to read and reconcile these tensions. Moving beyond understanding cell phones as fetish objects, we use Lacan's theory of the gaze as a means to understand the existential dilemma, a lack of being, which underwrites the pleasures of consumption. At the heart of the matter is how cell phones mobilize users' desires and anxieties as social subjects in a mediatized consumptionscape.

Keywords: Cell phone, fetish, gaze, Lacan, mobile media, psychoanalysis

Introduction

The mobile phone has become globally pervasive and an indispensable appendage of contemporary life (Castells et al., 2004; Goggin, 2006; Horst and Miller, 2006; Ito et al., 2005; Ling, 2004), continually reshaping markets and cross-consumer interactions (Humphreys, 2010). Our aim is to explore the psychic and cultural links of the handheld mobile device. But rather than focusing on nuances of the bustling digital terrain (e.g. mobile apps and social networking sites), we examine the physical, brick-and-mortar realm in and through which the digital is integrated with the corporeal. In that sense, our work does not seek to

psychoanalyze users of cell phones, rather it seeks to use psychoanalytic theory to read typical social scenes emerging around the use of mobile media. The work is primarily theoretical, but we occasion our theorization upon empirical evidence from nonparticipant observations at four sites in northeastern United States, part of a pilot observational study concerning public cell phone use.

While psychoanalysis has had considerable impact on a number of fields including sociology (e.g. Marcuse and Adorno), cinema studies (e.g. Metz and Mulvey), philosophy (e.g. Derrida and Žižek), and literary criticism (e.g. Kristeva and de Lauretis), it is comparatively less common within marketing theory (for some exceptions, see Böhm and Batta, 2010; Cluley and Dunne, 2012; Oswald, 2010). Yet psychoanalysis should be of interest to marketers as it speaks to the heart of marketing—consumer desires and anxieties—and offers an alternative to theorizing consumers as rational actors pursuing their self-interest in the marketplace or as social–psychological performers of reasoned action.

Cluley and Dunne (2012) argued that a psychoanalytic account of commodity fetishism is needed to contend with the contradictory ways people consume. Retreading Marx with Freud, they conclude that narcissism rather than fetishism is truly what is at stake because the commodity form is not merely a masking of social relations of production; it is also, if not more so, a means of identification and self-aggrandizement. Similarly, Böhm and Batta (2010) argued that a psychoanalytic account of commodity fetishism is necessary for understanding enjoyment as the cornerstone of consumer capitalism. Yet our theorization differs from these insofar as we consider more broadly the roots of

fetishism as an enjoyable, subject-forming defense mechanism. Essentially, we expand the consideration of that, which it defends against, moving from the Marxian (knowledge of exploitation in the mode of production) to the existential (knowledge of alienation from social reality). This distinction is due to our effort to understand consumers not as subjects of capitalism as much as subjects of (mobile) media, though certainly the two are related. To build a bridge from the conceptual and critical priorities of the former to the latter, we weigh two possible interpretations of Lacan by applying one of his most well-worn theoretical propositions—the gaze—to consumptionscapes "stained" by cell phones.

On this, perhaps the most immediately comparable work of marketing theory is that of Oswald (2010), who drew from a particular understanding of Lacan's theory of the gaze to deconstruct the erotics of advertising constructed around male voyeurism and the objectification of female bodies. In examining how media artifacts construct consumers as such, Oswald takes a tack similar to our own. Our position, however, is less about the pleasures of looking and more about the underlying anxieties that are the precondition for such pleasure; what Oswald and other theorists refer to as "the gaze," we prefer to call "the look" as we reserve the gaze as a term for something more fundamental to subjectivity. Arguably, this is the more accurate reading of Lacan's terms and concepts, but our chosen interpretation of the gaze is not mere goal tending over Lacan's original intentions. Our particular reading of Lacan, distinguishing between the look and the gaze, is called for because we aim not to theorize a media text but a media technology and one that is regarded as especially disruptive.

