James E. Katz   Magic in the Air

<div align="right">Spiritual and Transcendental
Aspects of Mobiles</div>

Between Spiritual and Material Worlds

This chapter examines several broad theoretical stances towards technology and social change with an eye towards assessing how accurately they can account for recent developments in mobile communication. In particular, it examines theoretical claims about religious and spiritual uses of technology in light of contemporary mobile communication practices.

As backdrop, it is worth noting that a permanent fixture of human imagination is the belief that there is a spiritual world co-existing within, alongside, or just beyond the quotidian world of sensate reality. Many people – indeed entire civilizations – have shown profound commitment to the priority of this invisible world. These people also believe that the spiritual world controls the material one. Among the many actions undertaken to assuage or influence this invisible world are charity and the construction of magnificent edifices. But they have also included large-scale human sacrifices and gruesome genocides.

The idea that supernatural forces direct everyday life seems not only an appealing concept but also one that is nearly universal. Paintings in the caves of Lascaux testify to the notion's antiquity, and its appeal today appears no less strong as it animates institution-building and daily routines worldwide. Talismanic and magical thinking occurs even when suppressed by other belief systems. Peter Berger has sketched[1] the huge psychological cross-investment in religion due to its importance in organizing human experience, power relationships and institutions:

> Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference… Institutional order is the reflected or manifested form of the divine cosmos… The inherently precarious and tran-

[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967, p. 33.

sitory constructions of human activity are thus given the semblance of ulti-
mate security and permanence.

In contrast to the near-universal dominance of supernatural beliefs, sci-
entific research and technological development (S&T) as social practice
arise only in certain cultures and eras. One of the fruits of S&T of course
has been mobile communication. Mobile communication technology has
been made possible only through substantial commitments to research
and development. This fact remains true, no matter what the inspiration
was for the creative act.

There are many different potential relationships between S&T and
spiritualism relative to mobile communication technology. Spiritualism as
the term is used here encompasses religion, superstitions, magic, mysticism
and parapsychology. On the other hand, spirituality can be considered a
contemplative posture towards or outlook on life, nature or science itself;
as such for present purposes it falls outside the meaning of spiritualism. As
is often the case, an analysis such as is undertaken here necessitates commit-
ting the sins of both over-simplification and omission.

Perspectives on S&T and Spiritualism

S&T Supersede Spiritualism

One perspective is that S&T, which are natural extensions of rational-
ism, displace spiritualism, religion, and mysticism. David Hume and
Auguste Comte were among the thinkers who anticipated that as S&T pro-
gressed, religion would recede. Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham
celebrated technology's role as a moral inspiration. Karl Marx famously
called religion the opiate of the masses. Certainly S&T (particularly archae-
ology, astronomy and physics) have challenged the status of holy books,
including the Bible.

While agreeing S&T are supplanting spiritualism, a more commonly
heard criticism is that rationality and S&T are harming the spiritual side
of humanity, a matter of great concern. For instance, the *Lebensphilosophie*
(life-philosophy) school of thought, prominent in the 19th century, deals
harshly with technology. F. Nietzsche, W. Dilthey, and H. Bergson, among
others, were hostile towards technology and its effects. To them, tech-
nology imposed an extreme form of rationality on human existence, lim-
iting or extinguishing its emotional and spiritual sides.

Peter Berger[2] and Gabriel Marcel[3] are among those who view technol-
ogy as destroying the transcendent side of life, harming human sensibil-

ities and feeling of existential integration. To them, the spirit of sacredness is fundamentally human, and acts as an important way to make life worthwhile. Peter Berger, even while decrying the situation, sees rationality prevailing over religious legitimations: "for the first time in history, the religious legitimations of the world have lost their plausibility not only for a few intellectuals and other marginal individuals but for broad masses of entire societies".[4]

Following this line of thought, there is a more general critique, which could be called the Icarus tragedy. As but one example, Bill Nichols[5] addresses some themes identified earlier by Walter Benjamin[6]; Nichols highlights occasions when technology has been glorified as holding the promise of ultimate control over destiny. Such a promise is illusory, Nichols argues, and so leads humanity into still greater peril even as simulations of reality replace reality itself.

Nichols' approach is emblematic of a hostility to technology that is prominent in current liberal and Leftist academic circles (and which contrasts to earlier eras during which technology was viewed by many brands of Marxists as mankind's salvation). Modern critics devote great effort to showing the moral inferiority of scientific pursuits and repeatedly decry what they see as the morally suspect nature of the enterprise. In particular, they are unhappy with perceived race, class and gender agendas behind the technical research enterprise. The essence of the intellectual project is to show how technology has been, and is being, used to drive out the meaningful, spiritual and religious side of life.

