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PHONE AND COMPUTER SEX

Phone sex is masturbation while communicating by telephone with another person. It is an emerging pastime and industry, with franchises and telephone equipment designed for it. An offshoot of the pornography industry, phone sex has built its legal base on the freedom accorded to pornographic utterances and shows signs of attracting a significant fraction of its revenues. A number of small, non-profit clubs facilitate obscene phone calls among their members.

History. Dirty talk over the telephone is nearly as old as dial telephones, on which no one could eavesdrop, and has a precedent in obscene letters exchanged by lovers. Also helpful was the telephone industry's early stand in favor of confidentiality of communications, which soon became law. As a commercial phenomenon, though, it originated in the 1970s with recorded tapes of dirty talk sold by Old Reliable and a number of smaller publishers. Beginning in the early 1980s advertisements appeared in sex publications for phone sex services, in which for a fee of \$10 to \$40, usually paid via credit card, a voice at the other end creates fantasies or discusses any topic that will stimulate orgasm in the customer.

"976" phone services were introduced in the United States in the mid-1980s; the number refers to a telephone company prefix. They provided recorded messages of short duration for a fee of \$2 or less, billed through the telephone company. An important legal ruling stated that providers of sexual messages should have

equal access to this facility, and the primary use of the "976" capacity was for masturbatory sexual messages, gay and straight. The unrestricted availability of these recorded messages to minors led to such a parental outcry that they were effectively ended by the late 1980s. They were also a problem for businesses, which were faced with charges for surreptitious calls by employees. So many calls were made from Mexico to 976 numbers that international access was discontinued at the request of the Mexican telephone company.

Various adaptations of this highly profitable service were tried: the use of access codes furnished upon validation of age; changes in telephone company prefixes and equipment so that parents could remove access to such services from their phones; a requirement of payment by credit card, which few minors could effect. The adaptation which seemed to meet with the most immediate success was the abandonment of recorded messages altogether in favor of simply connecting callers to one another, in pairs or groups, or providing contact advertisements via telephone. Thus the service provider could disclaim responsibility for, and indeed remain ignorant of, the message content.

Computer Sex. An offshoot of phone sex is computer sex or compusex, in which the connection is made by modem, parties being linked over telephone lines with a host computer. This began with mainframe-based services such as CompuServe and American PeopleLink, which have been friendly to their numerous gay customers. Computer sex then spread to smaller, exclusively gay services operated by individuals; while they started as hobbies, several have outgrown that status. Providers of computer communication services encourage callers, in private messages or when connected in private with one or more other callers, to be as explicit as they wish; part of the appeal is that one can converse anonymously using a pseudonym or "handle." They also pro-

vide contact advertisements and gay news and commercial advertisements. Main-frame-based services offer popular "party line" type discussions; services usually have a gay conversation line, accounting for a third to a half of the party line conversations, and on which a cruisy atmosphere sometimes develops. Computer communications are quickly being given the same legal rights to privacy as telephone messages. In France, since the national telephone system distributed simple computer terminals to all customers, sexual message services, called *messengeries roses*, have been highly successful; indeed, the sexual message services have ensured the success of home computer terminals in France, just as X-rated videos made a hit of the videotape recorder in the United States.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

"Gay" or "homosexual" photography is an ambiguous concept. While a person can be described as homosexual because of sexual activities, or as gay because of sexual preference or expressing a certain consciousness, an inanimate, unconscious object cannot. Nonetheless, to the extent that a photographic image reflects a particular consciousness on the part of the photographer, it might be termed gay, though that consciousness is notoriously hard to define. Thus images by gay or homosexual photographers are sometimes described as "gay photography," although not every image by a gay person is necessarily marked by gay sensibility. On occasion the term is used to describe the documentation of gay events or meeting places, or of homosexual behavior. At still other times the term is used almost as a synonym for male nudes, though feminist-inspired male nudes (while a gay man may appreciate the images) could not be called

gay images. Yet in each case there is some justification for the usage, if "gay" or "homosexual photography" is defined as those images which consciously or unconsciously portray or evoke homoerotic associations shared by the creator and viewer. Homosexual photographers would be most likely to express such associations, the places or behaviors to be charged with such meanings, and certainly the male nude is the central focus of such homoerotic references.

Until recently, such expression of homoerotic interests had to be masked by a "top dressing" of one sort or another—artist's reference studies, ethnological studies, mythological or classical subjects, nudism, and physical culture. While these cover categories provided an area of safety in which homoerotic photography could exist in the face of social hostility, they also imposed artificial limits on what the photographer could create and how he could present his work, and contributed to a sense of the marginality of the work.

Pioneers. From the very earliest processes—daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and the like—very few images of male nudes exist, even as compared with the number of female nudes, and those are rare. It was not until the development of albumen paper and, later, of dry plate negatives, that any significant number of homoerotic images were created.

Photography, in its earliest phases, was not considered as an art form in itself, but as a technique for recording reality in the service of science or art. It was this rationale that provided the cover for the first major development of photographic images expressing homoerotic intentions, in the form of "études," nude studies of men and boys ostensibly for the use of artists who were unable to obtain the services of live models. Such studies flourished in the years 1875-1900, from studios such as Calavaş in France, but were also produced in other countries. As in images of women and girls created for similar purposes, the subjects are displayed in