Of course, not only did Lacan's thinking on this topic change over the course of his career (Evans, 1996), so too have interpretations of Lacan changed (Mellard, 2006; Saper, 1991). Because of that, it is impossible to explain succinctly the meaning and importance of the gaze. Since we will soon delve into the matter more deeply, let it suffice to say for the time being that the concept of the gaze, in its various iterations and interpretations, is used to interrogate subjectivity with regard to how desire shapes the ways people see and are seen. In the following, we will articulate two schools on this matter, the first a more traditional and longer standing reading of the gaze influenced by 1970s film theorists (cf. Oswald, 2010), and the second a more recent paradigm impelled largely by the work of media theorists beginning approximately in the 1990s (e.g. Copjec, 1994; Krips, 1999, 2010; Žižek, 1989). The former we will explain as concerned more with the look than the gaze; the look is aligned with typical approaches to commodity fetishism in that it speaks to phenomena of seeing and being seen in which people find pleasure in identity-consolidating experiences of objects. The latter we will explain as concerned more with the gaze as (late) Lacan (or his later readers) conceived it; that is, as a potential source of anxiety, threatening subjects' pleasurable attachments to fetish objects. Although the rhetoric used to differentiate these two ways of reading Lacan (i.e. look theorists vs. gaze theorists) may hint that one is more accurate than the other, we use the look/gaze distinction simply to clarify a key conceptual difference that, otherwise, may be impenetrable to readers less familiar with Lacanian theory. In the end, we see these interpretations as complementary.

In brief, our position is that the look involves phenomena of self-presentation and co-presence, seeing and being seen as a social subject in real, brick-and-mortar space. The gaze, on the other hand, entails disruptive moments of disengagement with that first domain of the look. The former level of analysis is most congruent with Marxist conceptions of commodity fetishism, whereas the latter level of analysis is necessary for contending with cell phones as more than just another fetishized commodity and coming to terms with their unique position as communications technologies embedding consumers within new mobile media ecologies. In the next section, we turn to selected field observations and continue to refine the concept of the gaze, articulating an ''antinomics'' of the present mobile consumptionscape. This will provide the foundation, in the section following the next one, for a more critical explanation and application of these two schools of Lacanian theory.

Selected Field Observations and Preliminary Theory

Pilot field ethnographic accounts and nonparticipant observational notes, precursor steps to a larger ongoing study, were generated from four sites. The object of these observations was to explore the ways people interact with their mobile devices, and with each other, in public spaces. A series of public places were selected that would best give a sampling of a diverse set of people of varying ages from different social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, for example, a food court of an urban mall, the club house of a golf course, a post office, and a suburban grocery store. Over a period of 8 weeks, six ethnographic field

observation sessions were conducted by Jennifer Bonoff, three at the mall and one each at the other locations, culminating in 226 individual observations. The collection of data followed the procedure for written field notes described by Barnard (2002). Both descriptive and reflective notes were taken focusing on the social contexts surrounding public interactions with cell phones. Observable demographic data as well as detailed information regarding the observational setting including time, location, date, and other specifics regarding the nature of the observation were recorded.

Many of the observed uses of cell phones had little to do with their digital capacities. Repeated observations found constant physical attachment of the individual to the mobile device, even while the device was not specifically in use, that is, holding the phones while eating, walking, talking, and engaging in a variety of other, disconnected social activities. Reporting a representative scene from the mall:

> I am immediately struck by the two ladies sitting diagonally across from me. They are eating salads, both are dressed nicely, hair neat. Approximately 35 years of age. They are clearly involved in a very active conversation—faces are animated, hands are waving back and forth. They both have mobile phones present. Lady #1 has the phone resting on the table next to her plate of food. Lady #2 (the most

animated/hand waving of the two) has her mobile phone in her hand. She never uses it or looks at it, but it remains waving around in her hand the entire time. At one point, she passes it into the other hand— but never, ever letting go. . . .

Many users were found to decorate and individualize their phones; there is an entire ancillary market of decorative cell phone accessories. Some observational notes from the session at the golf club:

> The device cases seem to match the attire and overall appearance of their owners. One young adult male, all dressed in black, had a skull and bones case. A teenage girl had a pink case with a large heart in the middle created with rhinestones. A middle-aged man at the golf course had a simple, refined black leather case. Another golf course observation spotted an older gentleman with an Auburn University Tigers [college sports team] case. Other observations noted cases featuring cer- tain brands or singers. I also notice varying ringtones. Although I could not hear specifically, I could ascertain that some ringtones were pop music lyrics, some instrumental, and others were sounds from nature.

Of course, there were also moments when the mobile device was used as a communication tool integrated into the flow of socializing. Some more observational notes:

> I am observing one of the males, who appears to be the father of the child. He is holding a mobile device and is constantly engaging with it, then engaging with the people he is dining with, then back to the device. At one point, the baby starts to cry. He (while still holding his phone) reaches into the diaper bag to get a pacifier. He goes back to manipulating his device, then puts the pacifier into the baby's mouth. This in-and-out, virtual/non-virtual behavior is a repetitive cycle.