S&T as a Form of Spiritualism

Other thinkers have emphasized the spiritual nature of scientific pursuits and technological achievement. Oswald Spengler[7] spoke about technical development as a unique expression of Western or Faustian culture, even as he decried the culture's decline. He saw technology as a unique expression of European dynamism. For Spengler, technology was the spir-

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[2] Berger, *op. cit.*

[3] Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Destiny*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963.

[4] Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[5] Bill Nichols, "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems", *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Winter 1988), pp. 22–45.

[6] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm.

[7] Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932.

itual embodiment of European symbol-soul. Though his thesis has been rejected by professional historians, his leitmotif of decline remains thematically popular.

Lewis Mumford held that technology, and especially machines, were replacing religion by becoming itself a new religion. Rationality as a central organizing ideology was the result of spiritualism, as embodied in religion, and machines, even though machines had often been created to solve religious problems (e.g., mechanical clocks). Mumford saw that machine rationality would destroy magic, since the former could do in actuality what the latter could only pretend to do: to control the natural world and other people.[8]

Jacques Ellul[9] saw rationality as a way of thinking that drove out other forms of cognition and social interaction. His call echoes that of Weber, and has continued to command widespread interest.

An analysis from the early period of mobile communication technology noted the importance of the spiritual side of personal communication technology.[10] It argued that people invest spiritual meaning and transcendental and collective values into their uses of personal communication technology. Ordinary people do not appear to distinguish between the forces that supposedly act for instance when a mirror is broken and bad luck ensues, from those that actually do work, such as when a cordless phone is used. Definitions of science ("using rational means to rational ends") can be juxtaposed with those of magic ("using irrational means to rational ends"). From this point of view, the public does not understand the scientific method or physical laws, so therefore cannot distinguish science from magic.

Davis[11], for instance, holds that there is little difference between the impulse for technological control and magic/religion. Spiritual and mys-

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[8] Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1963, pp. 59 and 90.

[9] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York: Vintage, 1964.

[10] James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus, "Making Meaning of Mobiles – a Theory of *Apparatgeist*", in Katz and Aakhus (eds.), *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 301–318.

[11] Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, New York: Three Rivers, 1999. It may be worth noting that there are several parallels between the argument of Davis and that of Katz and Aakhus, *op. cit.*, who hold that people often invest spiritual qualities in their personal mobile communication devices. A primary difference of emphasis in the approach of Katz and Aakhus is that they stress the personal and individualistic nature of this investment as opposed to Davis, who highlights the seeming transmission of more universalistic supernatural forces via information technology.

tical beliefs are important considerations behind technological innovation. People speak about technology in magical terms, and spiritual perspectives do much to inform the way techno-utopias are constructed. (Here UFO-ology is particularly prominent.) "Magic is technology's unconscious … our modern technological world is not nature, but augmented nature, super-nature".[12] Electricity was initially viewed through alchemistry, being judged as "God's fire".[13]

Yet electrical communication technology has also exercised an enormous pull on the transcendental side of the human psyche.[14] Many early experimenters in telecommunications were influenced by its other-worldly possibilities. Jeffrey Sconce, in his analysis of modern electronic communication, noted that these technologies "evoke the supernatural by creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form".[15] Social scientists were apparently no less likely to be attracted to thinking along these lines. Marshall McLuhan[16] conceived of all media as extensions of our physical bodies and senses. Electricity was related to the nervous system. Since radio's source was invisible, it "evoked archaic tribal ghosts".[17] Radio re-tribalized us by bringing back aural magic of tribal cultures. McLuhan saw that a breach between people's visual and auditory experiences gives telecommunication technology what appears to be magical properties. Media returns its users to the Word Magic of ancient tribal cultures. But people are either unaware of or deny this effect. For him, "the universal ignoring of the psychic action of technology bespeaks some inherent function, some essential numbing of consciousness such as occurs under stress and shock conditions".[18]

S&T Used to Pursue Spiritualism

Another argument coalesces around the idea that S&T can be used to advance, prove, or fulfill spiritual ambitions. These impulses seem to be

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[12] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[14] Andrew Cooke, *Electroplasm: Technology's Indissoluble Link to the Spirit World*, MA Dissertation, Royal College of Art, London, 2001, http://www.interaction.rca.ac.uk/alumni /00-02/andy/plasmic-city.htm#_ftn31.

