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Wanna hook up? Let your thumbs do the dialing.

by Mark Morford

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Ah, memories. The longing for a simpler time, when the Net was young and the e-thrill was new and you could send a potential (or current, or past) lover a dirty, flirty little e-note full of promise and verbal licks and awful punctuation. And lo, it was good.

And maybe you even attached (if this was later in the game, say, 2003) a digital picture of yourself all woozy and sprawled across the couch after four glasses of sake and you hit the send button and instantly got that little rush of connection.

It has now, I'm forced to admit, happened to me. Mutations in the hookup-relationship sphere have already occurred, and I've almost totally missed what all text-message addicts already know, which is that the thing now is not to e-mail, not to chat obnoxiously on your cell in Whole Foods or annoy everyone on the bus or in line at Peet's, not to send kinky, drunken e-mails late at night or post grainy cell phone pics straight to your MySpace blog that no one actually reads. No, the new thing is to look down.

Look down, that is, at your cell, your Blackberry, your Treo, at the tiny screen of whatever SMS-ready gizmo you carry and scroll through your most recent text messages, and the best and most urgent and delicious thing to look for now is, of course, the titillation, the invitation to flesh, the text-message booty call.

What happened? How did I miss the fabulous/silly sextext movement? Where was I? Where were you?

I thought I had it down. I thought I was all over modern communication tech, but somehow, during the entirety of the lovely long-term relationship I was just in, we never once tapped into the sextext phenom (the ex and I preferred old-school e-mail, IM or -- how quaint! -- actual hot phone sex), and so here I am, left with the realization that my thumbs aren't nearly up to speed (I can, at best, send a text to Google's SMS to get addresses or driving directions, which I still think is ridiculously cool, despite being so very 2004), and, oh my God, do I really need to catch up with the texting universe? Can't I stick with e-mail and sly grammar and the complete and intentional use of vowels? Does that make me sound 87 years old?

Damn.

Then again, I have yet to be text-messaged for sex. I have yet to be at the sushi bar or on a mountaintop or in a club late at night, just coming on to my fifth Red Bull cosmo and suddenly my SLVR vibrates (again!) as I'm grinding sweatily to the latest Tiesto and there it is, a message from some vaguely familiar hottie I swapped numbers with last weekend at the yoga trance-dance party, and now she's texting me that

she's a little drunk and a lot horny and is only three blocks away and would I perhaps enjoy coming by her tasteful apartment for a nightcap and some polite conversation and perhaps some respectful snuggling?

Except it doesn't read like that at all. Except it's much more like "DRNK. FLNG CRZY, HOT, NKD. U? GYPO+brng cndms+vdka+WHIPS+lube! YESYES?" It's a message, come to think of it, I would probably enjoy quite a lot.

I even love how the sextext thing has gone from impossibly silly to insanely pervasive so quickly that it's already spawned a text-based sex-info service right here in San Francisco, from the Department of Public Health.

It's called SexInfo (sextextsf.org), and if you think the condom broke or you might be pregnant or you might be gay or you think your girlfriend is cheating on you, and yet you simply cannot slow down long enough to actually sit down and take a deep breath and maybe read a book or talk to an actual human or even look up deeper information on the Web because you might spill your drink or miss a party or have to pull off the freeway, why, you can simply text SexInfo and the service will bounce a bite of info right back, offering a snippet of advice and directing you to some worthwhile resources. Weird.

(Surprisingly, SexInfo will not actually bounce back a few lines of what it probably should say, which is, of course, "What the hell is wrng w/u, pls put dwn the BlackBerry + go sit your manic uninformed butt down get sum prspctve.")

Ah, but maybe I don't have to worry. Maybe I can let this soon-to-be-obsolete sextext trend whip on by me without having to play catch-up or overwork my thumbs or get a better cell phone or worry that I don't know (or really care much about) the entire text-message acronym lexicon or what DYHAG or FMTYEWTK or KMSLA or A/S/L/P actually mean. (Print readers: Please visit netlingo.com/emailsh.cfm and it will kindly spell it all out.)

Because here's the thing about the insane pace of tech that makes you swoon and shake your head as you watch it wing on by like some sort of robot sparrow on meth: The trends now appear and disappear so quickly that nothing is really definitive or permanent or actually essential to know. It's all just a shifting throbbing mutating gob of gizmo and sex and desire and potential heartbreak pouring over the culture like some sort of sticky bittersweet Wi-Fi-enabled honey. Same as it ever was, just with fewer vowels and lots more tendinitis.

And so maybe I can simply wait for the next wave, the next mode of hot tech hook-up, which I imagine will be arriving any second now, if not sooner. Instant cell phone video clips? Bluetooth-enabled pineal gland implants? Viagra misters/thong detectors in the new iPhone? We'll just have to see. Can someone please text me when it arrives? Thx.

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