> I am sitting next to a couple, early 30s. They are sitting across from one another. The woman is holding her phone directly in front of her face and manipulating it, yet she is still carrying on a conversation with her date. I can see her eyes diverting quickly between the device and the man she is with. Most remarkable is that the phone seems to remain stationary directly in front of her face and directly in line of vision to her mate. Her eyes and attention seem to

fluctuate rapidly between the device and the human sitting across from her.

The commonness of such observations suggests that users are split, subject to the cell phone by virtue of their interpellation across competing planes of significance, that is, the shared here and now of brick-and-mortar space and the co-present yet more individuated digital space to which these devices are portals. Cell phones are the most visible markers of the former space's otherwise imperceptible remediation through mobile communication technologies. Moreover, this tension between planes is ontological; it concerns what it means to be a subject and specifically a subject split by these mediatized social scenes. Summarizing our observations of mobile use behaviors in public spaces, we discern five antinomies affecting the split (Table 1).

These behaviors define the contemporary mobile consumptionscape. Public uses vary from social integration to disruption, from phone as fashion to phone as distraction, from fitting in to dropping out, and often at the same time. Thus, our observations are similar to Arnold (2003: 233) who argued that the new mobile phone "reconstitutes desires and ends, as well as mechanisms, and to account for this reconstituted sociotechnical landscape, we need an approach that allows theoretically and empirically for contrariness, paradox, and irony to arise within the analytic frame."

Table 1: Observable antinomies relating to mobile device usage and interaction in public spaces

Antinomy	Description	Observation
Individuality/Conformity	Consumers use the mobile device (collectively) as a means of (individual) self-expression.	Observations illustrate individuals' efforts to express themselves and their identities with varying cases, ringtones, and other accessories, yet conforming by using common mass-market mobile devices and modifications.
Connected/Disconnected	Physical attachment of the individual to the mobile device, even while the device is not in use.	Repeated observations affirm that many individuals remain physically connected to the devices, holding them while eating, walking, talking, and engaging in a variety of other social activities.
Public/Private	Individuals seem to make a very public display of the mobile device, yet the extant literature shows that privacy is a main concern among consumers.	Users cite privacy as a key source of apprehension; however, the paradoxical public spaces abound with mobile users having conversations in public or passing around the mobile phone for others to see, with seemingly no regard for privacy.
Proximal/Distal	Individuals alternate between engagement with technology and engagement with the people or things in the 'non-digital' world	Activities that were once smooth, languid and continuous – such as eating lunch while enjoying time with a friend – have now become filled with forms of rapid and fragmented "in-and-out," behaviors.
Compliant/Defiant	Overall adherence to older, established social norms of interaction and etiquette is in a state of transformation.	Otherwise law-abiding, respectful, well-mannered people are showing complete disregard for traditional social behaviors when utilizing mobile devices in public spaces.

To help read and reconcile these opposing tendencies, we draw from Lacan's (1998 [1981]) distinction between the look of the eye and the gaze of the object, contending that each side of these divides implicates a different level of Lacan's theory of subjectivity. Although the effort to account for such antagonisms as essential and co-substantive leads to the notorious opacity of Lacanian theory, it is also what makes it especially apt for the unique changes marking mobile media consumptionscapes. Therefore, before articulating the

particularities of the look and the gaze with cell phones, it is helpful to consider how such a distinction figures within Lacan's larger theoretical project and how the priorities of that project are well met by the tensions described above.

Evans (1996) explains that this split between the look and the gaze represents Lacan's construction of a theory of desire, built from Freud's theory of libidinal drives, and that Lacan's position is distinguished by ''an antinomic relation between the gaze and the eye: the eye which looks is that of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object, and there is no coincidence between the two'' (p. 72). Lacan's antinomic theory of subjectivity is well suited to the task of analyzing mobile media and culture because it articulates how the erotics of subjectivity stem from an impossible yet necessary unity of opposites.

Regarding our observations, the key issue is not how cell phones distract their users, but how the spectacle of a person distracted by a phone comes to stand for a whole host of anxieties about the digital age. From this perspective, the cell phone as a signifying apparatus cannot be reduced to the hunk of matter comprising the artifact itself. It is more than that. It is also, of course, the data, the software, the network connection, but, above all, the way these material features are embedded in a larger symbolic system through their arrangement and use, which implicates users as part of the perceptible ''stain.''