[15] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 4.

[16] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 404.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 406 f.

behind the complex geometrical calculations of the ancient pyramid builders as they subsequently were behind those of cathedral and mosque architects who followed them millennia later. It was no coincidence that the first book published in the West with movable type was Gutenberg's Bible. Sir Isaac Newton spent much of his career in arcane attempts to decode God's divine plan. Many scientists and inventors have been inspired in their work by an attempt to discern or fulfill God's organization or even attempt to contact the spirit world. According to Ronell,[19] spiritual concerns were important background motives for Bell and Watson in their experimental pursuits that led to the telephone.

An extreme formulation may be found in David Noble's work.[20] Noble argues that Western Judeo-Christian culture has become obsessed with technology to an unparalleled degree because technology innately possesses a core of religious millenarianism which promises a transcendence of mortal life. By examining the more private musings of the founding figures of modern science and engineering, Noble (like Weber and others before him) shows how technological development was perceived as evidence of progress towards Godly perfection. Thus, for Noble (as opposed to Mumford), technology is homologous to religion. Rather than replacing it, technology becomes a way to foster teleological and religious thinking. On a rather tenuous basis, he argues that the builders of the great advanced technological systems were seeking to re-establish man's prelapsarian paradise. (The choice of the word "man" used here advisedly). According to Noble, nuclear, genetic, and computer scientists were not aiming in their endeavours to improve society. "On a deeper cultural level these technologies have not met basic human needs because, at bottom, they have never really been about meeting them. They have been aimed rather at the loftier goal of transcending such mortal concerns altogether".[21]

Mobile Communication and Spiritual Practices

In a brief paper, there is no way to prove or disprove often arcane assertions concerning technology and spiritual life. However, what can be done usefully here is to present evidence that religion and spiritualism are of enormous significance to users of mobile communication technology. This may

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[19] Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

[20] David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology, The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 206 f.

be done by highlighting some ways in which spiritual practices are conducted on mobiles. The evidence I will present consists of selected illustrations of the creative application of advanced mobile communication technology to spiritualistic practices. Obviously, this evidence is by no means comprehensive. Nonetheless it suggests that rather than circumscribing, reducing or eliminating spiritualism, mobile communication technology seems to be used to enhance spiritualism.

Religious and Spiritualistic Communication

Although argument by illustration is not a preferred way of proceeding, it may in this situation suffice to suggest how mobile communication technology is used on behalf of spiritual practices. A few instantiations of practices are

- Recruitment tool for evangelicals
- Conducting religious services
- Offering religious counseling
- Dispensing prayers
- Receiving prayers
- Issuing calls to prayers
- Providing geographical orientation for rendering prayers
- Offering as gifts to dead
- Religious ringtones
- Commemorating the recently deceased
- Commemorating religious occasions
- Camera phones used to capture miracles

According to textually.org, some of these religious practices also include:

- In the Philippines, a "Mobile Rosary helps count the beads by providing a visual rosary to follow, moving onto the next bead whenever 'Amen' appears and is clicked on the phone. The program also provides passages and images that help the subscribers reflect on the meaning of each mystery. Similarly, the Mobile Way of the Cross guides the subscriber through the prayers without having to walk through the 14 stations in church. And Daily Reflections is a subscription service that allows the subscriber to download and receive reflections and images on different themes from the Mass on that day."[22]

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[22] "Texting Faith", August 24, 2004, www.textually.org/textually/archives/2004/08/005045.htm.

- In Italy, Ireland and the UK, a Papal Thought of the Day text messaging service is available from the Vatican.
- To inspire users into contemplation, the Roman Catholic Church in Holland offers religious ringtones.
- txt@verse, a campaign backed by Christian charities raised money to mobilize against poverty, by offering verses of the Bible by text message at a premium rate.
- In Sydney, a text message service allowed mobile phone users to receive Bible passages directly to their handsets.
- Jews were able to send text messages with a prayer or request to a rabbi, who then placed the note in Jerusalem's Western Wall, thus observing a centuries-old tradition.

The Economist reports that Irish Jesuits offer a service called Sacred Space, which is accessible via a smartphone. It encourages subscribers to spend ten minutes daily reflecting on a specially chosen scripture.[23] Heidi Campbell tells of evangelical Christians in the UK using SMS to coordinate attempts to recruit new adherents in Ibiza as well as to sustain and reinforce religious convictions among the evangelists operating in the nightclub atmosphere (Campbell, personal communication).