Lacan's (1998 [1981]) example of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is most often referenced to explain how visual anomalies, like stains, figure within Lacan's theoretical architecture. In *The Ambassadors*, a 16th-century realist painting, Holbein depicts two wealthy gentlemen posed in a room filled with instruments of

science and music, ornate textiles, and other markers of affluence and knowledge. Near the bottom of the painting, however, is, what first seems to be, some kind of blurry oval that interrupts the otherwise realistic image. Yet with a slight shift of the viewer's perspective, the blur comes into focus as a human skull as the original image itself blurs. Berressem (1996) discussed the effect:

> When the spectator puts himself into the central, geometrically correct position in front of the painting, (the point from which the projection of the image originates) 'the eye' sees the image, and the anamorphosis as a stain. But, while turning around to walk away from the painting—an effect carefully engineered by the specific position of the painting within the room in which it was originally hung—it sees in the last moment, in the last 'gaze' that it casts back, the anamorphosis and, consequently, the image as a stain. Holbein's painting flattens these two points of view onto one image-plane with the explicit aim to make them exclude each other. (p. 271)

Such competing planes of significance, each requiring or producing a new subject positioning yet still flattened into one surface, is what we find with today's mobile phone culture. But how does this aesthetic trick speak to a greater theory of the subject?

Addressing the role of the stain in Lacan's theory of subjectivity, Ragland (1995) explained, "the visible seems adequate to itself. Not only does the body look whole, so does the world and the things in it. Thus, people identify with the illusion of the whole, rather than the reality of lack" (p. 200). Yet this identity-threatening reality of lack, which is imperceptible in and of itself, can nonetheless manifest indirectly through stains or gaps in the whole. The term "stain", however, suggests something like a malformation, distortion, or error, which is not necessarily what the theory implies. Ragland clarifies by equating dreams, painting,

and music as typical stains in that each ''points to something beyond the horizon, some stain against which we can see ourselves being seen'' and, in that way, ''[o]ne literally encounters the holes in being'' (Ragland, 1995: 201). Ubiquitous though they are, mobile phones, in our present historical moment, nonetheless stain scenes of the everyday, reminding viewers of the mediation of social life not just by language, fashion, custom, or any other readily observable signifying system but also by another, relatively imperceptible digital sphere. In these moments—at the mall, the country club, and so on—mobile users blot the landscape, punctuating the field with inscrutable marks of otherness.

Like most of Lacan's core concepts ''the other'' fulfills many theoretical functions, and thus its meaning evolves across his corpus and varies depending on context. Evans (1996) explains that this ''is perhaps the most complex term in Lacan's work'' (p. 132) and summarizes the general idea of Lacan's other as ''both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject'' (p. 133). The other, for Lacan, is not reducible to other people or to the fact that lack of knowledge about others' minds is a fundamental barrier to intersubjectivity. Rather, ''otherness'' is about the fact that signifying systems, like language, which facilitate intersubjectivity, are also extrinsic to subjects as such. While the point of his theory is to situate language at the center of the ''talking cure,'' it does so by acknowledging that language as such resides in the acts of others. This leads to the Lacanian dictum ''the other does not exist,'' which means more than that there is no one unalienated by language; it means also that there is no guarantor of identity

to be found within the system that makes sense of identity. That is, if the other does not exist, then neither does the subject. Of course, this works only with a very particular sense of "exist."

Schroeder (2008) interprets Lacan's theory of the other with regard to his reading of Hegel, where existence is opposed to essence:

> Essence must be contrasted to existence because it is not a being, but a doing—or in Lacan's terminology, an insistence. Being is the passive state of things, not the active real of subjects. Unlike existence which is merely factual, essence is actual. (p. 162)

So, nonexistence is not pure nothingness; or, if it is nothing, that nothing is where the actions underwriting existence take place. This is precisely why lack/desire is so prominent in Lacan's theory of the subject, because it is the essential force insisting on the subject to be.

To say, then, that something like public cell phone use is a stain of otherness means that it represents to the viewer a normally nonexistent, yet essential, sphere of action; one upon which existence relies but cannot fully assimilate. However, the other and the stains that represent it to the subject, as actual rather than factual, arise only in specific historical, cultural situations—*The Ambassadors* was not merely made to work upon a certain historical audience for Renaissance art, it was made to work in one certain room. For mobile phones, the staining is not because the devices are inherently unnatural or antisocial, it is because within the symbolic order of contemporary life—the systems of meanings, moralities, laws, and so on—the mobile phone has, in certain contexts, come to represent some of our greatest and most enduring anxieties. Like Holbein's skull

they symbolize lack and may provoke existential anxiety by de-centering the viewing subject. Such is plain to see in the proliferation of (negative) effects research concerning mobile media.

This includes parenting guides like Osit's *Generation Text* (2008), which finds "Generation Text kids are immersed in their cell phones, Internet, television, and video games. And they are enamored by the sociocultural temptations of the day" (p. 262); as well as broader culture critiques, like Rushkoff's *Present Shock* (2013), which is premised on the idea that:

> … we tend to exist in a distracted present, where forces on the periphery are magnified and those immediately before us are ignored. Our ability to create a plan—much less follow through on it—is undermined by our need to be able to improvise our way through any number of external impacts that stand to derail us at any moment. (n.p.)

Evidently, adults are as imperiled as children. But these problems are not endemic to the digital age. Human societies have and will always worry over how best to raise children, how to maintain social cohesion, how to behave ethically, and so on. This is not to say there are no specific effects correlating to cell phone use, only that the intense attention this technology receives has as much to do with phenomena specific to its technological function as it does with its function as an object used to both engage and avoid more timeless anxieties.

Turkle (2008) argues as much, making the case that people are "tethered" to one another via relational artifacts, like mobile devices:

> We move from technologies that tether us to people to those that are able to tether us to the Web sites and avatars that represent people.

Relational artifacts represent their programmers but are given autonomy and primitive psychologies; they are designed to stand on their own as creatures to be loved. They are potent objects-to-think-with. (p. 134)

Whatever the social functions and effects of mobile media may be, it is indisputable that they have become the flash point for contemporary culture critique. Turkle's argument also resonates with Lacan's (1998 [1981]: 62) theory that ''man thinks with his object,'' though the Lacanian object gaze is subtly different. From our perspective, Turkle's object—the cell phone—is potent only because it occupies the place of Lacan's object—the gaze. Pursuing this distinction in light of the aforementioned antinomies, the following sections demonstrate the disconnection/connection between the look and the gaze and use these concepts as a means to theorize the mobile consumptionscape.

The Look

One of the most common psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity is that of the ''male gaze'' critiqued by film studies. This account, sometimes referred to as the ''screen theory'' interpretation of Lacan (Copjec, 1994; Krips, 1999, 2010), is rooted in Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" (1977 [1949]), wherein he considers how an infant, upon seeing himself/ herself in a mirror, internalizes this other image of himself/herself as whole, which is at odds with his/her experience of incompleteness. While it is, technically, incorrect to equate such phenomena with those Lacan refers to as the gaze because it

emphasizes the perceiver more than the perceived (Evans, 1996), it does well to address one side of the antinomy of visual subjectivity—the look— through which subjects are aware of themselves as spectacles.

The cultural politics of the screen theory account derive from the fact that the mirror of society is no mere reflection; it is ideologically inflected (e.g. mainstream cinema represents, and therefore implicates viewers within, the scopic desires of heterosexist patriarchy). For cell phones, marketing plays a role in educating consumers on how to see and be seen in public with their mobile devices (e.g. Apple's silhouette campaign). Yet this regime of visibility is a step removed from how Lacan conceived the gaze.

The successful aesthetic integration of cell phones and their users, the look, would be, in Lacan's (1998 [1981]) formulation, pleasurable due to its "pacifying" of the gaze, akin to his account of representational art:

> The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which, in part, at least, of the painting, might be summed up thus—You want to see? Well, take a look at this! He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze. (p. 101; Emphasis in the original)

Recalling Ragland's account of the stain marking the hole of being, and the connection to dreams and art, painting, in this case, essentially covers over the gaze, or what lacks in reality, by creating an object for desire to latch onto, not satisfying it, ultimately, but giving it direction. For mobile users in public places, this would concern how users recognize and enact the very public-ness of the place

itself, using the mobile device as part of their construction of an identity, adorning and manipulating the device in ways socially and culturally congruent with the norms of such a place. Moreover, aligning one's self-perception with the perception of another is pleasurable, as it relieves the subject of the look from the responsibilities of desire, which the gaze demands. This is why image-based advertising can be effective; it matters less what a product actually is and more how the fantasy around that product assuages a greater existential anxiety.

Oswald (2010) holds that advertising seeks to substitute symbolic objects for real things; brand positioning is always also subject positioning. This is demonstrated also in Böhm and Batta's (2010) account of Nike, "what these [advertising] slogans seem to be doing is to reactivate the infant's 'mirror stage' of narcissism, the stage where there was faith in the existence of the mother's phallus, that stage where there was no fear of castration" (p. 256). At a more fundamental level, this is possible because pursuing desire for a product or image is more pacifying than engaging the lack of being from which desire gains its force. Cluley and Dunne (2012) address consumption in this deeper sense as they explain commodity fetishism as a narcissistic mechanism, as when people cope with their lack of being by having children and centering the desire to consume upon those children:

> … as far as Freud is concerned, they are satisfying their own narcissistic desires. First, they are able to entertain the notion that they are acting out of selfless love and, therefore, add to their idealized image of themselves. Second, they can make up for desires that they were forced to inhibit when they were children by ensuring that their children, with whom they identify, need not ever know of these inhibitions. (p. 259)

Above and beyond the most basic needs, consumption is always a matter of satisfying desires born of identity processes driven by a lack of being. It is at this level that one observes cell phones as fetish objects.