Genevieve Bell, who conducted a multinational ethnography on behalf of Intel, described a highly popular service in China that offers reports based on the lunar almanac. "Each night you get sent a list of things that are auspicious to do on the next day. This is a traditional activity in Chinese homes."[24]

Bell also met women in Southern China who had their mobiles blessed by Buddhist monks, because they wore them daily close to their chests and thus wanted them blessed such that they would not be bad for them.[25]

Bella Ellwood-Clayton reported at the 2004 Budapest conference that among the Filipinos, a typical morning greeting might be "SACRED HEART of JESUS CHRIST shower d person readn dis w ur blessings 2day & always. Gud am!"[26]

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[23] "A Spiritual Connection", *The Economist*, 12 March 2005.

[24] "Asia Puts Faith in Mobiles", BBC Online, 28 April 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3663283.stm.

[25] Genevieve Bell, "Insights into Asia: The Digital Home, Mobile Technologies, and Technology Usage Models", *Technology@Intel Magazine*, July 2004. Accessed from http://www.intel.com/technology/techresearch/reallives.htm.

[26] Bella Ellwood-Clayton, "Texting and God: The Lord is My Textmate – Folk Catholicism in the Cyber Philippines", in Kristóf Nyíri (ed.), *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2005, p. 256.

A phone designed for Muslims not only sends religious texts and messages about when to pray, but also has a special change-over from ring to silent mode when the time to pray occurs. This helps users avoid a frequent complaint about ringing during religious rituals. Indeed, complaints about this problem have grown so loud that some Mexican churches have installed mobile phone jamming devices, preventing signals from getting through.

Astrology & Fortune-Telling

Astrology services are readily available via SMS. Kalpana David (personal communication) has identified numerous websites offering mobile fortune-telling and astrology-based match-making. I noticed that the mobile service provider I used offered by name 31 different web-based services that could be available on a mobile basis to subscribers, and one of those in addition to financial news and headlines was astrology. In this regard, a noteworthy program has been developed by TOM, a leading Chinese provider. A variety of interactive astrological services are offered, including interactive readings. The service is being operated in conjunction with the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Astrology and match-making are combined in India, where several services exist.

Dan Su in her research on the situation in China (personal communication) found an article in the *Jinghua Daily*, a local newspaper in Beijing, which reported on rental rates for numbers having astrological and homophonic significance. Specifically, numbers with the following endings are

Mobile telephone numbers ending	Monthly charge in Chinese yuan (RMB) (**1 RMB =~ 0.09 EUR**)
2888 or 5888	2 000
6666 or 9999	8 000
6665 or 8888	10 800
181818	180 000
888888	1 000 000
4 or 7	40

Table 1

Estimated monthly mobile phone subscription prices in China for numbers with purported spiritual significance

(Source: Personal communication from Dan Su)

valued at the indicated monthly subscription rate in the table below.

Numbers 4 and 7 are ill omens in China; the number 4 in Cantonese is a homphone for death. Phone numbers that are incremental, like 1234 or 5678 are expensive as they stand for "making progress". Prices of these numbers are usually up to negotiation. But generally the monthly usage should be more than 1,000 RMB. For number re-sellers, there is considerable cross-subsidization of unlucky numbers by those that offer good fortune (Dan Su, personal communication).

Ancillary Mobile Applications

Mobile communication and internet applications are merging. In this regard, some moblogs (mobile phone blogs or image-based weblogs) are used to propagate religious beliefs and images as well.

Mobile Communication Devices as Emissaries & Representatives

Blessed phones: Taiwanese interests in Matsu, the popular Chinese goddess of the sea, has been tapped by a company that manufactured a special Matsu mobile phone, complete with a hologram of the goddess on the phone, ring-tones featuring religious chants and Matsu wallpaper for the display pad. Most relevant is that all the phones have been blessed in a ritual at a Matsu temple,[27] and can download special Matsu music from the web. Originally only 2,000 phones were made (each selling for about USD 300); however the demand was so overwhelming that an additional 1,000 were produced before the run was permanently ended (Yi-Fan Chen, personal communication).

Photos on batteries: In Japan, Satomi Sugiyama has found that there is a practice of putting photos inside mobile phones. Photos are sometimes affixed to the inside of the clamshell flap or to the battery itself. Indeed, small booths sell photo-stickers that have as one of their intended uses their attachment to mobile phones. However, for one's special friends or loved ones, the photo is placed inside the phone's battery, facing inward. This provides a secret and warm place for one's special feelings. While this example is not strictly one of religious practice, it does suggest the spiritual and transcendental way mobiles are considered by some users.

Connecting to afterlife: Mobile phones are also used analogously for transportation into the next world. This impulse is comparable to ancient Egyp-

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[27] Myra Lu, "Taiwanese Handset Makers Answer Local Calls", July 2, 2004, http://publish.gio.gov.tw/FCJ/past/04070281.html.

tian and current East Asian practices of including tokens with the deceased. These may be for either tangible or symbolic reasons, or even status motives. Sometimes mobile phones are left at gravesites as tokens of remembrance. They are also included in the casket with the deceased. Coffins shaped like mobile phones are sold in Ghana.

Tokens: Laura Forlano (personal communication) has documented a practice in Japan of hanging mobile phone antenna dongles on Jizou statues in shrines. The Jizou statues are placed at shrines in Japan to commemorate children unborn due to abortion or miscarriage. It was unclear as to precisely why they were placed on the statues, but did seem part of a religious ritual, perhaps of ablution, at the nexus of the private and public symbolism.

Conservative Religious Values and Mobile Phone Use

Howard Rheingold notes that even though the Amish are extremely conservative, the cell phone has been widely adopted.[28] Some have even claimed that the cell phone is widespread among Amish youth. If so, they would be no exception to many other religious groups who reject modern garb, and many aspects of modern life, but readily embrace mobile communication technology. It is interesting to consider the algorithm that allows religious authorities to permit one form of modernism, but reject another.

While the camera-phone is officially banned in Saudi Arabia due to religious reasons, they are reportedly still sold widely: "the phones are on sale and advertised. The fact that they are in the Kingdom in sufficiently large quantity as to be on sale in almost every store indicates they are being imported in bulk."[29] The split view was reflected in a recent incident when a woman at a wedding used a camera phone to snap the bride. This led to the female photographer being beaten severely by the guests. Despite the fact that possession or use of cameras and camera phones are restricted sharply among some religious communities, the mobile phone itself is used heavily among many orthodox religious populations.

"Although widely used across the country, camera phones are illegal

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[28] Howard Rheingold, "Look Who's Talking", *Wired* 7.01, Jan. 1999, see http://64.233. 161.104/search?q=cache:5g25AbmbfJAJ:www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.01/amish. html+amish+cell+phones&hl=en.

[29] Abeer Mishkhas, "Saudi Arabia to Overturn Ban on Camera Phones", *Arab News*, December 17, 2004, see http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=56187&d =17&m=12&y=2004.

in the Kingdom. In many cases the phones have been used to invade privacy, particularly of women, prompting fights at markets, wedding halls, schools and other public places as well as triggering family disputes… Body search is a common practice in universities for all female students to ensure they don't carry camera phones. Girls, however, find ways to hide the devices and bring them to lecture rooms. In wedding halls, some operators have resorted to hiring special search squads to check every invitee to ensure they leave their camera phones out of the hall."[30]

So, despite the claims that the mobile phone is a revolutionary tool that will liberate all groups, including and perhaps especially women, the evidence does not seem to be forthcoming in abundance at this point and the purportedly revolutionary aspect of the mobile phone in terms of women's roles may in fact be over-stated. This at least would be the implication of research by Kalpana David among conservative women from the Indian subcontinent, both expatriates and current residents.

The phone especially designed to assist Muslims in practicing their faith was mentioned above. Similar impulses to use communication technology in religiously supportive ways have been introduced in other faith communities.

An Israeli mobile company introduced a handset and phone service that was designed to cater to the million member ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel. It sold phones that were certified and stamped as "kosher". Basically a Motorola handset, it has been modified to disable internet access, SMS text services and video and voice-mail applications. It is a discreet black colour. This new phone was borne out of concern that new mobile services could erode ultra-Orthodox values and way of life, particularly among the young. (MacKinnon reports that television is not allowed in ultra-Orthodox homes because of provocative images that are broadcast and that even radio is viewed with caution.)[31]

Mobile Communication as Corrosive to Religious Practice

Mobile communication is also used to escape more rigorous requirements of religious practice. To illustrate, bishops in the Philippines have

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[30] Roger Harrison, "Camera Phones Freely Available Despite Ban", *Arab News*, April 4, 2004, see http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=42472&d=4&m=4&y =2004.