Utilizing cell phones as tokens of sociality squares with the classical Marxist notion of commodity fetishism—in which relations between people become relations between things—for example, Apple versus Android users, or smartphone users versus last-generation mobile users. It was found also in an older era of car phones when some mounted fake ''antennas'' on their cars to signal—deceivingly—that they were privileged and had car phones. Moments of looking and courting the looks of others are consoling and consolidating uses of mobile media delivering to consumers the experiences promised by advertising for example, user-oriented design, futuristic aesthetics, and constant connectivity all in the name of facilitating and enhancing social interactions.

But fetishism is enjoyable only because it is a defense against a more pervasive, underlying anxiety. Gemerchak (2004) explains:

> Where desire endlessly explores reality for a satisfaction that is never forthcoming, the fetish steps in to close the circuit of desire by providing a partially satisfying solution, and does so in the attempt to protect the subject from the world's non-conformity to desire's highest expectations. (p. 9)

While the fetishizing veil of fantasy pacifies the gaze, that fetish and its Apollonian appeal are endangered because the gaze is always threatening to upset fantasy. To better articulate this dynamic, it will be helpful to recall Freud's analysis of the *fort*/*da* game and to consider how Lacan's theory diverges.

The Gaze

The *fort*/*da* game introduced in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" is where Freud (1995 [1920]) ruminates on seeing his grandson in the cradle playing with a cotton reel on a string, throwing it over the edge of his crib, out of sight, saying *fort* (gone) and pulling it back, saying *da* (here). This is an apt case against which one may begin to appreciate the erotic substrate of the look, particularly visible when users toy with their otherwise inactive devices—dressing them, fondling them— while anticipating the call, text, or push notification signaling the return of the digital other.

Freud contended the game was the child's effort to manage anxieties about the mother's absence. Through playing with presence and absence, the subject develops an ego, or imaginary sense of self, *vis-à-vis* a superego, or the symbolic presence of an authoritative other, like a mother, which remains present as a guarantor of the ego even under the real absence of the other. For Lacan, this is more than the subject's entry into the symbolic order, it is also the moment at which "partial objects," the inaudible and invisible gaps that make symbolization necessary and possible, begin to attach to material objects.

Lacan addressed the *fort*/*da* game in "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power" (1977 [1958]), describing the reel as a stand-in for the negation, making the phonematic distinctions between utterances—*fort*/*da*— meaningful; the child plays not with the toy so much as with the emptiness into which the toy is thrown and retrieved. That emptiness is the gaze. Nevertheless, though Lacan insists that objects like the gaze have no specular image, within a

symbolic system, the gaze may attach to perceptible stimuli (desire for commodities can avoid lack of being). This principle is elaborated in *Seminar XI* (1998 [1981]), where Lacan refers to the myth of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios.

The story, in brief, tells of a contest to decide who could create the most realistic image. Zeuxis painted grapes that attracted birds with their realistic semblance. Yet Parrhasios wins the contest for tricking not animals but his human opponent with a painted veil, acting as a ''lure'' for the desire of Zeuxis who marvels at the quality of the painting and loses the contest when he inquires as to what was painted behind the veil. The point of this myth, in Lacan's retelling, is that the kind of image most compelling to humans is not that which best resembles visual reality; what seems realistic to a human is the frustration, rather than satisfaction, of the scopic drive.

If anything is behind Parrhasios' veil, if the shadow in the mirror is hiding something, it is the gaze of the (nonexistent) other. Lacan uses the story of the painters' contest to show how a space beyond representation may be inscribed into the picture through the alluring surface of the veil. Therefore, the gaze is not a thing, because it is a property of the other, but a ''relational structure poised delicately between a visual object and individual viewers, its effects mediated by their differing positions within their disparate ideological horizons'' (Krips, 1999: 100). Yet the challenge to analysis is that this relational structure of the gaze is neither universal nor ahistorical.

Lacan (1998 [1981]) clarifies this point through an anecdote about spending a school holiday on a boat with professional fisherman, one named Petit-Jean:

> … this Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you! (p. 95; Emphasis in the original)

This otherwise innocuous comment upset young Lacan:

> … the fact that he found it so funny and I less so, derives from the fact that, if I am told a story like that one, it is because I, at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place in the picture. And it was because I felt this that I was not terribly amused. (Lacan, 1998 [1981]: 96)

Mobile devices in contemporary society may be read against Lacan's sardine-can anecdote. In doing so, however, it is crucial to understand that neither the sardine can itself nor the mobile device is the stain, or perceptible evidence, of the gaze. Rather, it is the twinned social and phenomenological relations between objects and subjects that produce the gaze, leading Lacan to identify himself, not the can, as the stain of that fishing scene.

Like the child in the crib contending with the psychic and material lack caused by the mother's withdrawal, public cell phone use similarly opens a gap—figuring the ''point of insertion'' for a symbolic sphere dominated by mobile, digital communications. This justifies Lynn's (2012) comparison between smartphones and other fun-yet-dangerous products like cigarettes and junk food. The connection, according to Lynn (2012), is not fundamentally about addiction

but about how anxiety-reducing play is the *entré*e to what may be addicting and deleterious, indeed, anxiety producing rather than anxiety reducing. The implications of such a connection, justifiable from a Lacanian perspective, are damning for consciousness-raising campaigns (e.g. Herzog's *From One Second to the Next*) because it points out that people engaged in negative patterns of behavior adopt and continue those behaviors for psychic gratification, despite, or maybe even because of, well-known adverse effects.

As for our observations, cell phone users seem to lose themselves from physical space, like stopping and blocking a walkway to answer the phone or pausing mid-conversation to read and reply to a text message on the device. In these instances, we find the lure of the cell phone, of the other, of a digital space ''behind'' the analog world. At the same time, we are confronted with its gaze when the phone, once a tamed fetish playing to the look, overflows with the libidinal demands of the apparatus. The key to understanding how this is a matter of cell phones operating as an alluring veil, and not merely a competing channel of communication as they are cast by ''effects research'' (e.g. Osit, 2008; Rushkoff, 2013), is to understand that witnessing the use of the device itself—the disengaging with and through the device—is the veil, or the frustration of the desire to see as the other, which disrupts the look and its pleasures while simultaneously supporting them.

Plant (2002) argues that the mere site of a mobile phone can be a disruptive force, upsetting the integrity of social spaces and relationships, when it sparks viewers' anxious anticipation of the device's deployment:

> even a silent mobile can make its presence felt as though it were an
> addition to a social group, and … many people feel that just the
> knowledge that a call might intervene tends to divert attention from
> those present at the time. (p. 30)

In such moments, when the phone is used or even just anticipated to be used, the gaze reemerges as a threat to the consolidated imaginary of the look. The body itself and the physical space it inhabits are threatened to become an insignificant remainder as mobile users literally deny their look, the attention that would affirm the existence of others, from the people around them, a reminder that the other does not see.

At this level of analysis, regarding the gaze, mobile devices are still about users' identities, as with the look but are disarticulated from anything like self-expression as may be witnessed in the social semiotics of designer cases or public posturing; here, the device is embroiled with identity in a more existential sense. Like young Lacan on holiday, mobile users are often stunned by the ''glittering'' of their devices in the form of audio, visual, and haptic signals. Still the world is full of such glittering stimuli; the greater question is how some become more cathected than others. For Lacan, it was the flash of light as well as the joke that brought him out of the present situation, re-inscribing him in the scene as a bourgeois college student "playing" at working. Similarly, one may witness the stain of mobile users, observable evidence of the gaze, as they become caught by the glint of their devices reminding them that they are out of place and that there is (perhaps) another alluring, even arresting, field of social relations.

This may help to explain the apparent contagion that happens during idle moments in public, such as waiting in line or sitting on a bench, that is, people seem compelled to use their devices when other people are using them, engaging in the behavior that, when witnessed, produces anxiety, and may, when performed, reduce it. Yet this leads to the through- the-looking-glass aspect of mobile culture that is both outside Lacan's original formulation and the scope of our present study, namely, that the digital other does, in a way, return the look. That is, to the extent that mobile devices are portals to another, online, mediated social sphere wherein the ontology of the subject may well be reversed and traces of the priority of off-line forces (e.g. dropped calls, idle chats, and deserted blogs) stain digital scenes.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

The cell phone, as a cultural artifact, has the capacity to both pacify and incite the gaze, rendering sensible and manageable an otherwise inaccessible yet essential psychic operation. We identified two ways to approach this matter, one concerning the ways fetishism can facilitate the flow of the scopic drive and another concerning the incitement of the gaze, becoming a flash point for anxieties once pacified. But these two levels are intertwined and constantly in flux. The drive to see and be seen flows through and unites the pleasures and displeasures of fetishism, and, as our brief fieldwork indicated, users move between one mode of interaction and the next fluently. Nonetheless, the separation between these levels of analysis is useful for

heuristic purposes, particularly for better articulating these theories of visibility and subjectivity, to a broader politics of the contemporary mobile consumptionscape.