[31] Ian MacKinnon, "Kosher Phone Taps into New Market for Mobiles", *The Times of London*, March 3, 2005, see http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,251-1508115,00.html.

ended a program that allowed people to attend confession and receive absolution via text messages.[32] (The relationship between the recently ended program and the mobile religious assistance described above is unclear.)

The bans on images were already mentioned in the case of Saudi Arabia, and on virtual mobile religious practices in the Philippines. But use of cell phones in an innovative and perhaps humorous way has even led to threats of bodily injury and substantial fines. This occurred in Malaysia in 2003 where statues had been introduced of the elephant-headed Hindu god, Lord Ganesh, holding a mobile phone in one of the many arms. The Hindu community there greeted the introduction with outrage, and the government stepped in to forbid sales of the offending statues. Fines were threatened to any vendor who displayed the item.[33]

Not all spiritual services for mobile communication are altruistically motivated. They can be used with malice aforethought for exploiting the gullible. As but one instance, Finnish authorities closed a service that had been offering SMS messages that were supposedly from Jesus to the subscriber. The cost was Euro 1.20 for each message.[34]

Finally, it is worth noting that although the possibility was investigated, nothing significant was found in terms of using mobile phone technology to advance secularism and rationality as a belief set. These activities would have reasonably been expected had the theories of rationalism superseding spiritualism or of technology draining life of its meaning been correct in this domain. Mobile communication technology does not seem in any way a direct corrosive of spiritual life.

Mobile Technology Extends rather than Blunts or Replaces Spiritualism

Taken as a whole, mobile communication technology appears to have been widely adopted and heavily used in many places around the world to pursue and promote spiritual matters. In contrast, there is no concomitant use among mobile phone users for rationality-promoting behaviours. Neither does much appear to have been done to propagate secular or rational worldviews via advanced mobile communication tech-

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[32] *The Economist, loc. cit.*

[33] "Ganesh Idol with Mobile Phone Provokes Uproar in Malaysia", Agence France-Presse, http://www.network54.com/Forum/thread?forumid=186926&messageid=1064497632&lp =1064497632.

[34] *The Economist, loc. cit.*

nology. (A parallel absence of practical mobile applications for educational purposes was reported in the Budapest conference series a year ago.) If people did use mobile communication technology for expanding and enriching or even propagating their spiritual views, then that would constitute evidence for the "subjugation" or "superseding" perspectives of S&T's impact on spiritualism. But that is not the case, at least according to the data that could be gathered for the present study. So in the absence of some data to the contrary to what has been reported herein, the "subjugation" and "superseding" perspectives appear to be incorrect.

There is an irony here: Only empirical analysis and experimentation has enabled the creation of mobile communication systems. The system's continuing proliferation could only have been accomplished through the application of rational, analytic tools. Yet the necessity of these tools for creation does not mean that somehow their conceptual templates are carried forward to, much less adopted by, the system's users. So despite occasional claims, there is as yet no reasonable evidence that supernatural invocation or messages from beyond were responsible for the technical breakthroughs that have allowed for the creation of GSM, CDMA, EDGE and the other alphabets of today's communication system.

What is the case is that people use their tools to advance and explore their interests and proclivities. There is a long-standing concern over the spiritual side of life, and technology has at various times been used to help in the pursuit of this concern, including many people nowadays. Recognition of this fact helped inspire *Apparatgeist* theory,[35] and the analyses contained in the edited volume, *Machines That Become Us*.[36] Such theories predict that personal ICTs would be increasingly embraced as spiritual emissaries and even imputed to have spiritual powers themselves. Thus, in a paradoxical way, technology is used for the pursuit of anti-technology or more accurately technology is seldom pursued for its own sake but rather for what it can do or bequeath upon the user.

Various psychological studies have shown how people impute meaningful messages from randomly generated phenomena. This generalized aspect of the human brain has been particularized many times when researchers had specific interactions with new technologies that greatly increased human powers of communication and observation. Peering through early microscopes, a scientist thought he spotted miniature humans

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[35] Katz and Aakhus, *op. cit.*

[36] James E. Katz (ed.), *Machines That Become Us: The Social Context of Personal Communication Technology*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003.

within sperm cells; deploying newly improved telescopes, astronomers thought they could see canals on Mars. Some of those early radio listeners who heard strange noise felt certain they were hearing signals from intelligent beings on distant planets or the ethereal chatter of heavenly souls. From my viewpoint, the greatest paradox is that we use our technology to communicate to seemingly distant supernatural worlds. In reality we are only communicating with an echo of our limited selves.[37]