The first level of our analysis, the look, illuminated the imaginary function, the level of visual identification, or simply style. The point, here, is that people are not merely interacting with others, but they are enacting themselves *vis-à-vis* the cell phone as fetish object, making the device part of a routine, erotic attachment to one's own identity. This naturally leads to questions about visual design and marketing, especially for devices that may be technologically inferior to competitors. This can be seen at its highest stakes in recent controversy about whether the size and shape—the very ''look and feel'' (the rounded corners of the device)—of Apple's iPad is a protectable intellectual property. But the cultural politics stemming from this level of analysis also imbricates cell phone marketing with one of the more insidious aspects of consumer culture, that is, waste. To paraphrase Williams (1997), ''consumption'' is an odd term, since consumers rarely eradicate or transform the object of consumption; so, in that sense, what is it consumers consume? In short, fantasy.

Williams (1997) wrote that:

> it is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings which in a different cultural pattern might be more directly available. (p. 185)

What marketing does is to manipulate fantasy, to make the real object of consumption, the imaginary gaze of the other, expire, move, or ''look'' elsewhere.

The fact that nearly any consumer good can be made to fulfill this function can be accounted for by the fact that the gaze itself does not correspond with the objects that seem to embody them; rather, it is the social relations, including marketing, which surround them and make it possible to fetishize in the first place. When this all-important fantasy-sustaining object disappears, the old consumer goods become embarrassments and liabilities. The eruption of the real at this level, that which disrupts the fetish fantasy, is seen in pawn shops filled with last year's must-have items as well as massive fields of electronic waste piling up in Third World countries . Overall, however, this is more of a classic, Marxist dimension of commodity fetishism, not particular to the digital age or mobile communications.

The second level of our analysis, the gaze, concerns something somewhat deeper, or at least less obvious. This level concerns the symbolic domain and is only most obvious when it runs aground of the real, or the level of antinomic contradiction, (im)materiality, and dissolution of identity. The fetishism of cell phones through the look is, with regard to the gaze, seen as a measure against confronting the desire of the other. Users intermittently stunned by their mobile phones—flickering in and out of one symbolic order into another—represent the twinned enjoyment of pacifism and anxiety-triggering cell phone culture. The overflow of the digital into the analog, the bodily contortions and unself-conscious exhortations accompanying the eruption of the real in a symbolic sense are more than evidence of a newly mediated society; they are the visible, material symptoms of becoming subject to the other desires of a new, digital age. The gaze of the cell phone, as social stain, points to how the phone is as much a barrier to socialization

as it is a channel for it. How new mobile technologies might incite the gaze is plain to see in a case such as the preemptive bans on Google's augmented reality glasses, set in place before the technology even reached the market.

From these considerations, one might return to our analysis to inquire how emerging media technologies extend or challenge our theorization. In particular, it will be necessary to consider whether our application of Lacanian psychoanalysis may continue to serve as a means to understand emergent subjectivities with more timeless problems of identity, communication, and consumption; or whether it is just the most apt way to describe the present stage of sociotechnical evolution. What degree of integration between these planes of existence would have to take place before users could no longer be understood in terms of the antinomies detailed here? What happens if and when mobile technologies become less socially visible? Even if it were possible to better integrate digital media with more immediate reality, would it be socially desirable and personally pleasurable?

In the context of the pervasive—and still rising—mobile culture and its attendant technologies, these and other similar questions constitute tilled fields ready for sowing new psychoanalytic research. Our observations lay the ground for considering more critically, thus better anticipating, the next mediatized consumptionscapes on the horizon, involving technologies like ubiquitous computing, augmented reality media, ''wearables,'' and brain-computer interfaces, promising less obtrusive and more prosthetic mergers of the technological and the corporeal. Such media are likely to affect significantly the matters addressed in this article, because what qualifies them as ''new'' media is that they aim to reconcile

the antinomics of contemporary mobile subjectivity theorized here. But what will truly measure the mark of new(er) media age will be a re-situation of the gaze, a shift toward a different technology around which social pleasures and anxieties circulate.

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